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## 1913: A HUNDRED YEARS ON

The excerpt below is reproduced from “*The Cincinnati Post*”, a newspaper published in Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A. from 1881 until 2007; a period of some 126 years. The article below was published in December 1912—100 years ago.

*“THERE never was such a wonderful period! We never before knew so much or could do so much. We never experienced an age of equal comfort. No part of yesterday was as glorious as this hour.*

*The hundred years behind us are jammed and crammed with achievements that out-balance the sum total of progress since the signing of the Magna Charta. The average mechanic enjoys luxuries that Midas, with all his wealth, could not command. The college freshman has more real information in his little finger than the erudition of the foremost scholar of the Renaissance. We have done more to put existence on a sane, logical and definite basis than the sum total of our ancestors.*

*A mere hundred years ago even the scientist thought that the atmosphere was simply space—that gas was only a smell. The first microbe hadn’t disclosed his identity. Metchnikoff’s announcement of battling hosts in every drop of human blood would have earned him a padded cell. The best illumination George Washington could secure came from tallow dips, lighted by striking a spark from flint and steel. Every piece of fabric was woven by hand. The only horse-power was four-legged and wore a tail. The steamboat was still building on the ways of Fulton’s brain, and the wheels of the steam engine had only moved in Stephenson’s head. It took Benjamin Franklin two weeks to send a letter from Boston and get a reply from Baltimore. Abraham Lincoln’s angular frame never reposed in a Pullman berth... a 20-day “liner” was an “ocean greyhound”.*

*Thirty years ago electricity had never been hitched to a wheel; gunpowder was the most powerful explosive; subways weren’t considered within range of possibility. “Impossibility” is now an old-fashioned word with a definition, but not a meaning.*

*Almost every dream of the past is a reality today. The magic cities and the fairy kingdoms of your grandmother aren’t half so wonderful as the world in which you live.*

*It is hardly a year since the father of antiseptic surgery was gathered to his fathers. Electric light, trolley cars, bicycles, automobiles, department stores, skyscrapers, 10-cent collars, tinned salmon, airships, penny newspapers, appendicitis and power cranes are infant ideas still toddling in their diapers”.*

### The glorious hour

Certainly the devices invented between 1813 and 1913 were marvellous, but they fade into insignificance when compared with those of the last 100 years: fluorescent lights, plastics, jet engines, medical diagnostic tools, organ transplants, surgical procedures, computers, robots, space travel, television, nuclear power, refrigeration, mobile phones, and a host of electronic gadgets and machines. Indeed it was not until the late 1940s, after World War 2, that several of the current techniques in agricultural practice were developed, helped along by the dire shortage of food in a devastated world. Modern machinery has greatly reduced the amount of hard physical labour that was previously required to grow food but it is not the ultimate answer.

### In This Issue

1913: A Hundred Years On	1
The Year Before Us	3
Strong Delusions	4
The Authority of the Apostle Paul	5
Temptations Common to Man	8
The Clouds of Heaven	10
Jerusalem : The Holy City	11
Whatsoever Things Are Of Good Report	12

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### **Sane, logical and definite**

From a human perspective, the benefits afforded by the inventions developed between 1812 and 1912 certainly gave some justification for deeming them to be “sane and logical”. The benefits were such that some publications proclaimed them to be “foregleams of Messiah’s kingdom”. One may speculate what the authors of that time would say if they could see the inventions that have been developed during the last 100 years.

Additionally the claim that the inventions placed society on a “sane, logical and definite basis” may be queried. The present consumption of raw materials cannot be sustained forever, and already the search is on for more natural reserves of metal ores, coal, oil and gas. The folly of trusting in an endless supply of these reserves is exemplified by the reserves of phosphate rock in Nauru. Just 60 years ago it was acclaimed as a vital resource for the production of agricultural fertilizer. However the reserve was exhausted some 30 years ago. So while the inventions may be considered sane and logical, they have not put the world on a definite basis—for that to be the case the reserves of raw materials would have to last forever. While there might yet be undiscovered reserves of natural resources, the most plausible assumption is that the reserves are finite, and consequently the present rate of consumption cannot be sustained indefinitely.

However two changes which would enable the present consumption to continue forever are:

- Inventions which utilise raw materials cease wearing out and therefore not require replacement, reducing consumption of raw materials to zero;
- All natural resources be replenished.

### **Removal of wear and tear**

In view of the developments made so far one may speculate that “science” will develop mechanisms that will not wear out. Wear is caused by friction between moving parts and has been reduced by lubricants. Consequently some credence may be given to the possibility of friction being totally eliminated. Regarding things rusting out, again great improvements have been made with “non-corrosive” and “corrosion resistant” materials and coatings. Nevertheless on both fronts there is still a long way to go before perpetuity is realised.

### **Climate change**

Another factor which might add to the debate about the sustainability of the present industrial world is the effect of the inventions on the environment, currently termed “climate change” and “global warming”. Scientists and politicians continue to differ regarding the truth of the concept and it is not the purpose of

this column to enter into a debate on the subject. Nevertheless as we go to print a scientific report has just been released which claims the rate of warming is accelerating, as evidenced by the melting of large areas of the polar ice caps. From a spiritual viewpoint, such a change is plausible because the emissions were not part of God’s original creation.

### **Intellectual prowess**

Many of the inventions have been developed from earlier more basic devices, and in that sense their development may be considered to be evolutionary. Thus it may be contended that their development is evidence of mankind’s evolution to a higher and more intelligent creation. However an analysis of the development of many inventions reveals that they were developed by a few persons and the population generally had little or nothing to do with it.

The argument that Man is developing a higher intellectual capacity is further negated by another factor. Many of the original inventors, those who broke through the frontiers of scientific knowledge, were not men of high education. Neither were they of greater intellectual might than Moses, Solomon, the Apostle Paul or Shakespeare. In general, it has been the distribution of knowledge that has resulted in the benefits flowing to many. In that regard, the printing press was a monumental development—perhaps the printed page has been the most powerful single instrument to have aided the distribution of knowledge—and in the twenty first century the internet may be its equal.

### **Knowledge explosion**

Additionally the article published in “*The Cincinnati Post*”, quoted above, testifies that the developments have occurred during very recent times, after centuries during which there was no change in the methods of performing tasks. The speed of development is exemplified by the Short Message System (“SMS” or “texting”) on mobile (or “cell”) phones. The first SMS was sent on December 3, 1993, just 20 years ago. The message transmitted was “Merry Christmas”—just two words. Today indications are there are 1 million SMS messages sent in the world every second—that is, 8,640,000,000 every day! Such a sudden increase may justifiably be termed a “knowledge explosion”!

### **God’s time**

To those who are privileged to understand God’s hand in mankind’s affairs, the dramatic increase in technological devices is explained by God lifting the veil off the eyes of human understanding. When His set time had come He allowed mankind to see the power of steam and to learn how to apply it. Later He lifted the veil in respect to electricity, and in more

recent times He has revealed some of the secrets of the atom. The developments have occurred at this time and in such a short period of time because it is God's time to grant mankind increased knowledge.

### Daniel's prophecy

Many centuries ago Daniel foretold (prophesied) there would be a sudden increase of knowledge. He wrote: *"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people... many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased..."* (Daniel 12: 1-4). It was not to be until Michael stood up that knowledge would be increased, which is consistent with there not having been any gradual increase prior to late nineteenth century. As Daniel's prophecy further explains: *"for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end"* (Dan. 12:9).

Daniel also prophesied that the time period during which knowledge would be increased would be *"a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time"* (Dan. 12:1). The last 100 years—since the outbreak of World War 1—has seen the fulfillment of that prophecy, at least in part.

### New Testament prophecies

Jesus and His apostles also prophesied about the end time when Michael would stand up: *"But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven"* (Luke 21:8-11). *"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 then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory"* (Luke 21:25-27). The events foretold by Jesus are manifest in the world today and indeed have been since 1914.

The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy regarding the end times: *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection... heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away... Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth... reprobate concerning the faith"* (2 Tim. 3:1-8).

Some of the characteristics of Paul's prophecy that are evident in the world today, and have become increasingly so since 1913, include *"without natural affection"* (that is homosexuality); *"heady, high minded"* ("impossibility is now a word without meaning"); *"ever learning"* (there has never been so much education in the world) but *"reprobate concerning the truth"* (agnosticism and atheism have usurped "Christianity"). As Paul continued, *"evil men have waxed worse and worse"* (2 Tim. 3:13).

### The next 100 years

And now the question may be asked "what of the next 100 years?"

It is very tempting to say the kingdom of God will be firmly established in the earth well before a further 100 years transpires. However, while that is the desire of every Christian, it should be remembered those living 100 years ago—in 1913—probably had the same conviction, their reflections on the previous 100 years providing strong evidence that the kingdom of God had already come and they were basking in its blessings. However, overall, in spite of the development of so many inventions and increased availability of education, the world has become less reverent of God since that time.

Maybe Christians today would do well to remember the Lord's words by Habakkuk: *"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"* (Hab. 2:1-3).■

## THE YEAR BEFORE US.

STANDING at the portal of the opening year,  
Words of comfort meet us, hushing every fear;  
Spoken through the silence by our Father's voice,  
Tender, strong and faithful, making us rejoice.  
Onward, then, and fear not, children of the day;  
For His Word shall never, never pass away.  
"I, the Lord, am with thee, be thou not afraid;  
I will help and strengthen, be thou not dismayed.  
Yea, I will uphold thee with Mine own right hand;  
Thou art called and chosen in My sight to stand".  
Onward, then, and fear not, children of the day;  
For His Word shall never, never pass away.

## STRONG DELUSIONS

*"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:11).*

**T**hrough the Apostle Paul, God declared He will use "strong delusions" to distinguish those who believe the truth from those who have pleasure in unrighteousness. Thus, for those who are endeavouring to prove themselves loyal to God, it is necessary to be aware of the nature of delusions.

### Nature of delusions

The basic characteristic of a delusion is fraud, that is, it is error masqueraded as truth.

Jesus warned His disciples that deceptions would be severe at the end of the Age: *"And at that time there shall arise false Christs and false prophets and they shall show great signs and wonders insomuch as if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect"* (Matt. 24:24). Jesus' warning was repeated by the Apostle Paul: *"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived"* (2 Tim. 3:13). Thus one must be ever alert of the possibility of fraudulent influences, indeed the subtlety of the deceptions (delusions) would be such that the Apostle Peter wrote: *"... beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness"* (2 Pet. 3:17).

### Human agencies

Paul warned the Christians at Ephesus that human agencies deliberately perpetrated delusions: *"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive"* (Eph. 4:14). Paul implies that the Ephesians had been uncertain of some things and were "tossed about" by various doctrines which were deliberately promulgated by those who "lied in wait to deceive". In stark contrast to the wiles of those whose objective was to deceive, the apostles were clear and forthright in their ministry: *"For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile... For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness... Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burden-some, as the apostles of Christ"* (1 Thess. 2:3-6).

### Deceptive speech

Words are a powerful tool. Paul declares the Apostles did not use "flattering words". The Apostle Peter also warned of the deceptive power of words: *"For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness..."* (2 Pet. 2:18). The message for the

Christian is simple: *"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"* (Isa. 8:20).

### The test of love

However one factor which presents a challenge to Christians is the balance between love for the truth and love for human beings. Accommodation of others' feelings can lead one into a situation which confronts the Christian with acts and situations which appeal as plausible and loving, but in reality are contrary to God's will and righteousness and have the potential to deceive one into accepting falsehoods.

Balaam was one who entangled himself in such a conflict. The record is in Numbers chapters 22 to 24. There are several aspects of the story that appear to the human mind as exemplifying Balaam's loving and kind disposition. However the truth is that Balaam allowed himself to be deluded into believing God's will might be different from what had been clearly communicated to him: *"And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed"* (Num. 22:12). Nevertheless, in spite of an initial forthright response from Balaam—*"And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you"* (Num. 22:13)—he was eventually persuaded to reconsider what the Lord had told him. After a prolonged course of action Balaam deviated from God's instruction and sought the advice of others: *"And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness"* (Num. 24:1). So Balaam, who repeatedly refused to be bribed by Balak, was eventually enticed to act contrary to God's direction and turned to other agencies for advice and support. 2 Peter 2:15 explains that Balaam was motivated by a hidden desire for *"the wages of unrighteousness"* and it was not until God opened his eyes that he was aware of the delusion under which he struggled.

Balaam's actions are recorded as an example for Christians to note: *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope"* (Rom. 15:4). May every Christian who believes the truth be continuously aware of the delusions of the Adversary: *"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices"* (2 Cor. 2:11).■

# THE AUTHORITY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Every human being is unique. Even so-called “identical twins”, while being so similar in outward appearance that the human mind cannot distinguish them, are not completely identical: there is a difference somewhere, if not in appearance it will be in talents or mannerisms.

The Apostle Paul was unique: his call to apostleship was different from that of all the other apostles, being converted by a miraculous experience on the road to Damascus, when his name was Saul: *“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do”* (Acts 9:1-6).

Understandably Ananias was hesitant when asked to confront Saul but God reassured him that He (God) had a special work for Saul to do: *“Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake”* (Acts 9:13-16).

Additionally Paul was given a vision which he was not permitted to convey to others: *“I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago... such an one caught up to the third heaven... How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter... And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure”* (2 Cor. 12:2-7).

Subsequent to those experiences God commissioned Paul with the special work He had for him to do—*“the care of all the churches”* (2 Cor. 11:28).

## Means

Paul carried out his mission by utilising two mediums: personal visits and writing letters. In his second letter to the church at Corinth he wrote: *“And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea”* (2 Cor. 1:15-16).

## Letters

One reason for Paul writing letters was the hope that a letter would be less antagonistic than a personal confrontation. The church at Corinth was one such church: *“For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing”* (2 Cor. 7:8-9). Paul’s letter was “not pleasant reading” for them but it had the desired effect of motivating them to a higher level of spiritual conduct—they realised his letters were authoritative: *“For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed: That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful...”* (2 Cor. 10:8-10).

In spite of his poor eyesight, Paul personally wrote a letter to the Galatians: *“Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand”* (Gal. 6:11). Letters were important in Paul’s ministry.

## General application

Paul intended his letters to be read in the church to which they were addressed, and also to other churches in the area: *“Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it”* (Col. 4:15-17). He gave similar instruction to the church at Thessalonica: *“I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren”* (1 Thess. 5:27).

Thus letters were one of the means by which Paul accomplished the care of all the churches. The fact that his letters were to be shared with other churches shows that his messages were applicable to all, which

in turn means the message was uniform—it was not one doctrine for one church and another for another church: all were to share the same message. Such uniformity (generality) is consistent with the Lord's strategy: *"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"* (Eph. 4:11-13).

### Divisions

Nevertheless unity did not prevail in all the churches: *"For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you"* (1 Cor. 11:18-19).

The primary cause of the differences was that there were heresies amongst the members of the church—a heresy is something which provides a choice; something that arises from a teaching that differs from what was initially taught—and Paul declared that there were divisions in the church because some taught concepts which were different from those he had taught. He also explained that such differences were permitted by God to prove those who were sincere and those who were imposters. A lesson for all Christians today!

### Paul's teaching

In that context it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of the various types of instructions Paul gave to the churches. It must be remembered that, although the instructions Paul gave might be given different titles, there cannot be any doubt that all of them have the same objective—the edification of the brethren. He wrote: *"... we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying"* (2 Cor. 12:19).

Paul was given the spirit directly, without any intrusion by another human being: *"But when it pleased God...to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus"* (Gal. 1:15-17). Therefore to deem Paul to be in error on any matter is bold indeed.

### Ordinances

The title of Paul's instructions which has the greatest authoritative tone is "ordinances". An ordinance is a law or regulation which demands compliance. The Law Covenant contained ordinances: *"Having*

*abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace"* (Eph. 2:15).

### Obligatory

The obligatory nature of the ordinances is evident from the Old Testament: *"And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do"* (Exod. 18:20). *"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, I am the LORD your God... After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances. Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God"* (Lev. 18:1-4).

Paul gave the church "**ordinances**": *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you"* (1 Cor. 11:1-2). It was Paul's duty to convey the ordinances to the churches, which he did either by letter or by word of mouth: *"Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions (ordinances—Greek: *paradoses*) which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle"* (2 Thess. 2:15).

### Non-compliance

Paul gave directions regarding the action to be taken if another disregarded the ordinances: *"Now we **command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition (ordinances—Greek: *paradoses*) which he received of us"*** (2 Thess. 3:6). The believer must withdraw themselves from any who disregarded the ordinances—compliance was mandatory.

Paul instructed Timothy to withdraw from those who did not comply with the ordinances: *"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: **from such withdraw thyself"*** (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

### Commandments

Another term which reflects Paul's authority is "commandments": *"If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the*

things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37).

Paul used the same term in his letter to the Thessalonians: *"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus"* (1 Thess. 4:1-2).

In summary, the churches were to comply with the "ordinances" and "commandments".

### Would not

One expression that might be deemed less authoritative is in 1 Corinthians 10:20: *"But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I **would not** that ye should have fellowship with devils"*. The word "would" might give the impression that it was Paul's preference but not obligatory that they did not have fellowship with those who sacrificed to devils. However the expression "would not" carries the same authority as the ordinances—the word "not" means **the absolute negative**—that is, definitely not. So the Apostle was giving firm direction to them that they not associate with those who sacrificed to devils.

The import of the term "would not" is further evidenced in Romans 11:25: *"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"*. It was imperative the Romans understood God had not cast off His people *"whom he foreknew"* (Rom. 11:2) because if they did not understand that point they would become wise in their own conceits, that is, puffed up, esteeming themselves of greater merit than the natural Israelites.

Another instance where Paul used the expression "would not" to dictate an essential doctrine is in 1 Thessalonians 4:13: *"But I **would not** have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope"*. Knowledge of the resurrection is an essential component of the Christian hope and hence the Thessalonians were not to be ignorant of it.

### God's order in creation

An understanding of God's order in creation was, and is, essential to understand the order in the church: *"But I **would** have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God"* (1 Cor. 11:3). In this instance the word "not" does not appear because

Paul's instruction is "positive"—that is, his statement is not a prohibition but a direction—they were to understand the hierarchy in God's creation.

### Suffer and permit

Yet another expression which might be interpreted to mean it was merely one of Paul's wishes but not mandatory is "suffer": *"But I suffer"* (Greek: *"epitrepo"*—Strong #2010: "allow") *not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence* (1 Tim. 2:12). *"Epitrepo"* occurs only three times: 1 Corinthians 14:34, 16:7 and 1 Timothy 2:12.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34 it is translated "permit" and modified by the word "not": *"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is **not permitted** unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law"*.

1 Corinthians 16:7 reads: *"... but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit"*, that is, allow. The negative "not" would be inappropriate.

Hence "suffer" has the same authority as the terms ordinances and commandments.

### Beseech

On the other hand there are instances when Paul gave the Christians advice that was not mandatory. One word used in such cases is "beseech" which means to invoke, implore, exhort: *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them"* (Rom. 16:17). It was good advice, but not essential, for the brethren to note those who stirred up divisions (by teaching doctrine that was contrary to what they had been taught), and having noted them, to avoid them (2 Thess. 3:6).

It was in that vein that he urged the Corinthian brethren to *"speak the same thing"* (that is, doctrine) and thereby not cause division (1 Cor. 1:10).

Paul used the word which is translated "beseech" to **exhort** the believers to follow his example regarding conduct: *"Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church"* (1 Cor. 4:16-17). And: *"Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more"* (1 Thess. 4:1). Again Paul was exhorting them to adopt his pattern, but he did not issue the exhortation as a commandment.

### Think I have the Spirit of God

Finally, and perhaps the most controversial expression regarding Paul's authority occurs in 1 Corinthians 7:40. Regarding marriage Paul wrote: *"But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God"*. Paul's statement was not mandatory, and indeed could not be mandatory because marriage was not prohibited: *"But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned..."* (1 Cor. 7:28).

Nevertheless the expression gives rise to the possibility that Paul was unsure of himself, and that might well have been the case because he might not have received an ordinance from the Lord regarding

marriage. However, before dismissing Paul's advice, in view of his background, experience and the charge given him to care for all the churches, it is a bold assertion to dismiss his advice as erroneous.

### Old Testament testimony

In summary, Paul's advice reflected the instructions given in Old Testament times: *"But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward"* (Jer. 7:23-24).■

## TEMPTATIONS COMMON TO MAN

Jesus said: *"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it"* (Matt. 7:13-14).

The primary implication of Jesus' words is that the Christian needs to exercise restraint—the gate to life is strait, that is, narrow—because many activities that are able to "pass through" the broad gate must be excluded from the Christian's way of life. Such enticements—temptations—must be rejected.

### The nature of temptations

The Apostle Paul wrote: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"* (1 Cor. 10:13). The Christian's experiences might not be anything unusual but merely similar to the temptations that confront mankind in general. Thus the essence of the test confronting the Christian is resistance, firstly to identify those activities which must be rejected (those that will not pass through the strait gate), and then to resist yielding to them. As James wrote: *".... Resist the devil, and he will flee from you"* (Jas. 4:7).

### The love of honour

One of the most powerful temptations is to seek honour amongst men. However Jesus said: *"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets"* (Luke 6:26). Many of the praises of mankind are insincere and may be justifiably called flattery. Of such the Psalmist wrote: *"They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double*

*heart do they speak"* (Psa. 12:2). On the other hand the correct course for the Christian is take courage and comfort from Jesus' words: *"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake"* (Luke 6:22).

The love of honour is not limited to words, but all seeking of honour amongst men. Such seeking was one of the temptations to which the scribes succumbed: *"And he said unto them... Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts... and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation"* (Mark 12:38-40).

### The love of money

Another temptation that must be resisted is the love of material wealth. The Apostle Paul warned Timothy: *"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"* (1 Tim. 6:9-10). It is not a sin to have money but it is a sin to love money.

### Pride

Pride is a temptation which presents in several different scenarios. It is possible to be proud of anything, including one's humility, but maybe the main dangers are:

- Material possessions. It is a great temptation to be proud of what one owns. However such pride is false because it should always be remembered *"...who*



*maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"* (1 Cor. 4:7). Even if the possessions have been gained through hard work, diligence, or expert use of intellect, all must be attributed to God—it is He who has endowed one with the physical ability to work and think, and not everyone has been given such blessings.

- **Ability (or talent):** The same principle applies—the talents with which everyone was born were given by God and applies to every aspect of one's existence, including personal appearance. One common expression amongst the world of mankind is that one should take pride in their appearance. Certainly some attention is required in order to *"provide things honest in the sight of men"* (Rom. 12:17), but the temptation to be proud of them must be recognized and rejected.

- **Knowledge:** It is easy to be proud of one's knowledge, including knowledge of the Scriptures. Again, certainly there is need of diligence and effort to study the Word, and God *"rewards those who diligently seek Him"* (Heb. 11:6), but there are several fundamental requirements which enable one to study the Word, many if not all of which are beyond the power of the individual: availability of the Word, an education which enables one to read (often taken for granted in the Western World today due to the availability of secular schools), and the Holy Spirit: *"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit... For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Cor. 2:9-14).

- **Good works:** Performing good works is an essential part of the Christian's conduct: *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **unto good works**, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"* (Eph. 2:8-10). The Apostle Peter also exhorted his readers to practise good works: *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts... 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. 2:11-12). The Christian is to do "good works"—the challenge is to resist the temptation to be proud of the works; the fleshly lust that seeks recognition for the works. As James wrote: *"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom"* (Jas. 3:13). The quality of meekness with wisdom is to flavour all the good works of the Christian.

### The cares of this life

Jesus warned His disciples: *"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares"* (Luke 21:34). While the Christian should not be troubled with surfeiting and drunkenness—*"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"* (Titus 2:11-12)—the cares of this life present a real challenge.

The Christian is obliged to give due regard to the things which pertain to their sustenance: *"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"* (1 Tim. 5:8). The Apostle Paul earned his own living, *"working with our own hands"* (1 Cor. 4:12), and exhorted his readers to do likewise: *"And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you"* (1 Thess. 4:11). The challenge is to know what constitutes due care and what is excessive. Failure to provide for one's own does not bring praise to God's Name, not now nor will it in the day of visitation.

### Summary

The path before the Christian is a delicate one, requiring wisdom and judgment—judgment to distinguish what is a proper responsibility and what is unnecessary and therefore is a temptation which will distract from the Christian walk. Judgment is made more delicate because, for the most part, the issues are common to mankind and therefore not easily distinguished. In that respect the more extreme temptations are easier to identify as the Apostle Peter wrote: *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."* (1 Pet. 4:12-13).■

# THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN

**G**enesis 1:7 records the separation of the waters when God created the heavens and the earth: “*And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so*”. It is the water above the firmament that gives rise to clouds.

## Clouds in Israel

A knowledge of the weather patterns in Israel adds some significance to the symbolism of clouds in the Scriptures. The area is bounded by sea on the West and desert on the East. The wind coming from the West is always moist and has the potential to bring clouds. If the temperature over the land is low enough the clouds will be condensed and rain will fall, but if the temperature is high there will be no rain even though there are clouds.

In the months of October through March, rain storms often arise suddenly from the sea, and might be the phenomenon seen by Elijah’s servant, miraculously arranged by God to occur at that moment: “*And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain... And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel... And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times. And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain...*” (1 Kings 18:41-45).

In the months of April, May and June a hot east wind sometimes rises from the desert and brings a cloud of dust. Such clouds are caused by strong winds and do not contain water. Maybe they gave rise to the symbolism in Jude 12: “*These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds...*”.

The wide difference in temperature between day and night in Israel often results in clouds being short-lived—the clouds that come in from the Mediterranean in the cool of the morning are often quickly dissipated when they enter the warm atmosphere of the land. Such transient clouds might have been what Hosea used to illustrate the transitory state of the faith of Ephraim and Judea: “*O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do*

*unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away*” (Hosea 6:4).

## Symbolic meaning of clouds

Clouds are also used as symbols. One symbolism is God’s chariot: “*Bless the LORD, O my soul... who maketh the clouds his chariot...*” (Psa. 104:1-3). Chariots were a vehicle that transported the ruler to war—they demonstrated might—and so the Psalmist might have used clouds to convey God’s might.

Clouds are also used to show the difference between God’s power and that of mankind, as Job declared: “*He bindeth up the waters in his thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them*” (Job 26:8). The weight of water held in the clouds is a manifestation of God’s power—the weight of water required for the island State of Tasmania (Australia’s smallest State) to receive 25 mm (1") of rain is approximately 1.7 million tonnes. However that amount of water is infinitesimal compared with the amount that has deluged parts of the USA and Asia in recent times, all of which came from clouds.

Zephaniah referred to clouds to convey the gloom mankind will experience in the day of the Lord: “*The great day of the LORD is near, it is near... a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness*” (Zeph. 1:14-15).

Ezekiel also used the symbolism of clouds and rain to convey the power God will use in that day: “*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 all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence... 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*” (Ezek. 38:18-22). Torrential rain and hailstones have devastating power.

On the other hand God can use rain to gently water the earth, as Job observed: “*Behold, God is great... For he maketh small the drops of water: they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof: which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly. Also can any understand the spreadings of the clouds*” (Job 36:26-29). God can use clouds and the water they contain to destroy or bless the Earth.

## God’s presence

Clouds are also used to convey God’s presence and guidance, as when He guided the Israelites through

the desert after they were freed from the Egyptian yoke: *"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"* (Exod. 13:21-22).

The cloud also provided them with protection from the Egyptians: *"And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night"* (Exod. 14:19-20).

As well as assuring them of God's presence and protection, the cloud also told them when they were to move camp and when they were to stay: *"And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys: But if the cloud were not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the tabernacle by day... in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys"* (Exod. 40:36-38).

Thus the clouds of heaven are a powerful indicator of several aspects of God's dealing with mankind: His power, His presence, His protection and His plans for the future. May all watch the clouds of heaven diligently as the events of the next year unfold and more is revealed of His program (Matt. 24:30).■

## JERUSALEM : THE HOLY CITY

**J**erusalem is mentioned more than 800 times in the Bible, in relation to both history and prophecy.

**Historically** it has had at least five names:

**Salem**—first mentioned in Genesis 14:18, when the King of Salem blessed Abraham. The location of Salem is not given in Genesis, but Psalm 76:2 links it to Zion and therefore Jerusalem: *"In Salem also is His tabernacle and His dwelling place in Zion"*. Salem means peace (Heb. 7:2).

**Moriah**—Abraham offered Isaac on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:2) and Solomon built the temple there: *"Now Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah..."* (2 Chron. 3:1).

**Jebusi**—*"... the cities of the tribe of the children of Benjamin according to their families were Jericho... and Jebusi, which is Jerusalem..."* (Joshua 18:21-28).

**Jerusalem**—First mentioned in Joshua 10:1. King David established his throne there: *"And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem"* (1 Kings 2:11).

It is God's chosen city: *"... David my servant may have a light alway before me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there"* (1 Kings 11:36); *"But I have chosen Jerusalem, that my name might be there; and have chosen David to be over my people Israel"* (2 Chron. 6:6).

The second temple was built there: *"Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me; and he hath charged*

*me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah..."* (2 Chron. 36:23). *"Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem"* (Ezra 1:5).

The heavenly Jerusalem is the city of God: *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem..."* (Heb. 12:22).

**Zion**—*"Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David"* (2 Sam. 5:7).

**Prophetically**, the word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem: *"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).

*"And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem"* (Micah 4:2).

*"Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD"* (Zech. 8:22).

The new Jerusalem will bless the world of mankind: *"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."* (Rev. 21:2).■

## WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT

**T**he Apostle Paul's exhortation to think on things that are of good report (Phil. 4:8) is easier said than done.

There are at least two factors that make it difficult to decide whether something is of good report. One factor is the power of words and the other is that different reporters convey different impressions of the same event, either subconsciously or deliberately.

False reporting has ever confronted the Lord's people: Moses had to deal with the false report of the spies he sent to assess the land of Canaan: "*And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel...*" (Num. 13:30-33).

Paul was conscious of ill reporting: "*We then... beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. ... But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God... by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true...*" (2 Cor. 6:1-8). Paul was aware there would be evil reports of their activities and one counter to false reports was to take notice only of those things that were attested by more than one witness: "*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men...*" (2 Tim. 2:2).

Paul's exhortation means the Christian should not take undue notice of any single evil report regarding the brethren; it should be remembered that, while Christians will be evil spoken of at this time, nevertheless their adversaries will glorify God in the day of visitation: "*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).

### False Christians

Additionally, and on the other hand, the Christian is to be wary of good reports—they might be flattery designed to deceive: "*Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets*" (Luke 6:26). Alternatively, one who is praised by those in this world are not good examples of the ministry: "... *know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*" (Jas. 4:4).

However not all favourable (good) reports convey incorrect perceptions. Cornelius was one who was well renowned: "*Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius ... And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews...*" (Acts 10:21-22). Likewise Ananias also had a good report of all the Jews and was used by God to restore Saul's sight (Acts 22:11-13).

### Elders

The test regarding those who would be elders is even more demanding: they must be of "*good report of them which are without*" (1 Tim. 3:7)—in other words they must be as Paul wrote to Titus: "... *of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you*" (Titus 2:7-8). While they may be evil spoken of, their conduct must be exemplary.

### Temporal associations

Keeping one's mind on things of good report also requires the Christian to separate from some in the world, as Paul instructed Timothy: "*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... false accusers... fierce, despisers of those that are good... having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away*" (2 Tim. 3:1-5). Association with those who practise such things does not engender holiness of thought and does not cultivate thinking on things that are "of good report".

In summary, the essence of Paul's exhortation to the Philippians is that Christians must think on those things that are well reported of by those who know the Lord: "*But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them... which are able to make thee wise unto salvation...*" (2 Tim. 3:14-15).■

### PEOPLES PAPER AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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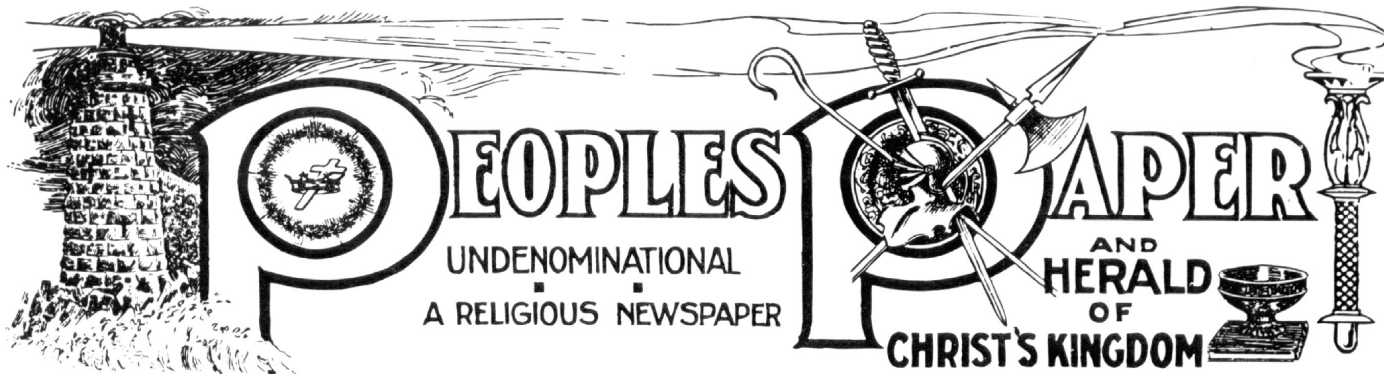
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## THAT JESUS WAS CHRIST

*“... Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:5)*

The title “Jesus Christ” occurs more than 250 times in the Bible. Such prevalence might lead to the conclusion that there is no significance in the separate parts of the title, and that the only purpose is to give Jesus of Nazareth His full name. However, as implied by Acts 18:5, that is not the case, and a realisation of the significance of each part of the title adds greatly to the status to be ascribed to Jesus during His earthly life and also since His resurrection.

### Jesus

The first occurrence of the complete title of “Jesus Christ” is in Matthew 1:1: *“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham”*, and the first occurrence of the title “Jesus” standing alone is in Matthew 1:16: *“And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ”*. However neither of those verses gives any indication of the significance of the two parts of His title, other than that Matthew 1:16 shows He was known as either Jesus or Christ.

Strong’s Concordance defines “Jesus” as: *“Of Hebrew origin... Jesus (that is, Jehoshua), the name of our Lord and two (three) other Israelites”*. W. E. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines the meaning of Jesus as: *“a transliteration of the Hebrew ‘Joshua’ meaning ‘Jehovah is salvation’... a common name amongst the Jews”*. The idea that “Jesus” is related to “Joshua” which in turn is related to Jehovah and salvation, is consistent with Joshua of the Old Testament who led the Israelites into the promised land—*“And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I sware unto them: and I will be with thee”* (Deut. 31:23).

Hence the definition of “Jesus” as a transliteration of Joshua is an example of the significance of names in the Scriptures; Jesus also is associated with salvation.

### Christ

Strong’s Concordance defines “Christ” as: *“anointed, that is, the Messiah, an epithet of Jesus”*. An “epithet” is an adjective to express an attribute, and that added meaning is significant because Jesus’ anointing was the crux of Paul’s argument to the Jews at Corinth—he tried to persuade them that Jesus was Christ; “the anointed”.

### Anointing

The Israelites were familiar with anointing because the priests of the tabernacle were anointed: *“And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water. And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon Aaron the coat, and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastplate, and gird him with the curious girdle of the ephod: And thou shalt put the mitre upon his head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre. Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him”* (Exod. 29:4-7). The priests of the typical tabernacle were anointed with literal oil; Jesus was not anointed with literal oil but with the Holy Spirit when He was baptized in the River Jordan: *“Now*

### In This Issue

That Jesus Was Christ	1
Jesus and Gardens	4
Christianity Compared	5
Shall He Find Faith On The Earth?	7
Brussels Christmas Tree	9
Let Your Moderation Be Known	10
Israel and the United Nations	11
If There Be Any Virtue	12

when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost (Spirit: Greek 'pneuma'—a current of air; breath) descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21-22). "... God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost (Spirit) and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

Jesus was aware of the power that attended His anointing: *"And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: 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 brokenhearted, 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 knew He was the One prophesied by Isaiah and the powers God had given Him. It is significant that this event occurred after His baptism; His anointing.

### Jesus' power

Matthew records Jesus' power was evidenced by the miracles He performed: *"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan"* (Matt. 4:23-25).

However, while great multitudes followed Him and He became famous—"... there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all" (Luke 4:14-15)—they did not realise who He was: *"When Jesus*

*came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven"* (Matt. 16:13-17). The critical point in that lesson was that it was God alone who enabled His disciples to realise He was Christ, God's anointed.

### Elijah

From a human standpoint, the Jew's failure to realise who Jesus was may also be excused to some extent because of the promise that, before Messiah came, Elijah would come and restore all things: *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse"* (Mal. 4:5-6).

However Jesus explained that Elias had come already in the person of John the Baptist: *"And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist"* (Matt. 17:10-13).

Nevertheless the miracles He performed amongst them convinced some that He was the Messiah: *"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did"* (John 2:23). Nevertheless not everyone who witnessed His marvelous works were persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah: *"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him"* (John 12:37).

### Crucifixion

Jesus' crucifixion on the cross at Calvary caused despair amongst some of His followers: *"And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus... And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them... And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of*

them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, *Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done*" (Luke 24:13-21). They had trusted Jesus would have redeemed Israel, but now He was dead and their hopes were vanquished.

### **The Jews scattered**

Jesus did not travel beyond the borders of Israel, however the Jews were scattered amongst other countries, and secular history accords that in the first century A.D., the Jews were scattered throughout southern Europe. Consequently the Apostles travelled throughout southern Europe and Asia Minor to tell the Jews living in those regions that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus: *"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord"* (Acts 11:19-21).

### **Thessalonica**

And so it was that Paul came to Thessalonica where the number of Jews was sufficient for them to have established a synagogue there: *"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few"* (Acts 17:1-4).

Those living in Thessalonica had not seen Jesus in the flesh and so they had not heard Him speak nor seen the miracles He performed. Consequently the only basis available to Paul to convince them that Jesus, their Messiah, had come, was "the Scriptures"—the "Old Testament".

The challenge confronting Paul might be better realised if it is remembered that John the Baptist, who

had heard of Jesus' miracles, sought confirmation of Jesus' authority: *"And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached"* (Luke 7:19-22). Jesus told John the miracles He performed were testimony that He was the One "who should come".

Another factor which made the challenge facing Paul greater was the Thessalonians did not have any concept of the Holy Spirit, as did those who witnessed the events on the day of Pentecost, when Peter explained that the Holy Spirit was evidence that Jesus was Christ: *"This Jesus hath God raised up... he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:32-36).

### **Christians today**

Likewise the Holy Spirit is testimony to Christians today, not because of any miracles that are done, but because of the spiritual insight each one enjoys: *"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit... For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God"* (1 Cor. 2:9-12). The fact that Christians can understand some of the "mysteries" of God's word bear testimony that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ.

Faith (conviction) that Jesus is the Christ is necessary today to overcome the world: *"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth... He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself..."* (1 John 5:1-6, 10). Praise God that Jesus is Christ!■



# JESUS AND GARDENS

**H**ebrews 1:1-2 states that Jesus was the One by whom God made the worlds: *“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, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds”*.

Jesus is also referred to as the Word: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God... All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made”* (John 1:1-3). The title “Word” may be understood in the same sense as it is used in some senses today; that is, unless someone “gives the word” nothing gets done. Jesus was God’s agent in the work of creation.

The Apostle John declares that *“the Word”* came to earth in the person of Jesus: *“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14).

## Garden of Eden

One of the works of creation was the creation of a garden in Eden: *“And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed”* (Gen. 2:8). Thus Jesus was associated with the very first earthly garden.

God placed the man in the garden in Eden and so Man’s first abode was in a garden. A garden brings a feeling of solitude and many who seek respite from intense mental or emotional stress today seek solitude in a garden. Specifically, those involved in religious pursuits often resort to a garden to enhance their feeling of closeness to God; thus it may be said that the nearest place to God is in a garden.

## The wilderness

In that vein it might be significant that, when the time came for Jesus to be tested regarding His loyalty to God, He was led into the wilderness: *“He was then led of the spirit into the wilderness and ate nothing for forty days and was tempted of the devil”* (Matt. 4:1). If a garden is the environment where Man feels closest to God, the wilderness could be where he feels most distant (that surmise does not deny the desire of the Israelites to go into the wilderness to worship God—Exodus 5:1; to them that environment promised separation from the Egyptian regime and hence enhanced worship). If that surmise is correct, the temptations which Satan put to Jesus were as severe as they could have been—He was isolated from His Father, He was hungry and He was alone.

## Gethsemane

After He ate the passover with His disciples for the last time Jesus *“... went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples. And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples”* (John 18:1-2). Jesus often resorted to the garden—the garden of Gethsemane—maybe because it provided refuge from the pressures of life. Such a recourse would have been consistent with Him being a man who experienced the same emotions as all mankind: *“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”* (Heb. 4:15).

It was in the Garden of Gethsemane that Jesus prayed fervently to His Father prior to His trial: *“Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt”* (Matt. 26:36-39). As He prepared to endure the dreadful treason, torture and humiliation that was to afflict Him during the next several hours, Jesus went to a garden to pray.

## His burial

After Jesus died, *“... Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus... besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus. And there came also Nicodemus... and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews’ preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand”* (John 19:38-42).

Thus Jesus was present when the garden was prepared in Eden, He often resorted to a garden during His earthly sojourn, and after His death His earthly body was laid to rest in a garden.

Surely there is some significance in Jesus’ association with gardens.■



# CHRISTIANITY COMPARED

**I**s Christianity just another religion? There is now a meeting of cultures, nations, races and religions on a scale unprecedented in history. Interaction with people from other countries and cultures presents the challenge whether Christianity is the only faith that has the correct understanding of the Higher Power.

To that challenge may be added the question whether what one believes is critical, or whether it does not matter what one believes provided they are sincere. In other words it may be assumed that all religions are basically the same, making the same claims, and essentially teaching the same things, with the same objective of the adherent attaining eternal life in some place. However sincerity does not make anything true or false: facts are facts, regardless of people's attitudes towards them—the basic question in religious matters is always: is it the truth?

## Similarities

The scene is made more complex by the fact that there are some similarities shared by the major religions. The basic element of all religions is that there is a superior power, whether that be an entity in material or spiritual form or whether the power is resident in everyone, in which case the only difference between religious and irreligious people is the extent to which each individual has accessed that power.

Another similarity between some religions is the golden rule: “do unto others as you would have them do to you”. It may be contended that is the only requirement to attain eternal life. However that principle is clouded by the assertion of some religions that it is the duty of every believer to convert everyone else to their creed, and that conviction may quickly lead to enforcement action which in turn requires the use of force—persecution—which is contrary to the desires of the victim.

## Buddhism

The ultimate goal in Buddhism is Nirvana; the extinction of desire. One branch of Buddhism does not hold any hope of eternal life. It is asserted that all pain and suffering come from desire. If desire can be overcome by following the path to enlightenment, one can achieve Nirvana—perfect peace within oneself in the present life. Adherents live a life of self denial.

## Hinduism

Hindus believe there are many gods, but the ultimate goal is Nirvana—the ultimate reunion with the impersonal Brahm, the all-pervading force of the Universe. This faith is similar to Buddhism except it does not necessarily mean one will be totally extinct;

the law of Karma provides for a continuous cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. One reaps in the next life what one sows in the present life.

## Islam

The god of Islam (Allah) is an invention of Mohammed. Allah is totally removed from people and is responsible for bringing about evil as well as good. The ultimate goal of Islam is Paradise, which is a realm of sensual pleasure. Paradise is obtained by abstaining from sensual pleasures in this life. The devotee of Islam must follow the five pillars of Islam: repeating the creed, making a pilgrimage to Mecca, giving alms to the poor, praying five times daily and keeping the fast of the month of Ramadan.

## Christianity

There are least three principal doctrines of the Christian religion which make it different from the religions summarised above: who God is, the nature of salvation and how salvation is obtained.

Firstly God is understood to be the One who created all things—the great “I AM”: “*And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you*” (Exod. 3:14). That tenet was the basis of the Apostle Paul's ministry: “*Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ*” (Eph. 3:8-9).

Intrinsic in Paul's statement is the belief that there are two Supreme Beings: God and Jesus Christ, the latter being the Son of the former and the One by whom God created all things. The duopoly is confirmed by another writer of the “Sacred Word”, the Holy Bible: “*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, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (Heb. 1:1-3).

However there is a hierarchy between the two, God being Supreme: “*... But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God*” (1 Cor. 11:3). Some strands of Christianity introduce a

third deity—the Holy Spirit—so that there is a trinity: “Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. While that concept is prevalent in many organizations which profess to be Christian, others believe the concept of the Holy Spirit being a separate entity is not supported by the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Spirit being the power the Creator gives to each subordinate creature which enables them to comprehend His majesty.

### Salvation

Within “Christianity” there are at least two different concepts of salvation. The first is dependent on the concept of death—that death simply means the expiration of life. However death is not the end of all existence because everyone will be brought back to life in a concept known as the resurrection: *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself... Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment”* (John 5:25-29). Resurrection may be considered to constitute salvation, salvation being saved from death and raised to life, that is, eternal life, with no further thought of extinction. However that resurrection (salvation) will not guarantee eternal life for all because some will be resurrected to face “judgment”.

### The mechanism of salvation

The concept of a resurrection for all, regardless of what they have done in their present life (with one exception, those who “sin against the Holy Spirit”—Matt. 12:31), is unique, and is based on the sacrifice of One man, the man Christ Jesus, *“who gave Himself a ransom for all”* (1 Tim. 2:6). This doctrine alone makes Christianity unique because it means, at least in the first instance, that salvation is not dependent on the person performing “good works” in the present life, but that, in the ultimate sense, salvation is a free gift. The concept was reiterated by the Apostle Paul when he was before Governor Felix: *“And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust”* (Acts 24:15).

Entwined in the concept of a ransom is the concept that all mankind are captive together, and hence one price—a ransom price—can result in the release of everyone from that captivity. The Apostle Paul explained the situation in his letter to the Romans: *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men....”* (Rom. 5:12-19). All mankind received the same condemnation to death due to the act of the

one man Adam. The Apostle continues: *“But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead... even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous”*. The concept of one man being the ransom price for all mankind is the single doctrine that makes Christianity unique.

However the fact that Jesus Christ has paid the ransom price for everyone and thereby gained for them a resurrection from death does not mean they are assured of eternal life—that is, living for ever. There is yet a time when all will need to prove their allegiance to God and His righteous ways before they will be assured of eternal life: *“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; (that One is Jesus) him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days”* (Acts 3:22-24). “Hearing”, that is, obedience, to Jesus’ regime will be required in order for anyone to live forever; those who do not “hear” will be destroyed from among the people.

### The Christian’s challenge

While on the one hand the concept of Jesus paying the price which affords everyone being freed from death is very attractive, it places great responsibility on the Christian to assure themselves that they have adequate justification for their belief. The Apostle Peter was well aware of the challenge and sought to assure his readers that the basis of their faith was sound: *“For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power... of our Lord Jesus Christ... We have also a more sure word of prophecy... 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). In other words the Christian’s belief is not a blind belief but is substantiated by the fulfilment of the prophecies contained in the Bible.

Recognising which prophecies have been fulfilled, when they were fulfilled, which are being fulfilled at this time, and having faith that those yet to be fulfilled will be fulfilled, is one of the challenges that face the Christian: *“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward”* (Heb. 10:35).■

## SHALL HE FIND FAITH ON THE EARTH?

One of the trials of the Christian's walk is persistence; the determination to maintain one's faith until their course is complete.

There is much exhortation in the Scriptures for Christians to maintain their zeal. One passage is Hebrews 10:32-36: *"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise".*

In those verses the writer (Paul?) refers to two methods which help Christians maintain their zeal: calling to mind the zeal they had when they first realised the privilege of their calling, and secondly realising their journey along the narrow way is long and therefore they need patience.

It is common to be enthusiastic when one is introduced to any project, religious or otherwise, and such enthusiasm enables one to suffer adversity and go to considerable lengths to achieve the envisioned outcome. The same motivation applied to the Hebrew Christians: in the early stages of their Christian walk they suffered adversity, directly, and indirectly through their association with others who were being oppressed.

### Jesus' exhortation

Jesus was aware that, as time goes on, human beings tend to lose their enthusiasm for any "project", and that such a loss had the potential to beset His followers. Consequently He told them a story—a parable—the essence of which was to negate discouragement. The parable is recorded in Luke 18: 2-5: *"... There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me".*

More than one lesson may be drawn from the parable, however Luke states that Jesus' purpose in relating

the parable was to exhort persistence in prayer: *"And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint"* (Luke 18:1); *"to this end"* defines the purpose of the parable.

The meaning of "faint" in Luke 18:1 is symbolic—it does not refer to physical fainting but to giving up hope; "losing heart", that is, discouragement. The Apostle Paul used the same expression in his letter to the Corinthians: *"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day"* (2 Cor. 4:16). They did not faint, even though their outward man "perished".

The crux of the parable in Luke 18 is that the judge granted the widow's request because she persisted with her petition and he considered it likely she would continue to pester him. Jesus points out that if such a human judge—one who did not fear God and who was deemed unjust—would reward a widow because of her persistence, it should be obvious that the Lord would do the same for *"His own elect"*; those whom He has chosen to be His own. Thus the lesson for the disciples was that they should not cease to continue to bring their petitions to God, trusting He will hear their prayers, and to wait on Him for His answers: they were to be *"... patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer"* (Rom. 12:12).

### Faith on the earth

Nevertheless Jesus declared that when He came again there would be little faith on the earth, that is, amongst mankind. The writer to the Hebrews gives some insight into why such a dearth of faith might develop: *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Heb. 11:6). Faith that God will answer anyone's prayers is dependent upon them believing God exists; if one does not believe there is a God it is impossible to believe He will answer their prayers.

One indication that there has been a significant decrease of belief in God in recent times in the Western World is the proportion of the population that attends a religious service. At the time of going to press the latest statistics available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.abs.gov.au>) was Document 4102.0—Australian Social Trends, which was issued in December 2012. The document indicates that while 69.1% of the Australian population state they have a "religious affiliation", only 16% attend a religious service at least once per week. Similar figures for USA indicate 44% attend a religious service at least once

per week while the proportion in UK is 27%. The National Church Life Survey, which claims its data is based on Australian Bureau of Statistics data, reports that overall church attendance is continuing to decline even though some congregations are growing.

### Doctrine

Church attendance does not, in itself, indicate if the attendee has faith that God answers prayers, and observation suggests that in recent times some religious services are moving to emphasise social affiliation rather than Biblical doctrine.

A reduction in the emphasis given to doctrine should not surprise the Christian—it was Jesus' concluding statement in Luke 18:1-8: "... Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Also the Apostle Peter wrote: "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: 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. 3:1-6). Peter encouraged them to call to mind that they had previously learnt that the prophets foretold there would be much scoffing at the thought that Jesus (in any form) would return to earth.

### "Faith" or "the faith"?

However in order to understand precisely Jesus' prophecy regarding the conditions which would prevail upon the earth, it is necessary to ascertain whether Jesus was referring to faith in general or to a specific doctrine.

Various translations render Luke 18:8 differently, the principal variation being the insertion or omission of the adjective "the" in relation to "faith"—that is, did Jesus say "... shall he find faith on the earth?" or did He say "shall he find **the** faith on the earth?"

The inclusion of the adjective "the" implies that Jesus was referring to a particular "faith" (doctrine), whereas its omission allows Jesus' words to be interpreted as meaning He was referring to faith in general—faith relating either to God answering prayer or faith in an even more general sense, even faith in matters not connected with religion. Resolution of the question requires examination of

the original text to ascertain whether the adjective "the" is included. If it is included, the further question arises: which particular doctrine did Jesus have in mind?

### Evidence for the inclusion of "the"

The *Concordant Literal Translation* is the only translation to hand that includes the adjective "the". The translation reads: "... at the coming of the Son of Mankind, will He be finding the faith on the earth". However the translation does not provide any manuscript evidence. The charter of the *Concordant Publishing Concern* states: "... the Concordant Publishing Concern... is a denominationally independent nonprofit association for Scripture research... The Concern is not a church, but a translating and teaching ministry". The introduction to their translation of the New Testament reads: "...The concordant method of translation clearly recognizes the importance of the vocabulary of Scripture keeping distinct the well-chosen words used by God in His revelation of truth. Though absolute consistency cannot be achieved in the making of a readable English translation, the *Concordant Literal New Testament*, by being "harmonious" with the Original, keeps to a minimum the confusion resulting from translating different Greek words with the same English word". It is difficult to criticise the objectives of the *Concordant Publishing Concern*.

The *Emphatic Diaglott* does not include the word "the" in the smooth English column, using the word "this" instead: "... will He find this belief on the land". However "the" is included in the interlinear column. The wording in both columns indicates Jesus referred to the faith that God would continue to answer their prayers:

Strong's Concordance comments on the Greek word which the *Diaglott* translates as "the": (#3588): "... the definite article; *the* (sometimes to be supplied, at others omitted, in English idiom)". In the King James Version the word is variously translated "the", "this", "that", "one", "he", "she", "it", etc.

The comment in Strong's Concordance that the word "the" should sometimes be supplied and at others omitted in English idiom strengthens the statement in the introduction of the *Concordant* translation that "absolute consistency cannot be achieved in the making of a readable English translation...", and it may be the reason why the adjective "the" in relation to faith in Luke 18:8 is omitted in the following translations: KJV, NKJV ("will He really find faith on the earth?"), RV (however there is a note in the margin: "or the faith"), RSV, Scofield (also with a marginal comment: "lit. The faith") and NIV. On the other hand, if "the" is inserted, the question arises: to

which particular faith (doctrine) did Jesus refer? From verse 1 the context seems to refer to persistency in prayer and any other interpretation is lacking contextual support.

#### Other occurrences of “the faith”

There are instances where the inclusion of the adjective “the” in relation to faith is more clearly appropriate. A few examples are:

- Acts 6:7: “...And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to **the** faith”. The subject is the gospel and the verse refers to the conversion of some priests;
- Acts 13:8: “But Elymas the sorcerer... withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from **the** faith”; the faith from which Elymas tried to distract them was the gospel;
- Romans 14:1: “Him that is weak in **the** faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations”. However the NIV reads: “Accept him whose faith is

weak...”. Nevertheless the following verses imply the reference is to a correct understanding of the gospel;

- Colossians 2:7: “Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in **the** faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving”;

In these four examples the faith is the faith to which the early Christians were to adhere, which faith was significantly different from the practices that were required under the Law Covenant: “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting 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. 2:13-14).

Thus Jesus’ prophecy was that, at the time of His return, there will be little faith amongst the population—little faith in God and little faith in Him answering anyone’s prayers.■

## BRUSSELS CHRISTMAS TREE

**I**t has been reported that more than 25,000 people in Belgium have signed a petition denouncing a decision to remove the traditional Christmas tree in the central square in Brussels, Belgium and replace it with a politically correct structure of abstract minimalist art.

Critics accuse the Socialist mayor of declaring war on Christmas by installing the “multicultural” structure of lights to placate the city’s Muslim population.

Historically, a 20 meter [65 foot] fir tree taken from the forests of the Ardennes has adorned the city’s main square, the Grand-Place. This year, however, it has been replaced with a 25 meter [82] foot new-age-like structure of lighted boxes. Moreover, the traditional Christmas Market in downtown Brussels is no longer being referred to as a “Christmas Market” but as “Winter Pleasures 2012”. The aim was to “blend the modern and the traditional”. More than half the city’s councillors are Muslim and the justification of the change included the statement: “The Christmas tree is not a religious symbol and lots of Muslims have a Christmas tree at home”. However critics say the non-tree was installed to avoid offending Muslims.

The conflict over the traditional Christmas tree comes as two Muslim politicians, who won municipal elections in Brussels on October 14, 2012 have vowed to implement Islamic Sharia law in Belgium. During a post-election press conference in Brussels on October 25, the two councilors said they regard

their election as key to the assertion of the Muslim community in Belgium.

The rise of the Islam Party comes amid a rapidly growing Muslim population in the Belgian capital. Muslims now make up one-quarter of the population of Brussels, according to a book recently published by the Catholic University of Leuven, the top Dutch-language university in Belgium.

In real terms, the number of Muslims in Brussels—where half of the number of Muslims in Belgium currently live—has reached 300,000, which means that the self-styled “Capital of Europe” is now the most Islamic city in Europe.

Meanwhile, critics of the “electronic winter tree” have called on Muslims in Belgium to sign a petition to show that they do not have anything against the traditional Christmas tree.

The petition reads: “The removal of the Christmas tree on the Grand-Place in Brussels aroused strong controversy about the role of Muslims in this decision. I hereby would like to see Muslims sign this petition to show that they are not against this tree. I would like to gather as many signatures as possible to show that Muslims comply with Belgian traditions and do not want to remove this joy at home”.

Fewer than 80 of Belgium’s 600,000 Muslims have signed the petition.

—GatestoneInstitute.org■

## LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN

**M**oderation is a broad concept, as evidenced by the differences in its meaning given by various translators. Dr. Strong defines it (#1933) as “appropriate, that is, by implication gentle”, whereas Young’s Concordance defines the same Greek (*epieikes*) as “yield, pliability”, and Vine’s Dictionary defines it as “forbearance”.

All of those definitions are consistent in one sense or other depending on the scenario in which they are to be applied. Gentleness can mean in certain circumstances one must yield to the convictions of another as exhorted by Romans 12:18: *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men”*. A harsh and abrupt response is more likely to provoke antagonism than a gentle approach.

However standing firm is also a form of moderation in that it means one is not prepared to bend to any lengths to accommodate another, and the Christian must be prepared to stand apart on some issues regardless of the circumstances, as Paul exhorted the Philippians: *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Phil. 4:4-6). The Christian must not be ashamed of the stand they take, and be prepared for their stand to be made known to all, regardless of any ridicule they may attract.

### The privilege of the light

The basis of such a stand is that they are privileged to be walking in the light: *“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light... Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them... See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil”* (Eph. 5:8-16). The Christian must firstly prove what is acceptable to the Lord and must cast off the works of darkness, those not acceptable to the Lord.

The most discreet form of standing apart is refraining from association as Paul exhorted the Corinthians: *“... 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”* (2 Cor. 6:16-17). Coming out from among them implies separation but does not imply any outward objection.

### Avoidance

Coming out from among people might not always mean physical separation, as Paul advised Titus: *“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain”* (Titus 3:9). Simply refusing to enter into debate about matters that are obviously proposed for the sake of argument is one form of standing apart which makes one’s moderation known.

### A helping hand

A further challenge arises because standing apart is not always the correct path for the Christian: *“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh”* (Jude 21-23). The Christian is to be sympathetic to those who are in darkness, to show them compassion if that will make a difference, and to be available to help them if God so chooses.

Such considerations might involve associating with them in an environment in which the Christian would prefer not to be, and accommodating such a situation might be challenged as inconsistency. One example was when Peter withdrew himself from associating with the Gentiles and was openly corrected by Paul: *“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 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”* (Gal. 2:11-12). Paul did not shrink from letting his moderation be known, and that publicly, because to not do so would have led to uncertainty that the Gentiles had been grafted into the fellowship of believers.

### Great wisdom required

However that situation was somewhat unique and Paul adopted a different approach in his dealings with the Corinthians: *“Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds); Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every*

*thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Cor. 10:1-6).*

Paul declared he was gentle when he was with them—that is, he avoided confrontation face to face—but he was bold towards them in his letter, that is, he wrote forthrightly, trusting they would take notice of what he wrote and would correct their ways before he confronted them face to face. If Paul had not corrected them by letter but had waited until he visited them, it might have appeared to some that he was just as confronting as anyone else, which might have given the impression he used the same “*weapons of warfare*” as those who were not enlightened. Consequently he was careful to ensure he did not give the impression his warfare was “*after the flesh*”; that is, confrontation and strife. Nevertheless he did not retract from his stand and claimed the weapons of his warfare were powerful and triumphed over “*every high thing that exalted*”.

However such a strategy is not always possible as Paul wrote to Timothy: “*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ... Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:1-5). Timothy was to rebuke and exhort as required to fulfil his ministry.

#### **Fervent in spirit**

Tolerance, or forbearance, has the potential to make one lax regarding one’s conviction. It is not possible at this time to harmonize all earthly things, even amongst the enlightened, as Paul 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; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God*” (2 Cor. 4:1-2). Such an example constitutes letting our moderation be known unto all men.■

## **ISRAEL AND THE UNITED NATIONS**

**T**he following report was issued by the Jewish Press on December 19th, 2012.

The UN General Assembly on Tuesday adopted nine resolutions on Palestinian rights and the Golan, sharply criticizing Israel, yet making no mention of Sunday’s massacre of Palestinians by Syrian warplanes firing missiles into a mosque in a Palestinian refugee camp near Damascus. Nor did the texts mention the tens of thousands of Palestinians who continue to flee the camp, UN Watch reported.

By the end of this week, the current 2012 UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) session will have adopted 22 country-specific resolutions on Israel—and only four on the rest of the world combined—one each for Syria, Iran, North Korea and Burma, noted UN Watch.

Tuesday’s resolutions criticized Israel for “the continuing systematic violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people,” and focused on “the extremely difficult socioeconomic conditions being faced by the Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.”

One resolution condemned Israel for holding on to the Golan Heights, demanding Israel hand the land and its people to Syria...

“It’s astonishing,” said Hillel Neuer, executive director of UN Watch. “At a time when the Syrian regime is massacring its own people, how can the UN

call for more people to be subject to Assad’s rule? The timing of today’s text is morally galling and logically absurd.”

“What is also outrageous is that these resolutions claim to care about Palestinians, yet the UN proves itself completely oblivious to the actual suffering on the ground, happening right now: Palestinians slaughtered, maimed and expelled by Assad’s forces.”

“Today’s farce at the General Assembly underscores a simple fact: the UN’s automatic majority has no interest in truly helping Palestinians, nor in protecting anyone’s human rights; the goal of these ritual, one-sided condemnations remains the scapegoating of Israel,” said Neuer.

“The UN’s disproportionate assault against the Jewish state undermines the credibility of what is supposed to be an impartial and respected international body, and exposes the sores of politicisation and selectivity that eat away at its founding mission, eroding the UN Charter promise of equal treatment to all nations large and small...”

While the nations are touched by humanitarian ideals, they are ignorant regarding God’s hand in the affairs of men, and particularly regarding His people Israel and their right to the land: “*And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children’s children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever*” (Ezek. 37:25).■

## IF THERE BE ANY VIRTUE

*“Finally, brethren... if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 4:8)*

**C**ompliance with Paul’s exhortation to think on things that have virtue requires the Christian to decide which things have virtue and which do not.

In order to make such decisions it is necessary to have a clear idea regarding the meaning of virtue. Some secular dictionaries define virtue as “moral excellence or goodness”, and some Bible concordances define it as “*manliness, that is, excellence*” (Strong’s Concordance #703).

The concept of “manliness” is appropriate in the sense that a virtuous man is morally upright, as exemplified in the **man** Christ Jesus. After interrogating Him, Pilate declared: “... *I find in him no fault*” (John 18:38). Later he further declared: “... *That ye may know that I find no fault in Him*” (John 19:4). Nevertheless his declaration fell on deaf ears, and so, in his last appeal to the priests and officers Pilate exclaimed “*Behold the man!*” (John 19:5). Jesus was a man who exemplified virtue!

### Animate and inanimate

However Paul’s exhortation applies to a wider spectrum than human beings; it embraces inanimate (non-living) things, which in turn can be classified as material things and non-material things (such as thoughts, words and deeds).

For material things, deciding if an inanimate thing is virtuous is more difficult than deciding whether a living being is virtuous because the assessment has to be made on the effect of the object’s appearance (or, for some things, the noise it makes).

For example some works of “art” provoke a desire for material prosperity, sexual immorality or violence. Other inanimate objects can stimulate thoughts of worshipping heathen gods. Whatever the consequence, if it is amoral (without moral virtue) the Christian should not ponder them.

### Words

One example of an inanimate and also non-material thing which can injure the Christian’s spiritual mind are words. Peter alerted his readers to the dangers of “*great swelling words of vanity*” that can “*allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness...*” (2 Pet. 2:18). Words can be very persuasive, and so the Christian needs to be selective regarding the words upon which they meditate. For that reason Paul chose his words carefully: “*And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing*

*words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God*” (1 Cor. 2:4-5). Jesus was noted for His gracious words.

Paul warned Timothy about the power of words: “*Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some*” (2 Tim. 2:14-18). That such influences can overthrow the faith of some indicates the danger of meddling with them.

### Gradual influence

It is not the words themselves that are injurious, but the thoughts they express. Their influence is particularly powerful because their effect might be gradual—Paul likened it to a canker, that is, an ulcer (or in modern day terms cancer). It is of the slow and subtle influence that the Christian must be aware.

### Activities

Participating in activities that are not virtuous also has the potential to injure the new creature, and particularly flamboyant activities. Jesus said: “... *thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men*” (Matt. 6:5). The Christian must withdraw from such displays of pride, as Paul also 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).

The Christian must avoid thinking on things that are not virtuous because they have the potential to ultimately affect how they think, and “... *as he thinketh in his heart, so is he...*” (Prov. 23:7).■

### PEOPLES PAPER AND HERALD OF CHRIST’S KINGDOM

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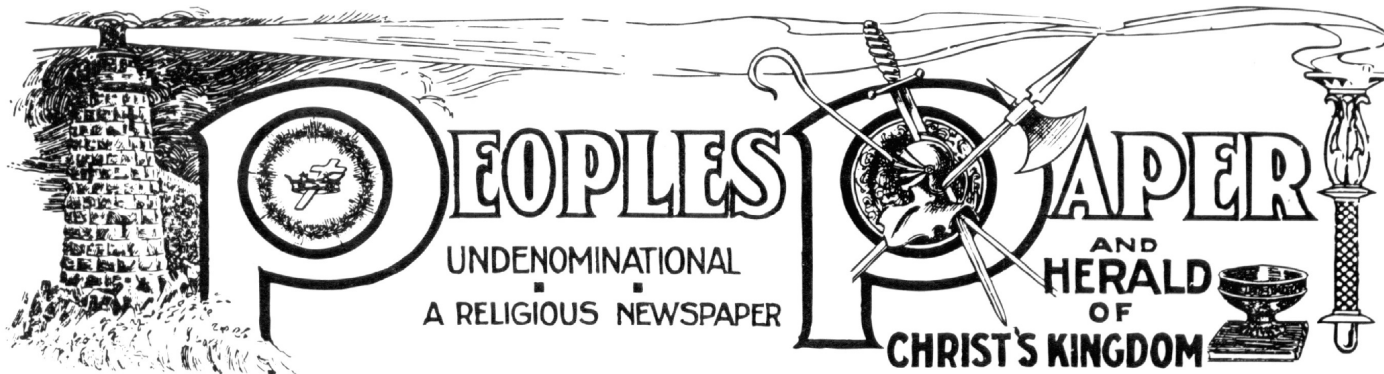
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## FORSAKE NOT ASSEMBLING TOGETHER

*“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” (Hebrews 10:24-25)*

The exhortation quoted above is one which the Christian does well to observe, especially if they are living in one of the hectic societies which characterize many Western societies.

The exhortation is also included in Paul’s letters to the churches, although not so directly: *“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...”* (Eph. 4:1-4). The need to *“forbear one another”* implies association, either by assembling together physically or, if separated by distance, by some form of communication. In either case there is to be fellowship: the overall sentiment of the verses is mutual support stemming from fellowship.

Paul used similar language in his letter to the Philippians: *“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel”* (Phil. 1:27). Again the thrust of Paul’s exhortation is that they would fellowship together and mutually support each other—*“striving together”*.

Paul’s fervency for the brethren to be united is further exemplified by his exhortation in the closing verses of his letters to the Corinthians: *“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you”* (2 Cor. 13:11). The fact that Paul’s **final exhortation** to them was for them to be of one mind and to live in peace stresses the importance of them so doing.

Likewise the Apostle Peter exhorted his readers to strive for harmony: *“Finally, be ye all of one mind,*

*having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous”* (1 Pet. 3:8)—one definition of courteous is “to be of friendly mind”.

Thus the exhortations to the churches reflects Psalm 133:1 *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”*

### Unity of the spirit

In all of the exhortations quoted above it is the unity of the spirit that is emphasised, not unity of doctrine or understanding, nor unity of procedure (for example, how meetings were to be conducted)—the unity was to come from “within” and not be imposed by some “external” dictate.

It was important that objective be kept clearly in mind because others wished to **impose** unity: *“... The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them... But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve”* (Luke 22: 25 and 26). The spirit of domination is incompatible with the spirit of unity that is to be developed by the Lord’s people. One

### In This Issue

Forsake Not Assembling Together	1
Loving God	4
Little Things	7
Framing the Worlds	9
Israel and Jerusalem	10
Appointed To Die	11
If There Be Any Praise	12

example of the effect of domination is recorded in 3 John: *"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church"* (3 John 9-10). There is no place for one to crave prominence amongst the Lord's people.

On the contrary, the spirit is to be one that esteems others: *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves"* (Phil. 2:3). The objective must always be the edification of each other: *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another"* (Rom. 14:19).

### Liberty

However the absence of domination necessitates liberty be extended to each other. One example of the extent to which brethren must exercise liberty in order to preserve the unity of the spirit is explained by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans: *"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. 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: for God hath received him"* (Rom. 14:1-3). At least two implications arise from those verses: the need for discretion regarding the subject matter to be addressed in any conversation, and the realization that some matters are not crucial.

The first matter—exercising discretion regarding the matters to be discussed—is difficult to practise, especially amongst Bible students who are desirous of establishing the truth in minute detail. Paul's direction is that brethren who are more learned in the truths of the Scriptures must be aware of the temptation to "air their knowledge" and to realise discussion of some matters might not be to the benefit of others present. However, on the other hand, one is exhorted to share the light they enjoy: *"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light"* (Luke 11:33). The parable implies people must learn which means they must be exposed to (confronted with) concepts which are new to them. Thus discretion is required, as prompted by the Holy Spirit, in discussion with others.

The second matter to be considered is which things are essential and which are not. The Apostle

continues: *"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Spirit)"* (Rom. 14:17). Paul states it is not necessary for everyone to understand every aspect of Christian living, even to the point of diet—diet was significant in Old Testament times (Lev. 11:1-12) and some might not have cast off the restrictions that applied under the Law Covenant. The objective must always be that *"no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in another's way"* (Rom. 14:13) but to develop a spirit which edifies the other.

The matter of diet might not be an issue amongst brethren who are raised in the same cultural environment. However the challenge extends beyond diet: *"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; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it..."* (Rom 14:5-6). Therein lies a challenge!—is one able to accommodate the conviction of another that Christians must worship the Lord on a specific day of the week?—Paul's instruction is to do so!

In order for the Christian to be aware of and comply with these exhortations it is necessary to keep in mind that it is God who has called and received each one, and therefore the Christian must be careful to **"destroy not the work of God..."** (Rom. 14:18-20). The Apostle Paul always had the welfare of others at heart: *"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not"* (1 Cor. 10:23).

It is a sobering thought that one must not destroy the work of God—indeed it is God and God alone who gives to everyone what they possess, and it is God alone who gives any increase in spiritual understanding, so that if one feels they have greater knowledge than another, it is by God's grace and not by their own works: *"... as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But **God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit...** for what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; **that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God...** But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Cor. 2:9-14).

Indeed it is as the Apostle also wrote: *"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, **even as the Lord gave to every man? I have***

*planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but **God that giveth the increase***” (1 Cor. 3:5-7). One does well to remember these words.

### Limits

The foregoing might be interpreted to mean the Christian should seek to live peaceably at any price, as Romans 12:18 exhorts: *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men”*. However the exhortation is not peace at any price, but *“as much as lieth in you”*, which implies there are limits to which the Christian may extend liberty in order to maintain fellowship.

In his letter to the Corinthians the Apostle was forthright: *“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for **ye are the temple of the living God**; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore **come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing**; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty”* (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

The above instruction may be applied to secular matters, but the principle extends to spiritual fellowship: *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us”* (2 Thess. 3:6). The strength of the word “command” should be recognised—it is not an exaggeration—and hence the commandment relates to those who profess to be a brother—a fellow-servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in this context that greatest wisdom and discretion is required—one must ask themselves the question “from whom do I withdraw amongst those professing to be followers of my Master?” Yes, indeed, the question must always be “is the meeting together edifying, both to those who present and those who receive?”

### As a canker

The dangers of associating with others who do not embrace the truths as they should is explained by Paul in his advice to Timothy: *“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. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;*

*Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some”* (2 Tim. 2:15-18).

Continuing association with those who engage in worthless babblings is destructive, **to the extent of overthrowing one’s faith in the resurrection**, which is the fundamental basis of the gospel: *“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:10-11). The hope of salvation is the key element of the gospel message, and Paul’s advice to Timothy is that continued association with those who engage in babble has the potential to overthrow even that hope. The overthrow will not be immediate but like a canker (cancer), that is, a little today, a little more tomorrow and so on until the whole body is overthrown.

### The ecumenical movement

One of the greatest manifestations of the effect of tolerating all things at any cost is the outcome of the efforts to unite all the Christian churches.

Beginning in September 1992, a number of Evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians held consultations over a period of some two years with the aim of reaching agreement for “Evangelicals and Catholics to be Christians together in a way that helps prepare the world for the coming of Him to whom belongs the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever”. One temptation that confronts those who strive to preserve fellowship is compromising the gospel, with the result largely becoming *“clouds without water”* (Jude 12). In itself the philosophy of ecumenism is directly contrary to Paul’s instruction to Timothy: *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”* (2 Tim. 4:2).

### “Ourselves”

Perhaps the challenge of the exhortation to the Hebrews can be summarised by noting the exhortation was for them to not forsake the assembling of **themselves** together.

The question arises: who may be regarded as “ourselves”? One danger is to apply the conditions too liberally and compromise the truth, and on the other to apply the definition too narrowly and not give due consideration to the variety of the members of the 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... **But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him...**”* (1 Cor. 12:12-20). To God be the glory, great things He hath done!■

# LOVING GOD

*“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18)*

The definitions of “fear” in both The Concise Oxford Dictionary and The Macquarie Dictionary include the concept of “painful emotion caused by impending danger or evil”, and so those definitions reflect the statement in 1 John 4:18 that “... fear hath torment...”—that is, emotional pain.

There are many causes of fear amongst human beings: fear of financial collapse, fear of starvation, fear of physical violence, fear of war. Jesus foretold that fear would assault the world of mankind in the end times: *“But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven... For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled... 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” (Luke 21:9-26).*

The Apostle Peter confirmed the shaking of the powers. He wrote: *“The day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:9-10).*

## Fearing God

Consistent with the fearful scenarios described above, there are several verses in the Scriptures which may give rise to a fear of God based on His characteristics: *“God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked... the mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him” (Nahum 1:2-6).*

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah also may be interpreted as a demonstration of God's vengeful

character: *“Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground” (Gen. 19:24-25).*

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah occurred in Old Testament times because of their wickedness. However the fact that it has passed does not necessarily relieve anxiety about the present heavens and earth—as Peter wrote they also will be “destroyed”. Such a fate is consistent with God's actions foretold in the Old Testament because, as the Apostle John declared: *“...the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19).*

## Love God

In view of the Scriptures quoted above it might be difficult to love God with all one's heart as required by the first commandment: *“And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment” (Mark 12:28-30).*

However such fear is overcome and is replaced by a love for God when the full message of the apostles and prophets is taken into account. For example, verse 13 in 2 Peter 3 was deliberately omitted from the quotation above. It reads: *“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”*. That verse should allay all fear of the ultimate future because the promise is the establishment of a righteous heavens and earth. These verses illustrate that a completely incorrect understanding might result if only part of any prophecy is considered—in every case it is necessary to consider the whole prophecy, as well as taking the context into account, that is, to whom it was written, when it was written, to what time does it apply and what is its intent.

## Hope for the world

Applying the principle of the “time to which a prophecy relates” reveals that the time for the righteous heavens and earth to be established is not yet, and the desire for such a righteous environment to

be established might lead to the idea that it is the Christian's role to evangelise the world and thus bring them into existence now. However such a viewpoint is contrary to the admonition in Zephaniah 3:8-9: *"Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent"*. Thus it is manifest that the time when the prophecy in 2 Peter 3:13 will be fulfilled is in God's due time—*"when He turns to the people a pure language"*—but that time is not yet, and the proper course of action for the Christian at the present time is to wait on the Lord.

### Knowledge

Hence fear regarding the future of the world is overcome by knowing God has a plan and that time is a critical element of that plan. It is in that vein that Paul wrote to the Philippians: *"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ"* (Phil. 1:9-10). The Apostle prayed that their love for God would increase, while realizing a complementary element of their increase in love for God was an increase in their knowledge of Him.

The Apostle Peter also wrote that an increase in grace (defined in some Concordances as "the divine influence upon the heart") is related to growth in knowledge: *"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..."* (2 Pet. 3:18). Thus, as knowledge of God's plan increases so also does one's appreciation of God's attributes which in turn leads to greater (perfect) love.

### Surety of promises

However having a knowledge of God's plan does not in itself ensure a love for Him: a conviction that He is able and that He will carry out that plan and establish a righteous heaven and earth is necessary.

Regarding God's ability to carry out His plan, it is necessary to realise He is the omnipotent (all powerful) One, as recorded in Revelation (quoting in part): *"And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication... And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants,*

*and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth"* (Rev. 19:1-6). Certainly God has the power to establish His righteous kingdom, but it is not yet time for Him to do so.

Regarding God's faithfulness to carry out His promise Moses wrote: *"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"* (Num. 23:19). There are times when Men do not fulfil all they promised, however that is not the case with God—He is not as Man in that regard.

Isaiah also affirms that God will fulfil His promise: *"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure"* (Isa. 46:9-10). The prophet Isaiah was confident God will carry out all He has promised.

In the New Testament James 1:16-17 reads: *"Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"*.

Thus the world may be assured God will carry out His plan, including the establishment of a world *"wherein dwelleth righteousness"*, and conviction that He will do so leads to one's love for God being complete.

### A more sure word of prophecy

The fact that some prophecies in the Bible have already been fulfilled is a further assurance that God will fulfil His promises.

One event which testifies to God honouring His promise was the coming of Jesus and the events which attended His life. The Apostle Peter summarises the importance of that event thus: *"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy... 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 Ghost (pneuma = Spirit)” (2 Pet. 1:16-21).*

### **The regathering of the Jews**

The Apostle Paul explains that the regathering of the Jews and the establishment of the nation of Israel—a process which started in the twentieth century—is the fulfilment of prophecy: *“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. 11:25-29).*

Belief that the regathering of the Jews is a fulfilment of prophecy might be a challenge to some because of Jesus’ words: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Luke 13:34-35).* However the full import of Jesus’ words must be addressed—at some time they will say *“Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”*, which implies their eyes will be opened—in God’s due time.

### **Israel is God’s witness**

Israel is a witness of God’s power and authority: *“Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God.” (Isa. 43:10-12).*

The fact that Israel as a nation did not recognise Jesus as their Messiah should not detract from faith that God will fulfil His promises because their unbelief (failure) was God’s deliberate action: *“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 their blindness was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah which in itself testifies to God fulfilling His prophecies.

Further, God’s deliberate blinding of the eyes of Israel was part of His plan to graft some Gentiles into the *“Israel of God”* (Gal. 6:16): *“I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy” (Rom. 11:11).* Until the Jews rejected Jesus the Gentile nations were aliens and **without hope in the word**: *“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, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:11-12).*

When He blinded Israel to the identify of Jesus God accomplished another part of His plan: *“Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world... But we speak **the wisdom of God in a mystery**, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which **none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**... But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:6-10).*

Thus the knowledge of the blindness of Israel to the identity of Jesus—which “led” to them crucifying Him—and the regathering of the Jews to the promised land, should strengthen every Christian’s faith that God is all powerful, that He has the power to fulfil His promises and that He does not default on His word. Such a conviction should allay any fears of God’s character and dispel any concerns about the outcome of the times of perplexity in the world.

A knowledge of these aspects of God’s plan should enable the Christian’s love for God to be “perfect” (that is, complete). Love that has knowledge as its basis will stand the test of time and circumstance and is a manifestation of the truth expressed in 2 Peter 1:5-7: *“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity”* (“charity” is the same Greek word as “love” in 1 John 4:18). It is the love of God that the Apostle John specifically addresses in 1 John 4:16-18; and love for God is necessary to enable the Christian to love for his fellow man and so fulfil the command to *“love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44).*■

# LITTLE THINGS

*“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much. Conversely, he that is unjust in the least is also unjust in much” (Luke 16:10).*

**I**t is the little things that often present the greatest test of a Christian’s loyalty and faithfulness to their consecration, and it is faithfulness in the little things that will ultimately govern one’s reward: *“Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:23).*

Jesus assured His disciples that the Lord’s interest in them includes the little things of their sojourn: *“Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-7).* The essence of the statement is that God takes great notice of little things, even sparrows, and He takes even greater interest in the little things of His chosen ones—the hairs of their head are numbered.

## Care for His little ones

The Christian must also care for God’s little ones: *“And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Matt. 10:42).* Consistent with the benevolent action of giving a cup of cold water to one of the Lord’s people comes the obligation to care for them in all ways, to the extent of not hindering their walk by causing them to stumble: *“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak” (Rom. 14:21).*

Further, the Christian’s attitude of caring is to include all, not just those of “the household”, because no one knows what the Lord has in store for those whom He has not yet called: *“Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him” (Prov. 24:17-18).* The Lord might yet enlighten the minds of one who is not yet privileged to see the hidden wonders of God’s plan.

## Significant events

In a stable environment, that is, one where food and raiment are regular and there is little or no social unrest, the tendency might be to measure one’s life by significant events, with the consequence of overlooking the little things, even though it is the little things—the things that comprise the ‘hum drum’

of life—that occupy the greater proportion of one’s time. In the context of one’s overall life time, significant events (highlights) may well occupy a very small proportion of one’s total life time.

It should also be realised that a significant event might be the outcome of many little events, and while the temptation is to focus on the outcome, the contribution of the little events that led to that result are easily overlooked. Such a temptation applies in both a favourable and unfavourable (destructive) sense. One example of little things contributing to a negative outcome is recorded in the Song of Solomon 2:15: *“Take us the foxes, the little foxes that spoil the vines for our vines have tender grapes”.* Little foxes might be attractive but when they are fully grown they are destructive and kill other animals. The moral of the story is that little things that are attractive and cute when they are small, have the potential to be destructive later.

In the quotation from the Song of Solomon the little foxes correspond to the little failings which beset the Christian. The temptation is to not take into account the long term effect of any “little action”, and just as admirers might be less inclined to consider the longer term effects of cultivating little foxes, so also the Christian might be less inclined to consider the long term effects of their little faults. Christians are to be aware of the long term effects of all their actions.

Another lesson to be learned from the little foxes is that the foxes attack the vines, and that is particularly destructive because the root and structure of the vine provides life to the fruitage, and any damage to the vine severely affects any tender grapes. Thus the Christian must always be aware of the disposition of others and so not destroy them with their meat. The damage caused by little imperfections of the flesh can be widespread. The danger must be recognised: the vine itself might not be damaged—it will survive—but the effect on the tender grapes should be the concern of the Christian at all times.

## Sleep

The destructive effect of the little foxes in the Christian’s make-up will grow if the Christian fails to be aware of them—in other words, if they take “time out”, or in physical terms, “take a nap”.

Proverbs 24:30-34 reads: *“I went by the field of the slothful and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And lo, it was all grown over with*



thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw and considered it well; I looked upon it and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth and thy want as an armed man". The lesson is that 'a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep' describes a sleepy disposition. The spirit of slumber is dangerous to the New Creature just as it is to the keeper of the vineyard because it allows the thorns and nettles to grow. On the contrary, the Christian is exhorted to always be on the alert: "Ye are all the children of the light and the children of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, **let us not sleep as do others**; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet the hope of salvation" (1 Thess. 5:5-8). It has been well said that there is no "off-duty" time for the Christian.

### Leaven

Another picture of the power and danger of little things is leaven: "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Cor. 5:6). Leaven is a very small component of the bakery, but it grows and permeates the whole lump. Thus the admonition is to purge out the leaven, not leaving even one trace.

Leaven is not restricted to moral issues but also to doctrine: "Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6-12). Purging out the leaven of doctrine is an on-going task, and is one that requires diligence and honesty with oneself—honesty to admit whether one is convinced what is truth.

While the task is on-going—a life-time work—and might be daunting, the reward will be great: "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" (2 Tim. 2:21). Do not shrink from the task.

### The tongue

The tongue is another "little thing" that has destructive power and must be brought under control. It is one of the smallest organs of the body that exerts influence on others (the eye is a smaller organ but its main function is to **gather** information for the body).

James 3:2-8 reads: "... If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell (gehenna). For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:2-8).

James compares the successes of mankind to control a ship via a comparatively small component (the rudder), to control horses via a small bit in the horse's mouth, and indeed to tame many wild animals, but mankind cannot completely control the tongue—it is easier to tame a wild beast, a horse and a ship than it is to tame the tongue.

Yet another lesson is the consequences of failure. A wild horse or an uncontrolled ship can cause great destruction, so a wild or uncontrolled tongue can be destructive to many.

Perhaps the most powerful illustration James gives is that of fire: fire can have the very smallest of beginnings—just a spark—and yet it can lead to the greatest conflagration. How many wars have been caused, and how many millions of lives have been lost, because of the failure to control the tongue? It is indeed an unruly member which no man can completely control and so it must be kept under constant surveillance.

A further consideration is that the danger presented by fire caused by the tongue exists not only in the world but also amongst the Lord's people, where the fire can lead to spiritual destruction. How blessed it is that the waters of truth can quench the fires of iniquity and love can overlook the little things.■



## FRAMING THE WORLDS

In the King James Version, Isaiah 42:5 reads: *“Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein”*. The Hebrew word translated “God” is “El” (Strong’s #410) which means “almighty”, and “Lord” (Strong’s #3068) is Jehovah—“the self-existent One”. From that verse alone it might be concluded that it was God Himself and He alone who created the world.

Such a conclusion may be drawn from Isaiah 45:18 also: *“For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; **God himself that formed the earth and made it**; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else”*.

However other verses indicate that it was not God alone who created the world but that “the Word” was involved. Three such passages are:

- John 1:1-14: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. **All things were made by him**; and without him was not anything made that was made...and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...”*;
- Hebrews 1:1-2: *“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, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, **by whom also he made the worlds**”*; and
- Hebrews 11:3: *“Through faith we understand that **the worlds were framed by the word of God**...”*.

Consequently the question arises: precisely what role did “the Word” play in creation?

### The worlds

The answer to the question depends upon the meaning ascribed to the Greek word translated “worlds” in Hebrews 1:2 and Hebrews 11:3.

There are five different Greek words from which the English word “world” is translated. However for the purpose of this article only two need be considered: “kosmos” and “aion”.

### Kosmos

Strong’s Concordance defines “kosmos” (#2889) as “orderly arrangement, that is, decoration; by implication the world (in a wide or narrow sense, including its inhabitants, literally or figuratively [morally])”. “Kosmos” is translated as either

“adorning” or “world”. That definition implies “kosmos” does not refer to the physical components of the earth but to the social arrangements that exist on it.

One verse which may be used to illustrate the definition is Matthew 5:14 which records Jesus telling His disciples that they were *“the light of the world”* (kosmos) (Matt. 5:14). The term “world” in that verse does not refer to the physical world because God made the sun and the moon to light the physical world: *“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to **give light upon the earth**: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also”* (Gen. 1:14-16). Jeremiah confirms the testimony of Genesis: *“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...”* (Jer. 31:35).

### Aion

Strong’s Concordance defines “aion” (#165) as *“properly an age; by extension perpetuity (also past); by implication the world; specifically (Jewish) a Messianic period (present or future)”*.

Young’s Concordance defines “aion” as “age; dispensation”.

The Companion Bible (Appendix 129.2) defines aion as: *“an age, or age-time, the duration of which is indefinite, and may be limited or extended as the context of each occurrence may demand”*.

W. E. Vine’s “Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words” defines “aion” as *“an age... a period of indefinite duration, or time viewed in relation to what takes place in the period”*.

In the King James Version, “aion” is translated “ages” in the following two verses only:

- Ephesians 2:7: *“That in the **ages** to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”*; and
- Colossians 1:26: *“Even the mystery which hath been hid from **ages** and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints”*.

The contexts of both Ephesians 2:7 and Colossians 1:26 support the definitions of “aion” (a period of time—an “age”—and not the physical components of

the heavens and earth) which alters the thrust of Hebrews 1:2 and 11:3.

### Hebrews 1:2 and 11:3

Ascribing the definition to the Greek “aion” means Hebrews 1:2—“*by whom also he made the worlds (aions)*”—shows that Jesus, God’s Son, did not only create the world but was party to the formulation of God’s plan of the ages. Such an interpretation is in harmony with Hebrews 11:3—that “*the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear*”.

In relation to Hebrews 11:3 the margin of the Companion Bible has the comment: “The reference is not to creation, but to the ordering by God of the dispensations, each of which succeeded but did not spring from its predecessor...”

### Framed

The meaning of the Greek (Strong’s #2675) from

which “framed” is translated is “to *complete thoroughly*, that is, *repair* (literally or figuratively) or *adjust*”, and is variously translated “fit, frame, mend, perfect, prepare, restore”.

Thus may be seen the complete and critical involvement of Jesus as “the Word”, God’s Son, in the history and destiny of the world of mankind. He was not only involved in the creation of the physical earth but also in the planning of the time periods which have and will transpire upon it.

Additionally He is the one upon whom the repair (or restitution) of the world depends: “*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... If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*” (1 Cor. 15:13-20). Let us praise Him who framed the ages!■

## ISRAEL AND JERUSALEM

It is difficult to define precisely when the preliminary processes for the fulfillment of Ezekiel 36:24 began: “*For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land*”. However the physical fulfillment has been visible since 1948 A.D.

Israel’s history might indicate that God has cast them off, however the Apostle Paul declared: “*I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid... God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew...*” (Rom. 11:1-2). Jeremiah also testifies to the surety of God’s promises to Israel: “*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... The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever*” (Jer. 31:35-36). It is not until the sun is no more that any of God’s promises to Israel will fail.

However the re-gathering of Israel is one thing, but occupying the city of Jerusalem is another, and it was not until 1967 that the Jews regained Jerusalem. Jeremiah explains the future significance of Jerusalem: “*At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it...*” (Jer. 3:17).

While it is **not** the policy of the Berean Bible Institute Inc. to attempt to influence the governments of the world, but to abide the exhortation in Romans 13:1—

“*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*”, Christians are exhorted “to watch” and the following extract from a newsletter of the **Christian Friends Of Israel Communities** (CFOIC — [www.cfoic.com](http://www.cfoic.com)) gives some insight into the present attitude of some in Israel:

### Sign the Jerusalem Covenant!

*There is nothing as meaningful as celebrating Jerusalem Day in Israel. The miraculous return of the Holy City to the Jewish people – as promised in our Bible – is as exciting today as it was in 1967. Yet, there are many today throughout the world who deny the Jewish claim to our capital city. Just last week, the Church of Scotland added their voice to the Palestinian argument and announced that the Jews have no claim to the Land and called for Israel to end its occupation of East Jerusalem!*

*We was (sic) asked by a very important group, the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus, to gather 10,000 signatures from friends and allies across the world to sign the ‘Jerusalem Covenant’ which affirms Jerusalem as the undivided capital of the Jewish people. As soon as we reach our goal, I will present those signatures to the Knesset in what will surely be a historic occasion.*

*With blessings of Jerusalem,  
Sondra Oster Baras and Kimberly Troup.*

(Sondra Baras is the Director of the Israel Office of CFOIC and Kimberly Troup is the Director of the USA office of CFOIC.)■

## APPOINTED TO DIE

*“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...” (Hebrews 9:27-28)*

One’s understanding of Hebrews 9:27 depends upon what one believes is meant by “men”.

The book of Hebrews is largely devoted to explaining the symbolisms woven into the arrangements of the Law Covenant, and how they foreshadowed the arrangement that would prevail after Jesus’ death:

- “For the law having a **shadow** of good things to come...” (Heb. 10:1);
- “... consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus” (Heb. 3:1);
- “a minister of... the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man” (Heb. 8:2);
- “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...” (Heb. 9:23-24).

Such extensive symbolism gives rise to the possibility that the term “men” is also symbolic. However it is the only word in Hebrews 9:27-28 which may be given a symbolic meaning:

- “Appointed” is an accurate translation of the Greek “*apokeimai*”—it does not mean a specific date and time, but rather “reserved or laid aside”;
- “die” is also an accurate translation of the Greek.

While simplistically “men” (Greek: “*anthropos*”) means a human being—“man faced”—it cannot refer to the high priests of the physical tabernacle because the high priests did not die while they awaited judgment each time they “entered into the holy places made with hands” (Heb. 9:24), even though that potential always existed, and was annulled only by them entering with the specified sacrifices (Lev. 16:2-6). In other words, Aaron was not “**appointed to die**” (death was not a certainty) just because he had performed his duties as high priest.

### World of mankind

On the other hand, death is “laid up” for every human being due to the condemnation they have inherited from Adam—“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die...” (1 Cor. 15:21-22)—Jacob (Gen. 47:29) and Moses (Deut. 31:34) to wit. Thus does “men” refer to the world of mankind?

Applying “men” to the world of mankind gains some justification from the meaning of “judgment”. It is translated from the Greek “*krisis*” which is equivalent

to the English word “crisis” and is the same Greek word from which “damnation” is translated in John 5:28-29: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (“judgment” in the Revised Version). A “crisis” time awaits every human being who has “done evil” in this present life in that, after they are resurrected, they will face a time which will determine their eternal fate.

### Animal sacrifices

A third possibility is that “men” is symbolic of the animals that were killed to provide the sacrifices offered by the high priests: such animals were “appointed unto death”. The symbolism can be extended to mean the animals represented the high priests; however the only high priest who is elsewhere represented by an animal is Jesus Christ: “And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36); and “But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19).

Yet another possible meaning of Hebrews 9:27-28 arises from a consideration of the word “so”: “**so** Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many...”

The word “so” means “in this way” (Strong’s #3779), and consequently there are at least six aspects of Jesus’ sacrifice that align Him with the experiences of mankind as summarized in Hebrews 9:

- **He** was “once offered” (verse 26);
- **He** was appointed unto death: “Even as the Son of man came...to give his life...” (Matt. 20:28);
- **He** died as a human being: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same...” (Heb. 2:14);
- It was “the **man** Christ Jesus (who) gave Himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:6);
- It is after **His** death that **He** will “appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (verse 28), in “the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21);
- That time will be a **time of judgment** for mankind—a “time of crisis” (verse 27)—because at that time “every one shall die for his own iniquity” and not because “the fathers have eaten the sour grape” (Jer. 31:29-30).

Truly “Christ is not entered into the **holy places made with hands...** but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:23-24).■

# IF THERE BE ANY PRAISE

*"Finally, brethren... if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8)*

**T**he identification of praiseworthy things requires judgment because there are many things in the world that are not praiseworthy, indeed *"the whole world lieth in wickedness"* (1 John 5:19).

## Words

Words are the principal medium, either written or verbal, by which concepts are conveyed from one human mind to another. (Another medium is works of art, however while works of art can be powerful, they are not as prevalent in spiritual circles as words.)

While words of truth generally are pleasant, and meditation upon them might edify, not all words that are pleasant to the ears are praiseworthy, and the Christian must be aware that words may also be used to deceive: *"For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh..."* (2 Pet. 2:18). Words of vanity may be phrased to convey praise to the recipient, while their true objective is to deceive.

## Love of praise

The praise upon which the Apostle exhorted the Philippians to think did not include praise of themselves. Praise of oneself presents a challenge to the Christian because praise tends to boost pride, which in turn is not conducive to the Christian's walk: *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"* (1 John 2:16). Thus wisdom is required when pondering praiseworthy words—the Apostle did not exhort the Philippians to think on words which praised them.

Indeed the love of praise can be even more powerful, as exemplified by the chief rulers: *"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God"* (John 12:42-43). It was not praise but the love of praise that caused some of the chief rulers to stumble (just as it is not money but the love of money that is the root of all evil —1 Tim. 6:10). Let the Christian beware.

## A warning

Additionally, the receipt of praise from one's fellow man could be a warning to Christians: *"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets"* (Luke 6:26). Praise from the world should be a warning to the

Christian that they might be coming too aligned with the world—the Christian is to expect to be despised and not praised in this present life: *"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise... and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are"* (1 Cor. 1:27-28).

## Diligent service

Nevertheless every Christian should perform their temporal duties in a way that is worthy of praise: *"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... do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good..."* (Rom. 13:1-4). While the Christian is to perform their duties honourably, and such diligence might attract praise, their objective is not to receive praise from men but that their compliance will bring praise to God: *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen"* (1 Pet. 4:11).

## Fruits

It is the development of the fruits of the Spirit that **brings greatest praise to God**, *"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more... Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God"* (Phil. 1:9-11). It is to God that the works of the Christian should accrue praise, and the Christian is to meditate upon such things: meditation on the fruits of the Spirit will always be beneficial to the Christian and it was upon such virtues that the Apostle exhorted the Philippians to meditate.

It is upon things that will bring praise to God, and not to self, that the Christian is exhorted to meditate—the Christian's praise comes later (1 Pet. 1:7).■

## PEOPLES PAPER AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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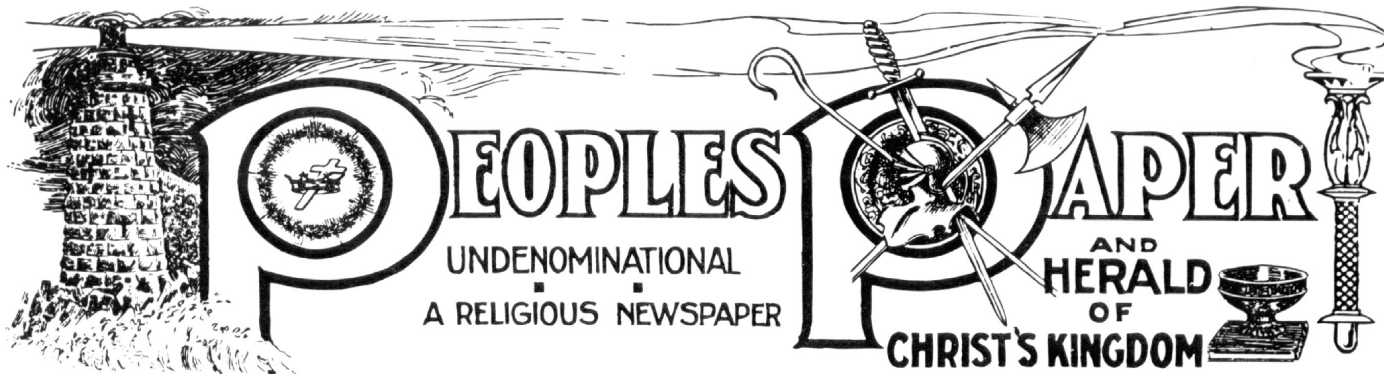
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## THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

**T**he Holy Spirit of God is the greatest treasure that any human being can possess in this present life. It is so because the Holy Spirit gives the greatest peace of mind available, which peace is referred to in the Scriptures as *“the peace which passeth all understanding”* (Phil. 4:7). The peace which it affords stems from the knowledge it affords—in summary, a knowledge that God is over all, even in the present times when there is so much turmoil and unrest both among the nations and within the nations; the knowledge that God is continuing to work out His plan which will ultimately yield the optimum benefit for all mankind. It is only when such an understanding is obtained that the earlier words of Paul can be practised without qualification: *“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God”* (Phil. 4:6).

Another reason why the Holy Spirit is so precious is that it cannot be bought with money: *“Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world... But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery... Which none of the princes of this world knew... But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God... Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God... But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Cor. 2:6-14). Paul’s words imply that the Holy Spirit cannot be passed down from parent to child—it is God’s province alone to choose those to whom He gives it: *“And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven”* (Matt. 16:17).

### Consequence

As mentioned by Paul, one of the effects of the Holy Spirit is to stimulate those who have received it to search out the deep things of God, maybe to the

extent that they overlook the simple components of the Gospel. There cannot be any question that Christians must continually increase their knowledge of God’s plan as Peter exhorts—*“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (2 Pet. 3:18)—but that must be balanced with the benefit that derives from reviewing what they already know: *“Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance”* (2 Pet. 1:13). And so it is at this season of the year that there is benefit in reviewing the meaning of the Gospel.

### Nature of death

One critical pre-requisite to understanding the Gospel is to understand the nature of death. Death has overtaken every human being who has ever lived, and any hope for them in the future depends on them being asleep in the grave. Any concept of them having gone to heaven eliminates any need for a resurrection, which was a fundamental teaching of Jesus and His apostles: *“The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother... Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be...? Jesus answered and said unto them,*

### In This Issue

The Gospel of the Kingdom	1
If Ye Love Me	3
Who ‘Owns’ the Land of Israel?	5
The Valley of Jehoshaphat	8
For the Elect’s Sake	10
Sound Doctrine	11
Think On These Things	12

*Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage...*” (Matt. 22:23-30). Jesus’ reply implies the resurrection will be a reality. Further, it must be realized the resurrection is still future, as implied by Martha’s response to Jesus when Lazarus died, which response was not corrected by Jesus: *“Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day”* (John 11:24)—she stated the resurrection would be *“at the last day”*. Likewise Peter declared on the day of Pentecost: *“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day...for David is not ascended into the heavens...”* (Acts 2:29-34).

Any doctrine which promises anything less than a resurrection of all who have died fails to expound the Gospel—*“the good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people”* (Luke 2:10). As Jesus declared: *“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”* (Greek: *krisis*) (John 5:28-29). The true Gospel applies to all; anything less nullifies the purpose of Jesus’ death: *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time”* (1 Tim. 2:5-6). The testimony that Jesus’ sacrifice is the ransom for all will be the resurrection; that is, the purpose of His coming to earth: *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes”* (Hosea 13:14). Indeed Jesus declared that the purpose of Him coming to Earth was that the human race may have life: *“... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10)—anything less falls short of the Gospel.

### **Witness**

Another aspect of the Gospel which must be understood before the majesty of God’s plan is captured is that it is not yet time for the Gospel to be brought into effect for the world of mankind at large. At this stage the preaching of the Gospel is to be a witness to the world: *“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come”* (Matt. 24:14). As in the temporal world only a few witness any event so it is with the preaching of the Gospel.

However the full benefits proclaimed by the Gospel will be brought into effect in God’s due time, when

God creates a new heavens and earth as Peter declared: *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness... But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up... Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”* (2 Pet. 3:9-13).

Peter wrote that the establishment of the new heavens and new earth were *“according to his promise”*. His promise was made to Isaiah, many centuries prior: *“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed. And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD”* (Isa. 65:17-25). The blessings of that promise cannot be fully appreciated until one takes time to ponder every element. The conditions will be such that the former will not be remembered nor come into mind, no matter how prosperous anyone was in their previous life. There will not be any weeping in Jerusalem, a city which has been plagued with battles and destruction. People will reap the fruits of their labour—none will plant and their toil be pillaged by another; there will not be any antagonism amongst the brute creation—indeed none shall hurt nor destroy in any part of the kingdom.

That is the gospel—the good news of great joy which is yet to come to all people. These fundamental aspects of God’s kingdom must be understood before the full meaning of the Gospel can be grasped—without the fundamental aspects clearly in mind, the Gospel message loses its impact.■

## IF YE LOVE ME

**“If ye love me, keep my commandments”** (John 14:15). In those few words Jesus defined the test of the disciples’ love for Him.

The test was not new: obedience has always been the test of loyalty. God told Moses: *“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine”* (Exod. 19:5). God required Israel to obey.

Jesus also told His disciples: *“If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them”* (John 13:17). Jesus’ words imply there was much joy to be had from merely knowing who He was, but that joy faded into insignificance compared with the joy that would flow from obeying His words.

Not only has obedience been a requirement of God’s people in the past and is a requirement in the present time, but it will be a requirement in the future kingdom of God: *“Behold, the day of the LORD cometh... For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle... And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. 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. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles”* (Zech. 14:1-2; 16-19). The nations will be required to obey God’s command to go to Jerusalem to worship, and there will be penalties for any and all nations that do not go. Eventually *“it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people”* (Acts 3:23).

### Jesus’ obedience

Jesus practised what He preached. He came to earth to do His father’s will: *“Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith... Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God”* (Heb. 10:5-7). Shortly before His crucifixion He prayed to His father: *“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”* (John 17:4). He had obeyed His father’s command and consequently He could say He had finished that work. He was obedient.

### Rewards

Consequently Jesus looked forward to being united again with His father in heaven: *“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”* (John 17:5). Jesus was to be rewarded for His obedience.

Likewise all who obey His words can look forward to their reward: *“And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”* (Heb. 5:9). Eternal salvation might at first seem to be a lesser reward than the crown of righteousness to which Paul looked: *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing”* (2 Tim. 4:7-8). However the salvation of mankind from death is the principal reason Jesus left His heavenly home and came to earth—*“... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10)—and so salvation alone is a great gift from God. However the benefit is greater than merely giving mankind an “after life”—the salvation will not last for only a few years as does the current life, but it will extend indefinitely—it will be eternal life because there will not be anymore death: *“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”* (Rev. 21:3-4).

### Prerequisite

As mentioned above, Jesus implied that knowledge of God’s will is essential for the Christian, that is, one needs to know what the task is before one can endeavour to obey. This has always been the case—God required the kings of Israel to know precisely the law they were to administer: *“When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother”* (Deut. 17:14-15). God knew ahead of time that Israel would yearn for a king as the nations around them, and so He told them their king must be an Israelite, and not a stranger. Then follows a

detailed list of restrictions and instructions which the king must observe: *"It (the law he was to administer) shall be with him and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to reverence the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them"* (Deut. 17:19). The king was to read the law *"all the days of his life"*, so that he would *"do them"*; in other words he had to know precisely what he should do, and then comply.

Likewise the Christian today must continually read *"the law"* so they know precisely what is required of them. Jesus told His disciples: *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life..."* (John 5:39), which Paul explains: *"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"* (Eph. 5:15-17). In order for the Ephesians to walk circumspectly it was necessary for them to understand the will of the Lord, and the verses following in Ephesians 5 give some clear restrictions and instructions regarding their conduct. A knowledge of God's requirements is just as necessary today as it was for the kings of Israel.

### **Growth**

Knowing the will of the Lord is not something that can be achieved immediately, but is an ongoing process—one's knowledge is dependent on the Lord who *"gives the increase"* (1 Cor. 3:6).

### **Refreshment required**

Additionally Christians have the treasure of a knowledge of the Lord's will *"in earthen vessels"* (2 Cor. 4:7)—in other words, in porous vessels, through which the liquid content may seep over time—in contrast to vessels made of metal which were not porous (Joshua 6:19). Consequently it is necessary for Christians to continually refresh their knowledge of God's will as exhorted by Peter: *"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"* (2 Pet. 1:12).

### **Obstacles to overcome**

Notwithstanding the desire of the Christian to love God and His Son, and endeavour to do so by continually refreshing their mind regarding His will, there are influences which obstruct their endeavours, and their love for Him is proven by them overcoming those obstacles.

One such obstacle is the obligation of the Christian to *"provide things honest in the sight of all men"* (Rom. 12:17). That obligation must be given some priority, particularly in regard to their household: *"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his*

*house ("own" is not in the original text), he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"* (1 Tim. 5:8). Paul's instruction to Timothy is powerful because no Christian would wish to deny the faith, nor to be regarded as being worse than an infidel (an unbeliever). Consequently failure to fulfill one's secular responsibilities does not bring praise and honour to God; not now nor will it in the day of visitation: *"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). It is honest conversation in this present life that will bring glory to God in the future, not slothfulness and failure to meet one's responsibilities.

### **Fellowship**

Fulfilling one's temporal responsibilities reduces the time available for activities that directly express one's love for the Lord, and the time so spent attending to those responsibilities may be interpreted by some as indicating a lack of love for the Lord. Consequently judgment is required regarding how much attention should be given to temporal responsibilities, as Jesus warned His disciples: *"And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with... cares of this life"* (Luke 21:34).

One weapon which helps guard against the cares of this life consuming an inordinate amount of time and energy is fellowship with one's brethren: *"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). Regular fellowship with brethren aids the development and maintenance of the balance necessary to develop one's love for His Lord.

### **Sacrifice**

Finally one must be prepared to forego those earthly pleasures that do not promote the development of Christian character. In this regard Paul wrote: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (worship)"* (Rom. 12:1). The presentation of one's body as a sacrifice must extend to being prepared to lay down one's life for the Master: *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13), and there is no greater friend than the Lord Jesus Christ: *"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you"* (John 15:15).■



## WHO 'OWNS' THE LAND OF ISRAEL?

There are approximately 2570 direct references in the Bible to Israel. This compares with approximately 980 references to “Jesus”, some 550 of which are references to “Jesus Christ”. The term “Messiah” occurs only twice: in Daniel 9:25 and 26 and “Messias” twice (John 1:41 and 4:25). Israel is significant in God’s plan.

One testimony to Israel being a significant nation in God’s plan is its re-establishment in 1948 after so many years in oblivion.

The article below is an edited version of a summary prepared by Kimberly Troup, the Director of the USA Office of Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (www.cfoic.com). It is reproduced by permission of CFOIC. Kimberly has worked for many years in close collaboration with Jews in Israel. Her report is printed here because it gives a concise summary of the current situation regarding the land of Israel from both a Biblical and secular perspective.

\* \* \* \* \*

Recently, someone posted the following comment on our Facebook page: “They may be God’s chosen people, but that does not give them the right to deprive others of their land and their homes and their livelihoods”.

Psalms 24:1-2: “*The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers*”. In this verse King David states that the Earth—the entire world—belongs to the creator. When God created the world He built paradise and so it is His to give to whomever He chooses. In the Scriptures God has made it very clear who is the rightful recipient of the Land of Israel: “*When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the Children of Israel. But the Lord’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage*” (Deut. 32:8-9).

The Most High gave each nation their inheritance; He divided mankind, and fixed the borders. Moreover, he fixed the borders of the nations, based on what the Children of Israel would require! God’s borders are not set by governments or political parties. It is amazing that the borders of Israel cause so much angst for almost every nation on earth!

The situation in Israel today with regard to borders is beyond ludicrous! If someone remodels their kitchen, or adds a porch to their house in Judea or Samaria, it causes consternation from the White

House to the Kremlin, to parliaments across the world, and of course in The Hague.

National borders changed and entire countries were created between the two world wars and no one made a fuss. So why is Israel different? Could it be because there is a spiritual element involved?

Genesis 12:1-8 reads: “*Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, **To a land that I will show you.** I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of **Shechem, as far as the Oak of Moreh (Alon Moreh)**. And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “**To your descendants I will give this land.**” And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the mountain east of **Bethel**, and he pitched his tent with **Bethel on the west and Ai on the east**; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord”.*

This one Scripture has two very important themes:

1) God’s commandment to Abram, first “Go to the land that I will show you”, and secondly His initial promise, “To your descendants, I will give this land”.  
2) There are four very distinct city names mentioned, Shechem, Alon Moreh, Bethel and Ai. All four cities are found in the area that today the world calls the “West Bank”. This is the area that our friend on Facebook says doesn’t belong to the Jewish people; where Jews are “land-grabbing” and forcing Palestinians out of house and home.

Genesis 17:19-21 reads: “*Then God said: “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him. And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with*

*Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.”* God knew that in the twentieth century He would fulfill His promise to return the descendants of Abraham to the Land of Israel. He knew that the modern State of Israel would be established in 1948, and the Arab world would dispute Israel’s legitimacy.

God states very clearly to Abraham, your descendants, your heirs to the promise, those that I will establish My covenant with, will come through Isaac. Ishmael is your son, and he will also receive an inheritance, but My covenant people will be the sons of Abraham and Isaac.

What about the Palestinians? Don’t they have rights to own land and live in their ancestral homeland?

To answer this question, we have to go back in history. The people who are currently called “Palestinian” are not the same people who were called “Palestinian” a century ago. The area was called the Land of Israel or Judea (a place belonging to Jews) from Biblical times until 135 AD, when the Roman Emperor Hadrian changed the name of the province from Judea to Syria Palaestina, a brilliant PR stunt to sever the Jewish people’s connection to the region. This was done following the Jewish Bar Kokhba revolt against the Roman Empire. For most of the period between 135 AD and May 15, 1948, the area was referred to as Palestine or the Land of Israel. From the 2nd Century until the 19th Century, this area called “Palestine” was conquered, captured, sacked, pillaged, and burned by a multitude of empirical armies. But not one of these Empires sought to establish a state of their own in Palestine, nor did they establish their capital in Jerusalem or anywhere else in “Palestine”. The last Empire that controlled “Palestine” was the Ottoman Empire, which fell in 1919 following the First World War.

At the conclusion of that war, the victorious allies carved up the entire Middle East, granting independence to some and creating mandates in some of the other areas. Great Britain was awarded the Mandate for Palestine.

The language of the Balfour Declaration, promising the establishment of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine and close Jewish settlement throughout the area, was incorporated in the Mandate’s foundational document. While the Mandate applied to the entire area of Palestine, representing all of Israel and Jordan as we know these countries today, in 1923, the British violated the original mandate by separating 76% of the Mandatory territory to create Jordan, giving it to the Hashemite family from the Hejaz area of Arabia, which rules the country to this day.

Since the First Century there has always been a remnant of Jews who continued to live in their ancient homeland. For part of this time, they were few and scattered, the vast majority of Jews having been exiled and forced to leave the area by the Romans. And yet there remained a handful of Jews who stayed in the land.

When the British controlled Palestine, the Jews there referred to themselves as “Palestinian”. The Arabs did not recognize a separate national identity for those Arabs living in Palestine and they referred to themselves simply as Arabs, as did the Arabs of much of the Middle East. They saw themselves as part of the Greater Arab Nation that dominated most of the Middle East. Many Arabs immigrated to Palestine following the First Jewish Aliyah (coming home) that took place from 1882–1903. Jews came home to “Palestine” mostly from Russia and Eastern Europe because the pogroms and persecution were so intense that they had been driven from their homes and forced to flee.

Why did they choose to settle in the Ottoman Empire? Because for over 2,000 years, since their ancestors had been driven from Jerusalem and Judea by the Roman armies, the Jewish people have prayed three times a day, every day, to return to the Land promised to them by God. God answered that prayer and when the time was right the Jews started to come home. They came home to a land that was desolate, absolutely barren.

For centuries, bloodshed and fighting had swarmed over this small piece of land, decimating all natural resources and beauty. Yet, they did not give up hope. They were so happy to fulfill the dream of hundreds of generations to return to this land. They immediately began to tend the land. They planted crops, sanitized water, built homes, and drained swamps. What did they need to accomplish this incredible task? They needed willing hands and strong backs, and both Arabs and Jews sought these new jobs.

And thus began the Arab immigration to this area. There were jobs available, money to be made, life to be improved. So the Arabs followed the Jews into “Palestine” and began to work. They moved there from all the surrounding countries, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Arabia. They came because they could find work and feed their families.

On May 14, 1948 the British Mandate for Palestine ended, and the Jewish nation of Israel was born. Overnight, everyone Jewish who was “Palestinian” became “Israeli.” In time, many Arabs became “Israeli” as well.

The term “Palestinian” was not used again until 1964, when Yasser Arafat organized the PLO, the Palestine Liberation Organization. It is interesting to note that in 1964, Jordan controlled all of the area that is referred to as the “West Bank” or the “Israeli Occupied Territories”. The occupation that the PLO referred to then was Israel within the pre-67 borders, for the PLO from the beginning refused to accept the existence of Israel within any boundaries. It wasn’t until the miraculous Six-Day War in 1967 when Jordan attacked Israel from the Old City of Jerusalem and the hills of Judea and Samaria which it controlled, that Israel responded to those attacks and liberated the area.

God performed a miracle, and the heart of Biblical Israel was once again under Jewish control. For the first time in over 2,000 years the ruling power in Judea and Samaria was once again Jewish, their capital is Jerusalem, and Jews have continued to come home to their ancient homeland from the four corners of the earth.

Today there are people who call themselves “Palestinian” who have co-opted the ancestral homeland of another people, the Jews! Their heritage consists of hatred, bloodshed, murder, and terrorism as its core value. Generations of Palestinians have been raised hating the Jewish “occupiers”. They have been raised with a value system that exalts the murder of innocents and twists the truth into lies. Today the Palestinian people do not always have it easy. However, their hardships could be done away with if they laid down their weapons against Israel. If they stopped trying to kill and destroy at every opportunity, if they chose to live like neighbors should. There is more than enough land in Israel for everyone. As tiny as the Land of Israel is, there is room for all.

Jews value human life and dignity, freedom and democracy. They want their Arab/Palestinian “neighbors” to live a good life, to have jobs, and education. To raise their families, attend Mosque and celebrate their holy days. The Jew’s greatest desire is to live in peace with their Arab neighbors. Today, there are road-blocks, there are security checks, there are Israeli army patrols, and there is a security fence/wall. Sometimes these security issues cause difficulties for the Palestinians and sometimes for the Israelis as well. But they are all vitally necessary to prevent terrorist attacks.

And the people of Israel are living in a place where they are under attack from without and from within. Given the choice between suicide or an effective army, the Israelis will always choose to defend themselves—because they will always choose life.

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**Comment:** The year 2013 AD is 94 years after the Balfour Declaration in 1919, and peace is not yet established in Israel. Such a long delay might cause doubt whether there will ever be peace in Israel, and whether God’s promise in Psalm 85 will ever be fulfilled: “*LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob*”. “*I will hear what **God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people...***” (Psa. 85:1, 8).

However such a delay should not give rise to any doubt that God’s promises are sure and steadfast. The prophet Jeremiah gives some unequivocal assurances that God will fulfill all the promises He has made to His chosen 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; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people*” (Jer. 31:31-33). God under-writes His promise: “*Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD*” (Jer. 31:35-37). It will not be until the sun ceases to be the light that rules the day and the moon ceases to govern the night that God will fail to fulfill His promises to Israel. In 2013 the sun and the moon continue to govern night and day and so God’s promises are still certain.

In spite of the turmoil which still plagues the land God gave to Abraham, there will be peace in Israel as Amos also prophesied: “*And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God*” (Amos 9:14-15). “*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).■

# THE VALLEY OF JEHOSEPHAT

*“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land” (Joel 3:1-2)*

The prophet Joel declared that the Valley of Jehoshaphat will be where God will deal with the nations after He gathers Judah and Jerusalem. Later in his prophecy Joel explains that this incident will not be a case of God pleading with the nations in the same sense as pleading might be used in society today, but will be one in which He will judge them: *“Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about”* (Joel 3:12).

The valley of Jehoshaphat is situated between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives in Israel. It is approximately 3 kilometres (2 miles) wide which means it is too small to accommodate *“all nations”* and thus it is assumed Joel’s reference to the valley has a symbolic meaning, and in order to ascribe a reasoned meaning to the prophecy its history is briefly reviewed.

## Jehoshaphat in history

The name Jehoshaphat occurs 85 times in the Old Testament, and a simplistic interpretation of the records indicates it is likely there was more than one person who was known by that name:

- A son of Ahilud (2 Sam. 8:16; 20:24; 1 Kings 4:3; 1 Chron. 18:15);
- A priest in David’s time (1 Chron. 15:24);
- A son of Paruah (1 Kings 4:17);
- A son of Nimshi (2 Kings 9:2, 14);
- A son of Asa (1 Kings 15:24).

1 Kings 15 records a succession of the kings of Judah: Abijam was succeeded by Asa (verse 8) who was succeeded by Jehoshaphat (verse 24) and it is assumed that it is to that Jehoshaphat that Joel refers.

## Jehoshaphat’s first battle

There are two battles in which Jehoshaphat son of Asa led Judah.

One battle was fought at Ramoth-gilead. The record is in 1 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 18. In summary Jehoshaphat joined with Ahab king of Israel to regain Ramoth-gilead from Syria because Ahab believed it was rightly Israel’s land (1 Kings 22:3).

One significant aspect of the battle was that the battle was initiated by Ahab and finally agreed to by Jehoshaphat after God, by His spirit, told Micaiah

that Jehoshaphat and Ahab would be victorious, but Ahab would be killed.

Other than Jehoshaphat asking God for guidance and God revealing the outcome to Micaiah beforehand, there does not seem to be any feature of the battle that can be related to the battle to be fought in the valley of Jehoshaphat as prophesied by Joel.

## The battle against the Moabites and Ammonites

A second battle that Jehoshaphat waged was against the Moabites and Ammonites. The record is in 2 Kings 3 and 2 Chronicles 20:1-30.

It is suggested that there are some significant aspects of this battle that might be closely related to the battle that is symbolically to be fought in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Indeed it is possible that the details, being recorded, might be one of the many details referred to by Paul in 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”*. Some aspects of the battle fought against the Moabites may well be a reassurance to the Christian today that, as they look out on the world in such distress, and the seeming plight of the nation of Israel in particular, their confidence will be strengthened.

There are several Scriptures, other than the verses in Joel, that describe various elements of God’s final battle with the nations, and some of those verses will be referenced in this consideration.

## The timing

Regarding the timing of the future battle in the valley of Jehoshaphat, Joel 3:1 reads: *“For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem”*. Thus the battle will be after the Jews have been regathered to their own land.

Likewise the battle against the Moabites occurred after Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem after the battle with Syria: *“And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem”* (2 Chron. 19:1).

The record is that Jehoshaphat enjoyed peace in Jerusalem after he returned from the battle with Syria.

Likewise there will be peace in the land of Israel before God's final battle with the nations: *"After many days thou shalt be visited: 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"* (Ezek. 38:8); and *"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?"* (Ezek. 38:14).

Thus the battle against the Moabites recorded in 2 Chronicles 20 and the battle prophesied in Ezekiel 38 both occur after Israel has returned to their own land and are enjoying a time of peace and safety.

### The aggressor

The battle between the Moabites and Judah was initiated by Moab and Ammon, not by Judah (2 Chron. 20:1).

Likewise the battle between God and Gog will not be initiated by Israel: *"Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land"* (Ezek. 38:10-12). Gog will be the aggressor—"they will think an evil thought".

### The multitude

The congregation of Moab and Ammon was so large that Judah believed they could not defend themselves: *"Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazontamar, which is Engedi"* (2 Chron. 20:2); *"And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD, before the new court, And said, O LORD God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?"* (2 Chron. 20:5-6).

Likewise Israel's aggressor will be large: *"And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: 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"* (Ezek. 38:15-16).

Such a congregation is consistent with the description in Joel in that God will gather all nations: *"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 3:2). And later Joel describes them as: *"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision"* (Joel 3:14).

### The battle is not yours

Judah realized they would be defeated by the Moabites and Ammonites: *"O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee"* (2 Chron. 20:12); so God reassured them: *"Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation; And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's"* (2 Chron. 20:14-15).

Likewise the battle described in Joel 3 and Ezekiel 38 will not be Israel's but the Lord's: *"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... Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; So that the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the heaven, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at my presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground"* (Ezek. 38:18-20).

In that vein Joel wrote: *"The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy..."* (Joel 3:16-17).

And Zephaniah prophesied: *"Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations,*

*that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy” (Zeph. 3:8).*

Likewise Isaiah also prophesied the battle would be God’s: *“I have trodden the winepress **alone; and of the people there was none with me:** for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury...” (Isa. 63:3)—of the people there will be none with Him; the battle will be solely God’s.*

### **Disarray**

The last feature of the battle will be the internal disputes which God will cause to erupt amongst the oppressors, just as He did in the battle against the Moabites: *“And... the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another” (2 Chron. 20:22-23).*

And thus will it be in the final battle: *“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” (Ezek. 38:21).*

### **Outcome**

The outcome of the battle by Jehoshaphat was glorious: *“And the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries, when they had heard that the LORD fought against the enemies of Israel. So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet: for his God gave him rest round about” (2 Chron. 20:29-30).* God’s power was recognized by the nations and peace extended throughout the realm.

And it will be likewise after the final battle prophesied by Joel and Zephaniah: *“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the LORD, and shall water the valley of Shittim” (Joel 3:18).*

*“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent” (Zeph. 3:9).*

The effect of the final battle will be everlasting: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Isa. 2:2-4).*

And to John it was revealed: *“And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:3-4).* Certainly the Lord’s ways are above Man’s ways (Isa. 55:8-9).■

## **FOR THE ELECT’S SAKE**

**I**n the King James Version, Matthew 24:22 reads: *“And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened”.*

Different conclusions have been drawn from the phrase: *“for the elect’s sake”*. The differences arise from the meaning of two words: “for” and “elect”. One view is that the verse should read *“by the elect”*, and if the elect is assumed to be the Gospel Age church, it may be inferred that the church will be with the Lord in determining the duration of the last days. However there is a distinct Greek word that is translated “by” (*“dia”*: Strong’s #1223) and that word does not occur in this text. The question

reduces to who are the elect?

The title “elect” is applied to at least three entities:

- The nation of Israel: Isaiah 45:4;
- Jesus Christ: 1 Peter 2:6;
- Gospel Age church: Colossians 3:12.

If the nation of Israel is adopted, the shortening of the days could refer to the persecution suffered by the Jewish nation during World War 2—if those days had not been shortened it is conceivable, from a human standpoint, that the Jews would have been exterminated, as was Hitler’s declared objective. However the days were shortened and the nation of Israel exists today in their homeland.■

## SOUND DOCTRINE

The Apostle Paul charged Timothy with a huge task: *“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ... preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...”* (2 Tim. 4:1-3).

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul explained that there are at least two components of “doctrine”, doctrine being the teachings or instructions that are intended to have a modifying effect on the believer. The first is the technical, academic or theological component, being those teachings that explain the origin of Man and His destiny. It also includes the interpretation of prophecy. Paul advised Timothy not to be distracted by such intellectual arguments but to focus on the things that promote *“godly edifying”* (1 Tim. 1:4). He continued to say that *“the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience and faith unfeigned”* (verse 5).

Paul continues in verses 9 and 10 to explain that the teaching of how one must conduct oneself is also doctrine. Such teachings maybe referenced as “devotional doctrine” and comprise the other component of Christian doctrine.

### Sound doctrine

Sound doctrine is doctrine that is founded in truth, that is, teaching that is verified by fact. Consequently in determining sound doctrine the question must be asked, what is truth? That question has perplexed mankind for many centuries—the first instance when a decision had to be made regarding whether something was true, was in the Garden of Eden when Eve was confronted by Satan. Before that time the question had not arisen.

It might be difficult to appreciate the dilemma that faced Eve. She was perfect; she had no experience with anything other than the truth; she hadn’t heard anything that wasn’t absolutely true. All of a sudden she was confronted with directly opposing statements: on the one hand God said *“Ye shall surely die”* and on the other Satan said *“Ye shall not surely die”*. Having had no previous experience with anything other than truth it was a very difficult situation. However it must also be recognised that God orchestrated the situation in that He had already planned Man’s redeemer, and His plan was to subject Man to an experience with wrong doing because it would be to his ultimate benefit as Paul explained in his letter to the Romans: *“For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him*

*who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”* (Rom. 8:20-21).

Concordance study indicates the expression *“not willingly”* is an accurate translation of the Greek text, and it may be interpreted that Eve was coerced or forced into eating the fruit. However that is not the case—there is no Scripture which indicates Eve was forced in any way. The real issue was that God had given her an intellect just as He had given Satan, and the wiles of Satan deceived Eve: *“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression”* (1 Tim. 2:14). One is deceived when they believe something that is untrue; belief being conviction in one’s mind. In other words, Satan’s intellect was superior to Eve, and without having any experience with untruth, Eve was in a vulnerable situation, albeit in accordance with God’s plan.

### The Christian’s challenge

The challenge to the Christian today is the same as that which confronted Timothy: how was he to distinguish what was truth and what was error?

It is “easy” to say whatever one believes must be consistent with Scripture, but Timothy did not have the Scriptures as they are available today. However, on the other hand, the deceptions in the world today are more subtle than they were in Timothy’s time: *“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of... and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”* (2 Tim. 3:13-17).

Nevertheless to continue in the things learnt as a child would mean one’s knowledge would not grow, and indeed for many it would mean holding false ideas of hell fire and the end of the world. Hence Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians is relevant to the Christian in the twenty-first century, perhaps more so than at any previous time: *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thess 5:21-23).■

# THINK ON THESE THINGS

*"Finally, brethren... think on these things" (Philippians 4:8)*

**P**aul's final exhortation to the Philippians—"think on these things"—implies the items he listed were to be pondered and not given only fleeting attention. The root meaning of the Greek word "logizomai" (from which the English word "think" is translated) is to "take an inventory", and is elsewhere translated "conclude", "esteem", "number", "reason" and "reckon", all of which imply deliberation.

## Inventory

One of the purposes of an inventory is to provide a record which can be referenced at any time and so obviate the need for repeated "counting". Hence Paul's exhortation to the Philippians was for them to make a list which would provide them with a ready reference of those things which engender truth, honesty, just dealings, pure thoughts, love, praiseworthy actions, virtuous deeds and praise for God and their fellow man. In other words they were to note and remember those things that aid (and not hinder) their edification, and the edification of those around them.

## Prophecy

Another item which should be in the Christian's inventory is Bible prophecy. Meditation on the prophecies contained in the Bible stimulates a yearning for more truth, and in turn also increases a yearning for that righteous kingdom to be established. Peter urged his readers to keep the prophecies clearly in their minds as he wrote: *"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets..."* (2 Pet. 3:1-2), *"for we have not followed cunningly devised fables..."* (2 Pet. 1:16). Familiarity with the prophecies is a powerful aid in helping the Christian keep their mind focused on the things Paul lists in Philippians 4:8.

## Rewards

Paul had a clear vision of his objective: *"Brethren... this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:13-14). It was his constant deliberation on his reward and the race before him that enabled him to *"keep his body under"*: *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain... I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into*

*subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway"* (1 Cor. 9:24-27). The reward offered to the Christian should be one of the items in their inventory.

## Examples

Other items upon which the Christian should meditate are the examples set before them, both the supreme example of Jesus and the examples of Old Testament heroes and New Testament warriors.

Regarding Jesus' example Hebrews 3:1-2 reads: *"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house"*. Jesus was totally devoted to and fully occupied by the work His father had given Him to do, as indeed were many in times past, such as Moses. Keeping their examples in mind are other powerful agencies which will help the Christian to keep their minds on things which have the qualities listed by Paul in Philippians 4:8.

## Words to no profit

On the other hand there are many things which the Christian is exhorted to exclude from their inventory. One of them is striving about words of no profit, as Paul wrote to Timothy: *"Of these things put them in remembrance... that they strive not about words to no profit... but shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness"* (2 Tim. 2:14-16). Such an exhortation is particularly relevant in the twenty-first century because *"... the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith... For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness..."* (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:18). The Christian must guard against being drawn into debates about things of no consequence—a task made more difficult today because of the increase of knowledge!■

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