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MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERINGS

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:9-10).

A straight-forward reading of Hebrews 2:9-10 raises at least one question: why would Jesus, who elsewhere is described as “... *holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners...*” (Heb. 7:26), have to be made perfect through sufferings?

The legitimacy of the question is strengthened by the Revised Version, Revised Standard Version and New International Version all retaining the word “perfect”.

Meaning of the Greek

The answer lies in the meaning of the Greek word from which the English word “perfect” is translated. It is “*teleioo*” which is defined by several translators as “to complete”. Thus the thought behind Hebrews 2:10 is not that Jesus was imperfect and had to be corrected—made perfect—but that His sacrifice would not have been complete without the sufferings He endured.

Looking at it the other way round, Hebrews 4:14-16 explains the reason why His sufferings made Him “complete”: “*Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*”. His sacrifice not only redeems mankind from the death sentence inherited from Adam’s transgression in the Garden of Eden but the circumstances of His life on earth and His death provide the Christian with an exhortation to walk in the path God has set out before them, knowing that they are not being asked to endure any greater suffering or temptation than their Captain has already endured and withstood, and in that regard it is profitable to review His sufferings.

The wilderness experience

It is not possible to fully appreciate the temptations Jesus withstood because He is the only One who has come down from heaven. The significance of that aspect is that He was present when God created the heavens and the earth—indeed He was God’s agent through whom God created the universe: “*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*” (Heb. 1:1-2). Thus Jesus knew all about the majesty of the heavens and earth and the glory He had when He was with His father before He came to earth, and now He was a human being—a species He had created—and was being subject to temptation by one who was inferior to Himself.

While it is possible to argue His understanding of the order in the universe would have helped Him appreciate the vanity of the worldly treasures with which He was being confronted, and hence to withstand Satan’s temptation, nevertheless He was now in the flesh and experiencing all the forces and desires of the human mind.

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The first point to note to capture the power of the temptations He endured is that He was led into the wilderness. There He was alone and separate from any and all comfort that others could provide. That condition should also be a source of comfort to all Christians wherever they may be, whether they be in the physical proximity of others or whether they be isolated from all human beings. However it is recognized that such a statement is more easily said than done: it is not until one experiences isolation from all sources of human (fleshly) comfort that one can appreciate that the test is for them to stand alone and to deny the temptations of the Devil, regardless of the consequences.

Secondly, Jesus had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Again it is not possible for those who have not experienced severe hunger to fully appreciate how powerful one's desire for material food can be. And that was the first temptation the Devil put before Jesus: *"And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (Matt. 4:3-4). The temptation was much greater than what any human being can endure because He had the power to convert the stones into bread. However while the Christian does not have the power Jesus possessed, it is profitable to note that Jesus resisted the temptation by referring to the grand scale of the universe—*"Man shall not live by bread alone..."*. In the short term it was by bread alone that He could have been sustained, but His answer reflects the situation that Man's tenure on the earth is temporary and that His strength came from His vision of eternity. Likewise the Christian may resist many temptations to be filled with temporal pleasure which might satiate the soul in the immediate future, but it is to the eternal that the Christian must look to substantiate their faith.

Next the Devil tempted Jesus in a demeaning way: *"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone"* (Matt. 4:5-6). The Devil challenged Jesus' faith that He was indeed the Son of God. And just as Jesus was tempted with such a contemptuous test so also are His followers. Such ridicule is often levelled at the Christian when they suffer some misfortune or are disadvantaged: the scorn might be framed in the form of a cynical statement such as "God should not—indeed would not—let it happen to

you if you were what you claim to be". Consequently it is manifest that the Christian needs the full armour of God and that includes realizing that they are not promised a pathway lined with roses but indeed are to experience the hardships and heartbreaks experienced by mankind in general: *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matt. 26:41).

Finally the Devil tempted Jesus with the lure of temporal power: *"Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve"* (Matt. 4:8-10). There were two aspects to Satan's temptation: firstly that, as the ruler of the world, Jesus would be worshipped by the world, and secondly, the lure that Satan had the power to make Jesus the ruler of the world. Both temptations afflict the Christian.

One temptation is that of being worshipped, or "highly respected", by one's peers. The temptation is powerful and overtook some in Jesus' day: *"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."* (Matt. 6:5). Such a spirit is not necessarily always so evident but may also take the form of domination amongst the Lord's people, as it did amongst Jesus' disciples: *"And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. 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 22:24-26).

Summary

In summary, the Christian does not have to contend with any temptation the likes of which Jesus did not contend—maybe the circumstances will be different but the underlying challenge is the same. Thus it is profitable to remember the words of Paul: *"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), *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things that are seen but at the things that are not seen"* because they are eternal.■

SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE

“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect” (Hebrews 10:1)

Shadows are produced when an opaque object shields light, an opaque object being one that prevents light passing through it.

The concept of a shadow is also used in a symbolic sense, for example, when a child closely follows his father—“takes after his father”—it may be said that he is “walking in his father’s shadow”.

The phenomenon of a shadow is used in a symbolic sense in the Scriptures: *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”* (Psa. 23:4). Death does not physically shield light, however symbolically it dims the light of life and hence the Psalmist refers to it as a “shadow”.

Zacharias also referred to death as a shadow: *“To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death...”* (Luke 1:79).

Not the very image

Only some of the characteristics of an object can be derived from its shadow. For example, the shape of an object may be largely derived from its shadow, however the size of the object cannot be assuredly derived from its shadow because the size of the shadow varies with the direction from which the light is coming; the size of a person’s shadow near sunset is much larger than their shadow at noon when the sun is overhead. As Hebrews 10:1 declares, a shadow is *“not the very image”* of the object and hence it must not be assumed the shadow accurately portrays every characteristic of the object.

Thus the only way one can be assured of the meaning of a shadow given in the Old Testament is when it is explained in the New Testament by one of God’s inspired apostles. Further, the lesson to be learnt from any shadow is limited to the meaning explained by the apostles—any extension is speculation.

Some shadows in the Scriptures that God has used to reveal His plans and purposes for mankind are:

- Isaac’s life;
- The Passover;
- The Law Covenant;
- The tabernacle.

The birth of Isaac

The birth of Isaac foreshadowed some aspects of Jesus’ birth: *“Sarai, Abram’s wife, bare him no children”* (Gen. 18:1). However God promised

Abram that Sarai would bare him a son: *“But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year”* (Gen. 17:21). God kept His promise: *“And the LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac”* (Gen. 21:1-3).

The Apostle Paul explains there were two features of Isaac’s birth that were a shadow of Jesus’ birth.

The first is that only one son was promised: *“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ”* (Gal. 3:16). The promise to Abraham referred to only one son, and that aspect was a shadow of Jesus’ coming to earth—Jesus was God’s **only** Son: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son...”* (John 3:16).

The second aspect of Isaac’s birth that foreshadowed Jesus’ birth is the timing of his birth—both were born at precisely the time God had planned. Regarding Jesus’ birth Paul wrote: *“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son...”* (Gal. 4:4).

The Church

The Apostle Paul explains there is a third concept that may be inferred from Isaac’s life—not from his birth but from his ancestry: *“For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us... Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise”* (Gal. 4:22-28). Paul explains that Hagar was a shadow of the Law Covenant that God gave to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, and that Sarah was a shadow of another Covenant—*“Jerusalem which is above”*.

Since Isaac’s mother was Sarah, Isaac was not *“of Agar”*—not under the Law Covenant—and so Paul explains that the church is not under the Law Covenant either, because the church is not *“after the*

flesh” but by promise. It was difficult for some early Christians to accept that they were not under the Law Covenant: *“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth... Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”* (Gal. 3:1-2). Likewise, even in 2015, there are some Christian groups who believe they must obey the Law, particularly observe the Sabbath day.

The Passover

The Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt was an amazing event, but its significance is more amazing when it is realized it was a shadow of things to come.

The critical component of the Passover was the lamb—its blood on the door-posts and lintels saved the first-born who lived in that house from being slain by the angel of death. The Passover lamb shadowed—foreshadowed—the true Passover lamb whom Paul explains is Christ: *“Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even **Christ our passover** is sacrificed for us”* (1 Cor. 5:7).

Another aspect of the Passover being a shadow is that it was only the firstborn who were under threat of death, and that shadowed how, first of all, the blood of the true Passover lamb protects the firstborn of the world of mankind: *“To the general assembly and **church of the firstborn**, which are written in heaven...”* (Heb. 12:23).

The concept of the church being the firstborn is consistent with the fact that, in the first instance, the Passover applied only to the firstborn of the Israelites, however the final result of the angel passing over the houses where the blood was sprinkled led to the release of the whole nation of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Likewise the full benefit of Jesus’ sacrifice as the Passover lamb will eventually result in all mankind being freed from the prison house of death.

Leaven

Another feature of the Passover was that the lamb had to be eaten with unleavened bread: *“And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it”* (Exodus 12:8). Jesus explained that leaven was a shadow of impurity: *“... he began to say unto his disciples... Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy”* (Luke 12:1). Hence the absence of leaven was a shadow that the firstborn of the church would need to purge out the leaven of wickedness from their character: *“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let*

*us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the **unleavened bread of sincerity and truth**”* (1 Cor. 5:8).

The Law Covenant

The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt was followed by the giving of the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai: *“And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them”* (Exodus 24:12).

The Law was a shadow (Heb. 10:1), and is referred to by Paul as a schoolmaster to point the Israelites to Christ: *“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith”* (Gal 3:24). There are many aspects of the Law Covenant that foreshadowed God’s dealings with His church, but only the tabernacle will be discussed here.

The tabernacle

God instructed Moses to construct *“a sanctuary”*: *“And let them make me a sanctuary; **that I may dwell among them**. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it”* (Exodus 25:8-9). Thus one of the purposes of the tabernacle was to be the place where God would meet with the Israelites—to *“dwell among them”*.

The tabernacle was made of relatively light material that enabled the Israelites to take it with them as they sojourned. However as time passed God required the Israelites to build Him a more permanent structure: *“And it came to pass... That the king (David) said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains... And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying, Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.”* (2 Sam. 7:1-6). So David began to build the temple.

However it was not given to David but for his son Solomon to finish the temple: *“And the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying, Concerning this house which thou art in building... I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel. So Solomon built the house, and finished it”* (1 Kings 6:11-14); the temple superseded the tabernacle.

The temple was a shadow of the church, which in later times is where God dwells with His people: *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”* (1 Cor. 3:16).

The High Priest

The principal official in the earthly tabernacle (temple) was the high priest because he was the one who offered the Israelites' sacrifices to God: *"For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins"* (Heb. 5:1). However he was able to offer only animal sacrifices and was thus only a shadow of Jesus: *"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man"* (Heb. 8:1-2). The High Priests of the tabernacle (and later the temple) were shadows—foreshadows—of Jesus' offering of His sacrifice.

It must be noted that here is one example of the shadow not being *"the very image"*. The High Priest in the tabernacle offered sacrifices of animals, but Jesus sacrificed Himself: *"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"* (Heb. 9:13-14).

Another difference between the efficacy of the tabernacle arrangement the Israelites built and the true tabernacle that God is building is that the sacrifices in the original tabernacle had to be repeated each year, whereas Jesus' sacrifice has been offered only once, and is effective for ever: *"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this*

man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:10-12). Hence it is recorded: *"By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death... For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore"* (Heb. 7:22-28).

Summary

In spite of the great care and attention to detail required of the Israelites in building the tabernacle during their exodus from Egypt (Exodus chapters 26 to 28), the High Priest offering sacrifices in the original tabernacle was merely a shadow of, and inferior to, the real High Priest offering His sacrifice in the true tabernacle: *"But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building"* (Heb. 9:11).

There are many events recorded in the Old Testament that foreshadow later events in God's plan—they are some of *"the deep things of God"* (1 Cor. 2:10), and comprise some of *"the things written aforetime that were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope"* (Rom. 15:4). An understanding of how God has interwoven such details into His plan should strengthen the Christian's faith that the Scriptures are the word of God and contain the words of life. Indeed who has been the Lord's counsellor?■

GOD WHO AT SUNDRY TIMES AND IN DIVERS MANNERS SPAKE (Hebrews 1:1)

God has used a variety of methods and manners—at different times and in some cases at the same time—to reveal the Christian message.

The Old Testament corresponds closely to what would normally be expected in a sacred volume: there are legislative works (such as those of Moses), songs expressive of religious feelings (such as the Psalms), impassioned addresses (like those of the prophets), and histories (in a continuous series) that trace the fortunes of the chosen people. Overall this collection comprises what could be expected of the foundation vehicle of a religion.

By contrast the New Testament, which may be regarded as the foundation document of the Christian religion, is laid in a narrative. The first and greatest development of Christian theology is not in any formal treatise; not in liturgies and canon; not in works of devotion, but in a collection of letters.

The cause of this unique style of proclaiming the message of salvation is not difficult to understand. Christianity was the first great missionary religion to break the bonds of race and be extended to all races and cultures. This necessarily involved a change of mode in which it was presented. The prophet of the

Old Testament, if he had anything to communicate, appeared either in person or sent messengers to speak for him by word of mouth. One exception is the letter of Elijah to Jehoram: *"And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah, But hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and hast made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to go a whoring, like to the whoredoms of the house of Ahab, and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself: Behold, with a great plague will the LORD smite thy people, and thy children, and thy wives, and all thy goods: And thou shalt have great sickness by disease of thy bowels, until thy bowels fall out by reason of the sickness day by day"* (2 Chron. 21:12-15). This "writing" was a long letter and was a communication in a new form.

The narrow limits of the land of Palestine made direct personal communication feasible, although as an exception Jonah had to travel some distance to go to Nineveh: *"So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey"* (Jonah 3:3). Jonah travelling for three days did not mean he was the first to travel such distances: it took Laban seven days to overtake Jacob (Gen. 31:23), but his travel reflected the situation at that time and was a contrast to Elijah who wrote a letter.

The New Testament scene

However when the Christian Church started to develop it soon consisted of a number of scattered posts stretching from Mesopotamia in the East to Rome or even Spain in the far West. It was only natural that the Apostle, by whom the greater number of these communities had been founded, should seek to communicate with them by letter. He was enabled to do this by two factors: first the general diffusion of the Greek language, and secondly by the remarkable facilities of travel available at that time. The whole world was at peace, held together by the organised rule of Imperial Rome. Piracy had been put down and commerce flourished to an extraordinary degree. The inland districts were intersected by a series of military roads. The Mediterranean Sea provided a slow but reliable method of travel by ship. Some of the ships were of a considerable size, for example the ship that carried Paul from Myra to Malta carried 276 passengers plus some cargo (Acts 27: 18, 37).

It is also necessary to consider the manner in which the church was established and organised by Paul. In his missionary work he travelled with a small band of co-workers who, as the occasion arose, he despatched as delegates to the several churches he had founded.

Sometimes they were tasked with establishing procedures and protocols to bring order to a church, such as that entrusted to Timothy and Titus: *"To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee"* (Titus 1:4-5).

In these churches it is also likely that Paul adopted the organisation of the Jewish synagogue, for when Paul entered a city he first of all sought out a local Jewish assembly and used the opportunity it afforded to preach the word: *"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"* (Acts 17:1-2). Only when his ministry was rejected, as happened at Corinth, did he remove himself and with those who had accepted his message and set up a separate church.

Paul's instruction to Timothy and Titus to appoint elders is in line with the practice in the synagogue. The appointment of a bishop to be in charge of a city or a region was a later development when a central figure was required to represent them.

Travelling ministers

However there is evidence there were other touring teachers who were preaching another doctrine, as recorded in the letters of John: *"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house..."* (2 John 10); *"Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth. I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not"* (3 John 5-9).

Paul also mentioned in Galatians 2:12 that certain men had arrived at Antioch with the supposed authority of James to teach and spread the Word. There is reference in one of the earliest Christian writings that such teachers should limit the length of their stay at any one centre to two or three days. As visitors to Christian centres relied on the hospitality of local congregations and it was important that they not overstay their welcome. So there were a number of different workers employed to build up the spiritual life of the church. In Ephesian 4:13 the list

of workers is given as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Each of these workers had a different function but there was unity of purpose.

Unity and Diversity

Even with the same purpose of preaching the word of God their individuality was not suppressed. The New Testament writings were written by eight or nine different writers but they all proclaim the same message. Even when Paul is writing for different purposes such as personal letters, letters of thanks, letters in deep distress at failures in the church and formal statements of doctrine, there are no words that contradict the central theme of salvation.

As with the Old Testament, the books in the New Testament may be categorised:

- Synoptic gospels (a summary account), three of which list similar events;
- Narrative account (Act of Apostles), restrictive in its record of events;
- Letters, written primarily to give instruction or to correct unacceptable conduct;
- Letters of exhortation or encouragement which may have been designed to be circulated through the various churches;
- Writings of a formal nature or treatise setting out in a logical order an explanation or statement of what God has done or is doing for mankind and the response that is expected;
- Letters of a personal nature, written to friends;
- Letters written to instruct the apostolic delegates;
- Apocalyptic writing (Revelation) with images of vivid symbolism.

In all these categories there is a common purpose and there is harmony. If there are statements in the account of events that are difficult to reconcile, they are not such as would destroy the central message, which is in harmony with the statement about Old Testament writings—that “*Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the spirit of God*” (2 Pet. 1:21).

Characteristics of the writers

The harmony (consistency) of the message in the New Testament is made more remarkable by the differences in the language the writers used.

For example, the phrase “the Kingdom of God” is found in all four gospels but is more common in Mark (15 times) and Luke (32 times). The Apostle Paul used the phrase only five times: Romans once, 1 Corinthians four times, Galatians once, Colossians once and 2 Thessalonians once. However the phrase “kingdom of heaven” occurs only in Matthew’s gospel (31 times plus once where it has been supplied by the translators of the King James Version). English readers interpret the terms as being

synonymous, but maybe the meanings of the phrases are significant in that Matthew was writing for Jewish readers and so uses terms about events suitable for that audience, whereas Luke was writing for readers with a background in Greek (Gentiles).

John used the term “Eternal Life” a total of 12 times with a scattering amongst the other writers.

Message details

The individuality of the writer is also reflected in the details of the events they recorded. For example, the records of the incident when a woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment vary: Matthew does not record that the woman had spent all she had before she came to Jesus, whereas both Luke and Mark mention it specifically. Maybe Matthew’s dealings as a tax collector had hardened his attitude towards people’s financial status (?).

Luke, a medical physician, is the only one of the gospel writers who records the healing of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2).

Diversity in the body

Since the Christian message was given in such a diverse set of writings by people with different backgrounds and interests, the question may be asked how should that realisation affect the Christian’s attitude in 2015?

One may answer that God has provided every individual with what they required to fulfil their role in the body: “*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). And so Paul wrote: “*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith*” (Rom. 12:3). The church is “*God’s building*” (1 Cor. 3:9); He has placed the members in the body and He gives the increase as He deems necessary to finish His work. Thus it was appropriate for the Apostle Paul to write “*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). The harmony of the Word testifies that “*God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him*” (1 Cor. 12:18)?■

DIVERSITY—UNITY—PURITY

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

Diversity

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

Along with the colour of a person's skin, allowance is now being made for differences in culture as well as differences in language, gender, and religion. Regarding gender, the converse is almost true: one common attitude is that there is no difference between the roles of men and women in society, the only continuing distinction being the undeniable differences in their anatomy, and in some Christian circles Galatians 3:28 is quoted to justify that attitude: *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"*.

On the religious front, many compromises are being made to accommodate other faiths in order to preserve the "brotherhood of man". As the number of adherents continues to fall, the additional financial viability provided by uniting with other groups might be a factor enhancing tolerance of different faiths. One example occurred several years ago when an Anglican Archbishop invited a Moslem cleric to speak at the Anglican Cathedral in Perth, Australia. The event was cited and rationalised as an example of "increased breadth of understanding of God's creation of Man".

While these initiatives might have some appeal at a secular level, it is suggested it is possible insufficient weight is being ascribed to the differences in religious objectives. The proclaimed objective of the Islamic faith is to convert the world and govern it under Islamic rule. Such an objective denies the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which is the fundamental doctrine of Christianity.

Unity

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

Likewise the European Union is a group of nations the prime purpose of which is "the promotion of peace and the well-being of the Union's citizens" (see: <http://en.euabc.com/>). The promotion of peace, one of the principal objectives of the EU, is in stark contrast to the events of 1939-40 when Germany plundered the countries of Europe.

Purity

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

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

The Spiritual Realm

The highest realm in the spiritual world is the divine plane, on which Jesus (as the Logos) and God (or Jehovah, His father) dwell. God and Jesus are different spirit beings and Jesus openly acknowledged that His father was superior to Him: *"Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my*

Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). Additionally, Jesus ascribed all the credit for His work to His father: “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:10).

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

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

The church

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

The diversity of the members of the church is one of the first characteristics the members must acknowledge and accommodate. To illustrate the point the Apostle Paul compared the diversity of the members of the church with the members of the human body: *“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free... for the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him... the eye cannot say*

unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.... God hath tempered the body together... that there should be no schism in the body... now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” (1 Cor. 12:12-30).

In those verses the Apostle addresses almost every form of diversity of human kind: heritage (Jew or Gentile); status (free man or slave); attributes (hands, ears); ability (seeing, hearing); and function (apostles, prophets, teachers). The acknowledgement of the diversity amongst the members of the body is so important that he also included it in his letters to the Romans and the Ephesians: *“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom. 12:4-5); “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ... From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:11-16).* Nevertheless, in spite of the diversity of the members, they must all strive for *“the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God”,* that there be *“no schism in the body”.*

Doctrine

Experience indicates that the differences in personal characteristics are relatively easy to tolerate—it is tolerating differences in understanding the Scriptures that church members find more challenging. However differences in understanding must be accommodated. They are more difficult to accommodate because, if one is true to one’s heart-felt convictions, one’s understandings (beliefs) are the result of concerted study, and it is difficult to acknowledge that other diligent students might come to a different conclusion.

An additional factor is that one’s convictions might cause differences in conduct. As Paul instructed the Romans: *“For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not*

him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth... One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks... Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way... Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:2-19). The Apostle specifically mentions two aspects of living that members might find difficult to accommodate: dietary practices and the days of the week when members should worship. In both cases the over-riding principle for each one to observe is that they must not allow the differences to hinder the spiritual growth of the other—to not let the differences be a stumbling block. The challenge for each member is to realise that the members of the body of Christ have different talents and abilities, just as the members in the physical human body differ, with each one being perfectly fitted for the function they are to perform. The challenge is to acknowledge that differences do not constitute grounds to consider another to not be of the body (the church).

Regarding the day of the week on which one believes they must worship, adherence to one's conviction might mean they cannot meet with other members of the body because they meet on a different day of the week. Indeed it might be difficult to accept that one who adheres rigidly to a particular day of the week might also be of the body. In such cases the proper course of action is to seek guidance by prayer.

Conduct

There are other differences in understanding which might prevent members from meeting together. One issue might be dress standards, one element of which might be whether sisters should wear a head covering in the meetings. Some believe they must be covered while others do not believe a covering is necessary.

In such cases, as the Apostle Paul declared, two principles apply: everyone must be fully persuaded in their own mind (Rom. 14:5), and one must not put a stumbling block in another's way (Rom. 14:13). Consequently the over-riding principle should be that if a certain action is not contrary to one's conscience they should comply with the wishes of the other. In the matter of head covering, if wearing a head covering is not contrary to one member's understanding but it is deemed necessary by another, the one who considers it not necessary should wear

one so that they do not put a stumbling block in the other's way. Such a position is consistent with the principles Paul articulated and which the brethren should observe.

However regarding head coverings, the Apostle Paul gave specific instruction to the church at Corinth. He wrote: "*For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered*" (1 Cor. 11:6). The options are clear: either the woman covers her head or she is shorn. However it was a shame for a woman to be shorn because that would indicate she was a prostitute. That argument might be considered to be weakened by the Apostle's later statement: "*But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God*" (1 Cor. 11:16 KJV). However before concluding that the Apostle's latest statement means a head covering is optional, two further points must be considered: the significance of "contention" and the authority of the Apostle Paul.

Regarding his authority, the Apostle wrote: "*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). Paul declared he was a follower of Christ, and consequently to differ with him implies he was astray in his understanding of the principles that pertained to his apostleship. Such an assertion is bold because Paul was given the spirit directly, without any intrusion by another human being (Gal. 1:15-17). He was also given an exclusive vision of the third heaven, a vision that was not given to anyone else (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Consequently, to deem him to be in error on the matter of women's head covering is bold indeed.

The second point to consider is that Paul gave the church "ordinances" (Greek: *paradoses*; Strong's #3862;... specifically the Jewish *traditionary law*). He also wrote that "*if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom*". The contention may therefore be raised that there was no such tradition amongst the Jews. Maybe not, but the point is that the practice was to be observed in spite of the fact that it might not have any historical precedent. (The New International Version translation of 1 Corinthians 11:16 reads: "*If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God*".)

To those considerations may be added the Apostle's exhortation regarding the ordinances: "*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). Indeed the Apostle is even more forthright: "*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).*

Summary

In summary, the Apostle Paul, a follower of Christ, who received God’s grace in unique circumstances, and upon whom was laid “*the care of all the*

churches” (2 Cor. 11:28), gave ordinances with which the brethren were to comply, one of which was that the women were not to pray or prophesy unless their head was covered. The obligation to not place a stumbling block in another’s way means that, if another in the ecclesia believes the women should wear a head covering, all women should wear a covering due to their love for the Lord and their “*fellowcitizens of the household of God*” (Eph. 2:19.■

ISRAEL ALONE ... WITH GOD

This article is reproduced from Arutz-Sheva, an outlet of www.israelnationalnews.com. It was released on Elul 29, 5771, which, translated into the Gregorian Calendar, is 28 September 2011. It is reprinted here because it seems to be an accurate reflection of the Israeli psyche, at least at that time, and also because it reflects the possible fulfilment, at least in part, of Jeremiah 30:14: “*All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased*”.

* * * *

“The Jews have been counting time for nearly 6,000 years. I believe that we shall continue to do so”.

Prof. Phyllis Chesler

And now it seems as if I am standing still while the years quickly swirl round me like autumn leaves, like diamond snowflakes. As one ages, time seems to gather speed.

Paradoxically, this particular moment in history seems to be taking place in slow motion. It seems we have been here before—but really, it is always new, always happening as if for the first time.

There is every reason to be pessimistic. Truth has been banished from the historical stage, jihad is fully underway, the Four Horsemen ride again, the poisoned words, like poison darts, have already struck their mark, the rockets have been raining down on Israel, many more, based in Iran, are almost poised to strike the Middle East, Europe, and America. The Ottoman Empire is back, demanding tribute; it competes with Iran for the Caliphate.

The United Nations crowd has just roared it’s approval for the destruction of Israel. They were joined by Islamists everywhere and cheered on by educated Westerners, including Jews.

Those who view themselves as the best among us are hopeless dreamers, stuck in amber, stuck in time, they are idealists who are more committed to fighting for

the rights of fundamentalists than they are committed to fighting for the survival of the West and its values.

Nevertheless, it is also the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. We are ushering in the year 5,772. The Jews have been counting time for nearly 6,000 years. I believe that we shall continue to do so.

I believe that Israel and the democracies will, once again, at great cost—always at cost--win against the forces of barbarism and evil that are seeking to wipe us out, to render the entire Muslim world “judenrein.” And also free of Christians, Hindus, Bah’ai, Buddhists, Zoroastrians—all the infidels whom are despised and endangered in Muslim lands.

As Jews and as Israelis, we must set the standard for taking the offense. Israel knows more about terrorism, more about the difficulties of asymmetrical and urban warfare, more about diabolical “Big Lie” propaganda than any other country on earth.

Israel can no longer afford to remain on defense. Now is the time for truly bold acts of sanity and truth-telling.

Israel is surrounded and Israel is alone. Therefore, appeasement is no longer an option. Illusions are far too dangerous to hold. We must, yet again, become heroes.

It only seems that Israel is alone. Yes, we are alone—but G-d is with us. We must act, we must do all that we can in order that G-d may join us.

Let us praise all our heroes who have been fighting for Israel’s survival and good name especially for the last eleven years. May this new year bless us with the return of both Gilad Shalit and Jonathan Pollard. May our wounded soldiers and civilians be healed, may the families of those who have fallen in battle be consoled, may all our agunot (chained wives) be freed, may our allies continue to grow.

u’metukah (a happy, and sweet New Year to you).

Arutz Sheva 28/9/2011■

UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Isaiah 9:6 contains a promise of a baby who would become leader of a government and who would be called, amongst other titles, the “Prince of Peace”. In view of the conflicts that plague the world as it enters the year known as 2015, the prospect of a government led by such a meritorious ruler provides great comfort to all who believe the promises contained in the Bible.

Neither the identity of the baby nor to whom He is given is mentioned; the text simply says “unto us”. Consequently it is significant that the promise is in the book of Isaiah.

The book of Isaiah

Isaiah 1:1 reads: *“The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah”*. Thus the book primarily relates to Judah and Jerusalem, that is, the whole 12 tribes of Israel.

Subsequent verses in chapter 1 confirm that Israel is the main focus of the book: *“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters, they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward”* (Isa. 1:2-4). History testifies to the truth of Isaiah’s statement.

Throughout the book there are several other references that confirm that Israel is the principal focus in Isaiah’s message: *“The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem”* (Isa. 2:1-3). These verses repeat the statement in chapter 1 that the message directly concerns Judah and Jerusalem, and that it relates to a future time—*“the last days”*—which emphasizes its importance.

Israel’s pride of place

Thus it is revealed that Israel has a prominent place in God’s plan for mankind, culminating in **all nations** going to Judah and Jerusalem to be taught God’s ways after which they will walk in His paths, and in that context it should not be surprising that it is to Israel that Isaiah prophesied God would give the baby who will lead a government of such equity.

Jesus Christ, the promised child

The next point to establish in order to understand God’s plan is that the baby was Jesus of Nazareth. Matthew records Jesus’ lineage from Abraham: *“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren... And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations”* (Matt. 1:1-2; 16-17).

Nevertheless some wondered whether John the Baptist might be the promised child: *“And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not”,* to which John gave an emphatic reply: *“One mightier than I cometh, whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose...”* (Luke 3:15-17). However, initially, John himself was uncertain whether Jesus was the promised child: *“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?”,* to which Jesus replied: *“... 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). Indeed, Jesus was the promised child!■

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THE LAST SEVEN DAYS

At this season of the year, as the Lord's people commemorate Jesus' life and death, they feel a depth of spirituality and closeness to their Lord that is unmatched in any of their other experiences throughout the year. One feeling is of deep gratitude to God for sending His only begotten Son to die such an ignominious death, so that mankind might have life, and a second feeling is determination to run their race because of the examples of Christian character He gave during the last seven days of His ministry.

Mark 10:32-34 provides a summary of those days: *"And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them; and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day He shall rise again".*

The seventh last day

Jesus walked before them—out in front—determined to do the things He must do, and suffer the things He must suffer: mocking, scourging, condemnation, and death. He did not dawdle along the way or delay his journey. He travelled purposefully, willingly, and unhesitatingly. All Christians should be filled with admiration at this example of His courage; they should have no thought of turning back, but be intent on accomplishing their Father's will for them, whatever that might be, along the narrow way.

In verses 35-40 (of Mark 10), James and John request one sit on Jesus' right hand and the other on his left in the kingdom. Matthew 20:20-22 also records the request but gives a slightly different account in that Matthew states that their mother made the request. The difference has been seized upon by some to ridicule the Bible as not being an accurate record of Jesus' life, however, whichever record is correct, the point is that Jesus answers the request with a

question: *"Are ye able (that is, are you willing) to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?... And they said unto him, we are able".*

When the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. How could they be so bold? And why did the master seemingly look favorably upon their request? Jesus used their request to teach them the importance of humility and service to one another: *"But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all"* (Mark 10:42-44).

No lesson must be so carefully learned as this lesson of humility. It applies to the very humblest of the flock, as well as those who are teachers and elders. The temptation multiplies in proportion to the position and attainments of the individual. Pride and ambition may also afflict those who have no official position in the Church, often asserted in fault-finding and criticism which, to the hearers, is intended to imply superior wisdom or ability on the part of the critic—that his wisdom and ability only wait for opportunity to manifest his greatness above his fellows. It is not to be so among the Lord's people.

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On this seventh day before His crucifixion Jesus healed Bartimeus: *“And they came to Jericho: and as He went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when He heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, He began to cry out, and say, ‘Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me’. And many charged him that He should hold his peace: but He cried the more a great deal, ‘Thou Son of David, have mercy on me’. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they called the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; He calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately He received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way”* (Mark 10:46-52).

There are several lessons that may be learned from this incident. Every individual is spiritually blind until they are privileged to hear God’s call—*“he calleth thee”*—to which they must respond in faith, casting away their garment upon which they have previously depended for their livelihood (the garment having been Bartimaeus’ licence to beg).

Such inherent blindness is not a result of any fault of those who have not heard the call, as Jesus taught His disciples: *“And as Jesus passed by, He saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that He was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him”* (John 9:1-3).

The restoration of Bartimaeus’ sight was a *“work of God”*; so also is the sight He gives to those who are privileged to hear His voice: *“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Cor. 4:5-6). Thus there are no grounds for pride among the Lord’s people, but humble gratitude for having received their spiritual sight at this time.

So may reflection on the events of the seventh day before Passover stimulate those who are privileged to hear the Name of Jesus, and who have received spiritual sight at this time, to not strive for mastery over their fellows but simply desire to be joint-heirs in His kingdom: *“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father,*

inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

The sixth last day

Both Matthew and John recorded one event that occurred on the sixth day before Jesus’ death: *“Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as He sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, He said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her”* (Matt. 26: 6-13).

John 12:1-8 records the same event but mentions Martha, Mary and Judas by name. There is a lesson to be learned from the actions of each of the three.

- Martha served (Greek: *“waited upon”*);
- Mary anointed Jesus’ feet;
- Judas deemed the anointing a waste of money.

Luke 10:38-40 records Martha, on another occasion, *“complaining”* that Mary was not helping to serve, and there is a lesson (a different lesson) for all to learn from that incident. However John 11:5 states that *“Jesus loved Martha”* and in John 11:20 it is recorded that Martha was the more eager of the two to greet Jesus. Hence it is evident that each had their own special way of serving their Lord, and the brethren do well to remember the same diversity of gifts exists today—one sees one need and another sees a different need, and each responds accordingly.

Perhaps the main lesson to learn from Judas’ attitude is that nothing must be kept from the service of the Lord. In the words of the hymn: *“take my silver and my gold, nothing Lord would I withhold”*. It is a challenge to keep those words in the forefront of one’s mind.

The fifth last day

Five days before Passover Jesus went to the temple in Jerusalem: *“And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem... then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me... All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion,*

Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, And brought the ass, and the colt... and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee” (Matt. 21:1-11).

One lesson to be learned from this event is the surety of every detail of prophecy: *“all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet”* (Zech. 9:9).

The fourth last day

“... and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves... And He taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Mark 11:15-17).

This cleansing of the literal temple in Jerusalem has application to all followers of their Master: *“... for ye are the temple of the living God, as God has said, “I will dwell in them and walk in them... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing...”* (2 Cor. 6:16-17). At this season of the year it behooves all members of the spiritual temple to cleanse themselves of everything that is, or might become, tainted with any influence that will defile or bring disrepute upon the Lord’s temple.

The third last day

Three days before Passover was Jesus’ last day of teaching in the temple. The Pharisees and Sadducees tried to trick Him by demanding He show them *“a sign from heaven”* (Matt. 16:12). Jesus regarded their request as “leaven” and taught His disciples to be aware of the leaven of the Pharisees—false doctrine—and questions designed to trick and ridicule.

Jesus used parables to teach them. In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, Jesus taught the importance of purity, faithfulness, and readiness. In the parable of the talents He taught the value of full devotion to God’s service. And in the parable of the man taking a journey and returning at an unknown time He taught that no one knows when they will reach the end of their personal walk, as well as when the Lord will

terminate the present dispensation with the Lord of heaven assuming control of all Man’s affairs and set up His kingdom of righteousness.

The second last day

There is no record of Jesus’ activities two days before Passover. Possibly He reflected on the three and a half years He had spent doing the Father’s will, recalling the many times He had been led and guided by the Holy Spirit. The joys, the sorrows, the friendships, the hardships, might have all passed before his mind during a time of silent reflection. There is great benefit in the Christian also taking time to ponder the way the Lord has led them in this life.

The last hours

The final events of Jesus’ life on earth began when He told his disciples to go and prepare the Passover in the upper room. Several significant incidents occurred during the feast, two being Jesus’ washing His disciples feet and foretelling who would betray Him.

Jesus girded his garments about him and washed the feet of the disciples. This action impressed yet again that *“he that would be chief among you, let him be your servant”*. All were shamed to silence except Peter who expressed his reluctance to have the master humble Himself on Peter’s behalf. Jesus’ gentle reply, that if He did not wash Peter He would not have any part with Jesus, provoked Peter’s response: *“Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!”* The Master’s reply was powerful—He that is washed needeth not to wash his feet but is clean every whit, the point being that the feet are the part of the body that come in contact with the earth. Those who are washed—the righteousness of justification by faith—need to keep themselves clean from the defilements of the world by continually washing their feet as they walk along the narrow way.

Finally Jesus’ ministry to His disciples ended: *“as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I? And He answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish”* (Mark 14:18-20). *“He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon... that thou doest, do quickly”* (John 13:26-27). Jesus’ ministry was complete; He had led them to the end. Then followed the Passover Supper.

May the remembrance of the last days of Jesus’ life keep each one’s heart and mind stayed on Him throughout the year as they grow in grace and knowledge.■

ABIDING IN THE LORD

The Christian has set their mind on heavenly things and heavenly fellowship. Their chief objective is to be at “*the general assembly of the first born*”, whose names are enrolled in heaven (Heb. 12:23), and then to live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4).

Jesus said that, in order to achieve that goal, the Christian must remain faithful to Him—to abide in the Lord: “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me*” (John 15:4). However the question arises: how can the Christian abide in Jesus Christ?

Jesus continued: “*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you*” (John 15:7). Jesus’ words will abide in each only if they continually eat of the Holy Word. One example of His followers abiding in Him was the Christians at Berea: “*And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea... These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:10-11). The nobility of the Bereans was attributed to them searching the Scriptures daily; not just annually, nor monthly, nor weekly, but daily. Just as the physical life is sustained by the circulation of blood, and a branch lives because of the continuous circulation of sap, so the Christian’s spiritual life survives only if it is constantly nourished by the word of Christ.

Manna

The need for Christians to constantly ingest the Word was pictured by the requirements that applied to Israel gathering manna in the wilderness: “*This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning... And they gathered it every morning...*” (Exod. 16:16-19, 21).

Manna was like bread; they collected it daily, except on a Sabbath. The same applies to the Christian gathering Bible truths every day, their bread of life—the truth that sustains them. And they must gather it every one according to their eating, such that “*he that*

gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack”. Some have a greater appetite than others, and it is necessary to realize that the Lord will provide just the amount each one needs.

When the manna first appeared, its taste was described as like “*wafers made with honey*” (Exod. 16:31). However the Israelites became dissatisfied: “*And the multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes*” (Num. 11:4-6). The Christian must not become dissatisfied with what the Lord provides; over time it might seem to become tasteless, but it is the bread of life—“*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*” (Heb. 13:8).

Quails

God answered the Israelites’ murmuring by sending them quails: “*And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: He that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague. And He called the name of that place Kibrothhattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted*” (Num. 11:31-34). What they sought was not to their ultimate benefit—God smote those who complained—and likewise the Christian must not complain that the Lord is not providing them with a varied diet. He knows what the Christian needs each step along the way: milk for the babe, meat for the strong. But both have to be ingested and so the Christian must ensure they use their Bible wisely and not just listen to discourses or read articles, but search the scriptures and prove for themselves “*whether those things are so*”.

Translating the experiences of the Israelites into the twenty first century, reveals that no truth is more basic to the scriptural theme than that Christ died for mankind’s sins, “*the just for the unjust*” (1 Pet. 3:18). No promise is sweeter than that made to father

Abraham: “in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 28:14). Salvation for all is the central theme of the Bible. To the Christian it initially tastes as the manna did to the Israelites—“wafers mixed with honey”. One must not tire of this most basic but wonderful food.

However, on the other hand, it must be remembered that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). The Christian must not fail to realize that the purpose of any food is not only to sustain them, but (in children) also to promote growth. Hebrews 5:12-14 reads: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for He is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil”. The next chapter describes the milk of God's Word: “Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment” (Heb.6:1-2).

There is no need to seek “solid food” from the theories of Man; God has provided meat for His people at each stage of their progress. The books of Ezekiel and Revelation plumb into the depths of God's plan with romantic symbolisms of chariots of fire, intertwining wheels within wheels, beasts, dragons and a city whose streets are paved with gold. Thus care must be taken not to exclude some scriptures because it is assumed they are not applicable to one's growth. The Christian's problem lies not with desiring to probe the limitless depths of God's Holy Word, but with viewing the precious basics as routine, simple or mundane.

The commandments

John 15:9-11 reads: “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full”. Jesus stated that abiding in His love required keeping His commandments. There are three words that may be taken as the keynotes of those verses, namely love, obedience and joy.

Firstly, there is the assurance of divine love—of God's love for His people—in which it is the

Christians' duty and privilege to abide: “Just as the Father hath loved Me, I have loved you, abide ye in My love”. The depths of that love may be appreciated to some extent by pondering God's love for Jesus: “As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you”. How deep, how pure, how fully, how eternally was God's love for Jesus, and it is with that same guarantee that God will love the Christian.

Secondly, and on the other hand, there is the need for the Christian to keep the commandment of love: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10). Jesus claimed an absolute and unbroken conformity with the will of God, and consequently He enjoyed an uninterrupted communion with the Father. No more wonderful words were ever spoken than these quiet ones in which Jesus declares that never in all His life had there been the slightest deflection or want of complete conformity between the Father's will and His desires and actions. Thus He teaches Christians that the secret of abiding in His love is obedience: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Jesus taught His disciples by referring to His own obedience, and applying the picture of the Vine and the branches illustrates the union to be one of sublime reality.

The keeping of His commandments is more than mere outward conformity—outward action. It is the inward heart-harmony of one's will, the surrender of the whole being to the will of God. This obedience—of the hands, the feet, the tongue, the life—is because the heart is conformed to His will. It does so because it loves and this is the condition to be met for continuing in the love of Jesus.

Fullness of joy

John 15:11 reads: “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full”. The Christians' joy is to be full even though they are required to suffer “many tribulations to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). The joy to which Jesus referred (Greek: *chara*: “calm delight”) is the same joy as that which He experienced during His ministry on earth, the joy that comes through an absolute surrender and submission in love to the expressed and revealed will of a loving Heavenly Father. That was His joy in spite of sorrows such as none but He could know: the baptism with which He was baptized; the burden and the weight of the chastisement He bore. Yet this joy remained with Him, and made Him the most joyful of the children of God: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of

God" (Heb. 12:2). This is the joy that results from perfect obedience, a joy coming from a surrender of self at the bidding of love. There is no joy that can be compared to that which a Christian experiences than the joy that springs from a surrender of everything under the impulse of love.

The Christian must have Jesus' joy reigning in their hearts in order that their joy also may be full. Their joy will remain—it will be permanent, it will be abiding—if, and only if, His joy is theirs. Some glad day they too, if faithful to their present privileges, will hear the wonderful words of welcome and commendation, "*Well done, enter into the joy of your master*" (Matt. 25:23).

The Christian's joy will be equal to the measure of their capacity, in ever trying to advance towards a greater possession of His joy. There is no deeper calmness of spirit and settled confidence than that which comes from entering into the joy of their Lord.

There is only one joy that is worthy, and that is the joy that comes from union with Jesus, the Vine. Love, obedience, and joy are all available in the measure Jesus has set forth, but only if the Christian abides in Him. The blessedness and sweetness of victory over all one's inherent unloveliness, can only

be obtained by keeping close to Jesus Christ—the Christians' Vine.

Christian fellowship

One picture that illustrates that fellowship with others of the Lord's people enables one to keep close to the Lord is that of a circle. The nearer the points of the circumference are to the centre—that is, the smaller the diameter of the circle—the closer all points on the circumference are to each another. As Christians draw nearer to those who stand around the same centre, they will feel they are coming closer to the Master, and draw from Him the same life while experiencing the same joy of abiding in Him.

Another picture of the closeness is a wheat crop. In the early spring, when the wheat is green and young, it is just a little above the soil in which it stands, the plants come up in the lines in which they were sown—each row separate from another—and also parted from one another. However when the full wheat ears wave in the autumn winds, all the lines and separations have disappeared, and there is one unbroken tract of waving golden grain. So it should be in the Lord's wheat-field—when the love of Christ fills all hearts, all "plants" will be close to each other; experiencing the joy of maturity, the joy of abiding in His love, the joys of being in their Lord's "body".■

EDIFY ANOTHER

"Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another" (Romans 14:19)

The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Roman church in approximately AD 57, about 3 years before He was delivered to Rome as a prisoner.

In chapter 13 the Apostle had been instructing the Church members regarding their conduct towards each other in civil matters, prescribing the sacred laws of justice, peace, and order, which were to be observed by the members of the little flock. In chapter 14, and part of the following chapter, Paul turns their attention to their conduct towards one another in sacred things, pertaining more immediately to conscience and religious observance. In particular He gives instruction regarding how to manage their differences and anxieties over what should be minor matters, but which could create disharmony and may result in the stumbling of a new Brother or Sister.

Many of the problems that occurred in the Church came about because the Church of Rome was composed of both Jews and Gentiles with the Jewish converts being in the majority. There were many among the ecclesia who had unsettling questions

regarding the transition from Judaism to Christianity. Paul often reminded the Jews of his own Jewish heritage, and how the Lord had directed him to bring the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Paul realized that for the Church to be edified, they needed to settle the many questions that were causing discontent, and "*to pursue the things which made for peace*" (Rom. 14:19).

Currently, "edify" is understood to mean "to instruct in such a way as to improve, enlighten, or uplift morally, spiritually, or intellectually". However the original meaning of "edify" related to the literal building of an edifice, and thus the present meaning loses some of the force and significance of the word.

The meaning of "edify" in Romans 14 conveyed the concept of the members of the church collectively forming a temple, a spiritual one and succeeding the literal one on Mount Zion; a temple in which the Lord dwells by his Holy Spirit: "*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of*

God dwells in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16 NKJV). Paul’s exhortation deserves close consideration.

Pursue the things which make for peace

In Romans 14:19 the Romans were exhorted to pursue peace, which implies effort is required to acquire it—it cannot be assumed it will “come naturally”, and hence Jesus Christ taught His disciples that a blessing awaits those who strive for peace: *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God”* (Matt. 5:9 NKJV). Christ’s followers have differing levels of understanding, maturity, talents and experiences, but all are travelling the same narrow way and so everyone must take care to *“follow after peace”* and not stumble another.

Despite their best efforts, peace and harmony will not always be obtained, and so Paul wrote: *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men”* (Rom. 12:18).

The responsibility lies with every individual and not with the “other person”. Paul encouraged the Philippians to *“fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others”* (Phil. 2:2-4 NKJV). The mind set that *“esteems others”* better than oneself involves putting aside selfish ambitions and self-importance.

However that does not mean compromising the truth or accepting behavior that is not in accordance with the word of God, but the manner in which differences are handled is critical. Some issues are not critical to *“making our calling and election sure”* (2 Pet. 1:10) and Paul lists two examples: esteeming one day holier than another, and the eating or abstaining from meats.

Nevertheless there were some matters Paul deemed required correction: *“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I (Paul) withstood him to his face, because He was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, He would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, He withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy”* (Gal. 2:11-13 NKJV). Peter’s actions were adding to their confusion, seemingly endorsing that they continued to be under the Law Covenant.

Edifying another

Paul continues that pursuing peace is not the end objective, but also to pursue *“the things by which one may edify another”*. Paul lists some of the ministries

that are required to edify the whole body: *“That Christ, our Lord and Master” “...gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”* (Eph. 4:11-12). Paul wrote that there were two overarching purposes to the ministry: equipping the saints for the work of ministry, and edifying the body of Christ.

Equipping the saints

The purpose of this part of the ministry is to enable them to be ambassadors for Christ, spreading the message of hope—proclaiming the good news of the Gospel—that *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16 NKJV)—*“that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation”* (2 Cor. 5:18-19 NKJV). Their message is not their own—they are merely preaching God’s word of hope to the world of mankind.

Edifying the body

The second aspect of the ministry is building up the brethren; the body of Christ. This objective may be accomplished only if there is *“... unity of the faith”*, which in turn requires unity *“... of the knowledge of the Son of God”*, a condition that will not be reached completely until all have come to the condition of *“a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”* (Eph. 4:13). This situation will not be realized until the church is glorified, and hence there is an on-going need for each one of the Lord’s followers to strive to edify each other, so that they are *“... no longer ... children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,” so that we are able to speak the truth in love, growing up in all aspects of the new creature until we are fashioned like our head, Christ”* (Eph 4: 15 NKJV).

The Christians at Berea endeavoured to prove all things: they *“received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so”* (Acts 17:11 NKJV). Paul’s exhortation to Timothy reflected the same level of personal endeavour: *“Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth”* (2 Tim. 2:15 Amplified Version). Edification of the brethren is not accomplished by enforcing blind adoption of the teachings of others, but by exhorting personal study of the word of God.

However the benefit of any ministry is dependent on God's blessing, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase"* (1 Cor. 3:6 NKJV). There is no place for personal accreditation.

Knowledge

Edifying the brethren does not mean increasing only their knowledge. Paul warned: *"Yet mere knowledge causes people to be puffed up (to bear themselves loftily and be proud), but love (affection and goodwill and benevolence) edifies and builds up and encourages one to grow [to his full stature]"* (1 Cor. 8:1 Amplified Version). Knowledge without grace puffs up and as a result does not benefit the one who is trying to help nor the one being helped. Consequently Peter wrote: *"Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..."* (2 Pet. 3:18). An increase in knowledge must be accompanied by an increase in grace.

Thus edifying requires continual self-examination, study, and appreciation of God's grace: *"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"* (Jude 20-21 NKJV).

Fellowship

The journey on the Narrow Way is often a lonely one, with few travelers who are often far apart, not able to meet as often as they would like. In the spiritual sense no-one is totally alone in that everyone has access to God in prayer, nevertheless fellowship is a very powerful and therefore important asset: *"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. 10:24-25), and so Paul exhorted the Thessalonians to *"...comfort each other and edify one another..."* (1 Thess. 5:11 NKJV).

Subject material

However the invitation to others to meet together for the benefit of fellowship must also be managed wisely: *"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations"* (Rom. 14:1). Paul exercised such wisdom in that He did lead his followers at a pace greater than they could handle: *"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able"* (1 Cor. 3:1-2). Nevertheless there is also a requirement that all believers grow and so wisdom in what to present is also required: *"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that*

one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for He is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14).

Many members

Above all, it must be remembered that the Lord has called each one and so there is no grounds for being "disappointed" with the "lack of progress" in one to whom one has been ministering: *"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence"* (1 Cor. 1:26-29 NKJV).

The diversity of the members of the body has application regarding the contribution each one makes to the welfare of each other: *"The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. The Spirit gives one person a message full of wisdom, while to another person the same Spirit gives a message full of knowledge. One and the same Spirit gives faith to one person, while to another person He gives the power to heal. The Spirit gives one person the power to work miracles; to another, the gift of speaking God's message; and to yet another, the ability to tell the difference between gifts that come from the Spirit and those that do not"* (1 Cor. 12:6-10 TEV). No one should imagine they have all the gifts that would be of most benefit to everyone else, nor should they strive to surpass the benefits of another's efforts to edify the brethren.

The reason why each one must strive to edify, not only themselves, but all others who are striving to walk the highway of holiness, is that finally all the members of the body of Christ will be knitted together to form one united body. The body of Christ is a mystery to the world, equal to the mystery of a man leaving his parents (who have done so much for him) and cleaving unto his wife: *"This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church"* (Eph. 5:32). No member should despise another; every member is a member of the same body: *"And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary"* (1 Cor. 12:21-22).■

THE TABERNACLE

"As long as deep in the heart, the soul of a Jew yearns, and towards the East the eye looks to Zion, our hope will not be lost. The hope of 2,000 years, to be a free nation, in our land, the land Zion and Jerusalem"
Lyrics of Israel's National Anthem—Hatikvah—"The Hope"

The *Hatikvah* (quoted above) is Israel's national anthem. It paraphrases God's promise to Abraham that God will "give them the land for an everlasting possession" (Gen. 17:8). The anthem is not merely the words of an entertainer, but rather it reflects the national conviction that God will yet fulfill that promise.

Another component of Old Testament lore that is prominent in present day Israeli conscience is the tabernacle. There is a model of the tabernacle on display at Tel Shiloh, which is where the temple—the "permanent" form of the tabernacle (2 Sam. 7:12-13; 1 Kings 6:2, 11-14)—stood for 369 years after the Children of Israel entered Israel and completed the initial conquest of the land as a whole.

Purpose

The nation of Israel was God's special people—"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6)—and hence God instructed Moses that the Israelites build Him a place where He could live among them: "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Exod. 25:8). The Hebrew word for "sanctuary" is "Mikdash", which Strong's Concordance defines as: "a consecrated thing or place, especially a palace, sanctuary (whether of Jehovah or of idols) or asylum". It is the same word used in Chronicles and Ezekiel when referring to the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezek. 44:1; 1 Chron. 22:19).

The Tabernacle was a transportable structure, suited for the desert. It was replaced by the more permanent temple, in the place "that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put His name and make His habitation there" (Deut. 12:5). The Tabernacle was a place where God dwelt within "their midst", in the midst of the Children of Israel.

Unlike pagan places of worship, Israel does not consider the tabernacle to be a physical structure meant to provide a home on earth for a god, but a place which facilitates the relationship between God and His children. This is reinforced by the instructions regarding the Holy Ark. "And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy

seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony" (Exod. 25:21-22). The ark, with its covering and cherubim, was a meeting place between Moses and God, and, in turn, enabled God to communicate with His people, through Moses. The sacrifices and rituals that take place in and around the Tabernacle are all about man meeting God.

Building the tabernacle

The first instruction regarding the building of the tabernacle required both men and women to contribute: "And Moses spake unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which the LORD commanded, saying, Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart... And every wise hearted among you shall come, and make all that the LORD hath commanded; The tabernacle, his tent, and his covering... The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the LORD, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the LORD had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses" (Exod. 35:4-11, 29). The inclusion of everyone and the encouragement of each to donate as his heart prompted them made the project something special—it was not the tabernacle of a selected few, of an elite class or wealthy few, but the tabernacle of the people.

Personnel

"And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation." (Num. 18:21). While the tribe of Levi (the priests—Deut. 21:5) was given the task of serving the tabernacle, the high priest was the only one who was allowed to offer the sacrifices: "Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people" (Heb. 9:6-7).

Thus there are many lessons that may be learnt from the tabernacle: its construction involved all the people, it was the means by which the nation of Israel communicated with God, God's instructions required attention to detail and their communication with God was via the high priest.■

WHO NEEDETH NOT DAILY

“Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this He did once, when He offered up himself” (Hebrews 7:27)

One purpose of Hebrews 7:27 is to contrast Jesus’ sacrifice with the sacrifices made by the High Priest under the Law Covenant. The contrast is based on the fact that, during His time on earth, Jesus was a High Priest, not of the tabernacle Israel was commanded to build and in which they were required to perform many ceremonies, but of a spiritual tabernacle: *“But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building, Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”* (Heb. 9:11-14).

The High Priest

The contrast is manifest when the characteristics and sacrifices offered by the High Priest are compared with Jesus’ characteristics and sacrifice.

The difference in the characteristics of the two High Priests is stated in Hebrews 7:28: *“For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity...”*. In other words, the High Priests of the tabernacle that Moses pitched, in accordance with the Law Covenant, were human beings, and were not able to completely escape the imperfections of human nature. The first High Priest was Aaron, Moses’ brother: *“And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that He may minister unto me in the priest’s office...”* (Exod. 28:1). Aaron was imperfect—a sinner—because He descended from Adam.

However Jesus *“...came down from heaven...”* (John 6:38), and consequently He was not tainted with any weaknesses inherited from Adam, notwithstanding that, during His time on earth, Jesus was flesh and bones just as all other human beings, as Hebrews 7:26 declares: *“For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens”*.

The sacrifices

The ministry of the high priest has always included offering sacrifices for the people: *“And Moses said,*

This is the thing which the LORD commanded that ye should do: and the glory of the LORD shall appear unto you. And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer thy sin offering, and thy burnt offering, and make an atonement for thyself, and for the people: and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them; as the LORD commanded. Aaron therefore went unto the altar...” (Lev. 9:6-8).

Before the high priest offered sacrifices for the people He was required to offer a sacrifice for himself: *“And He shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. And Aaron shall offer **his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself**, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house, And He shall take the two goats, and present them before the LORD at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation”* (Lev. 16:5-7).

The requirement for Aaron to firstly make an atonement for himself and his house (his sons) is emphasised by it being repeated in Leviticus 16:11-15: *“And Aaron shall bring the **bullock** of the sin offering, which is **for himself**, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself... Then shall He kill the **goat** of the sin offering, that is **for the people**, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as He did with the blood of the bullock...”* (Lev. 16:11-15)

Hence there is a contrast between the sacrifices of the High Priests: Aaron, being imperfect—having infirmity—had to firstly offer a sacrifice for himself, whereas Jesus did not have infirmity and therefore did not need to offer sacrifice first for himself.

Repetition

Another factor that contrasts the sacrifices offered by the Israelites in their tabernacle and the sacrifice of Jesus was that the sacrifices offered under the Law Covenant had to be repeated every year: *“And this shall be a **statute for ever** unto you: that in **the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month...** on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, **by a statute for ever**. And the priest, whom He shall anoint, and whom He shall consecrate to minister in the priest’s*

office **in his father's stead**, shall make the atonement... And He shall make an atonement for the holy sanctuary, and He shall make an atonement for the tabernacle of the congregation, and for the altar, and He shall make an atonement for the priests, and for all the people of the congregation. And this shall be an **everlasting statute unto you**, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins **once a year**. And He did as the LORD commanded Moses" (Lev. 16:29-34). The requirement was a statute (a law, a binding requirement) for ever, it being made clear that after Aaron's death, his successor, whom He had anointed, was to continue the practices.

Nevertheless, in spite of such sacrifices being offered, they did not eradicate the sinful nature Israel inherited from their human ancestors: "*For the law having a shadow of good things to come... can never with those sacrifices which they offered **year by year** continually make the comers thereunto perfect... But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins **every year**. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins*" (Heb. 10:1-4).

Thus the sacrifices God required to be offered under the Law Covenant had two critical aspects: firstly the high priest had to offer a sacrifice for himself (because He had infirmity), followed by another sacrifice for the people, and secondly the sacrifices had to be repeated every year.

Hence the contrast between the sacrifices that had to be offered in the tabernacle and the sacrifice of Jesus is evident—firstly because Jesus did not need to offer a sacrifice first for His own sins (because He did not have any sin—"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:21-22))—and secondly because His sacrifice did not require repetition. Romans 5:18 explains why Jesus had to die only once: "*Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life*".

Symbolism

Romans 15:4 reads: "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope*". It seems reasonable to regard the writings that comprise the Old Testament as being some of the "*things written aforetime*", and therefore they have been written for the Christian's learning.

The instructions to the nation of Israel regarding their obligations under the Law Covenant are complex and extensive, comprising almost the whole of the book

of Leviticus, which ends with the words "*these are the commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai*" (Lev. 27:34)—as well as substantial portions of the latter part of the book of Exodus and the book of Deuteronomy: "*Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them... Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you*" (Deut. 4:1-2). Thus it is not surprising the Lord's people have studied the requirements of the Law Covenant and wondered just what benefit a knowledge of them provides to the church, and especially since "...*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth*" (Rom. 10:4).

Further, while one purpose of the Law Covenant was to offset to some extent the wiles of the flesh for fleshly Israel—"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" (Gal. 3:19)—its grand purpose was to point to the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ: "... *the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith*" (Gal. 3:24).

Thus it is not surprising that several expositors have attributed meanings to each of the facets of the tabernacle, and credited them with being symbols. In that vein it is not surprising the bullock and the goats have been ascribed meanings which illustrate the Christian's walk.

It is not the intent of these columns to denigrate nor dispute the symbolic meaning ascribed to any element of the Law Covenant arrangement; rather it is acknowledged that it is the Lord who provides insight into the secrets of His word: "*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 the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. 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).

Whatever meaning is ascribed to any element of the sacrifices required under the Law Covenant, the principal reason for the Old Testament record is that it foreshadowed Jesus Christ's sacrifice which gives mankind hope of eternal life. ■

UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

The promise recorded in Isaiah 9:6 is not only that Israel would be given a child, but that that child would be a son, as God promised Abram: *"And He (God) said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son..."* (Gen. 18:10).

A son was necessary to perpetuate the family name: *"Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar... for He said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and He called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place"* (2 Sam. 18:18).

The importance of a son is further illustrated by the case of Zelophehad. Zelophehad did not have a son but He had daughters. However his daughters were not entitled to any inheritance so they made a special plea to Moses: *"Then came the daughters of Zelophehad... And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation... Our father died in the wilderness... and had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because He hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father. And Moses brought their cause before the LORD. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren..."* (Num. 27:1-7). (The Hebrew for "brethren" means a brother; Gen. 4:2). When Israel entered the promised land Joshua complied with the Lord's direction: *"Therefore according to the commandment of the LORD He (Joshua) gave them an inheritance among the brethren of their father... because the daughters of Manasseh had an inheritance among his sons..."* (Joshua 17:3-6). **Thus a son was a precious progeny.**

Further, if there was more than one son the first born son had priority: *"If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when He maketh his sons to inherit that which He hath, that He may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But He shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn... for... the right of the firstborn is his"* (Deut. 21:15-17).

The pre-eminence of the firstborn is reflected also in Joseph's objection to Jacob blessing Ephraim before Manasseh, Manasseh being the firstborn: *"And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim... He held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it... his younger brother shall be greater than he..."* (Gen. 48:17-19).

Only son

The importance and esteem given to the firstborn son emphasizes Abraham's dedication: he was prepared to kill Isaac as a sacrifice—the son of his old age (Gen. 21:2), Isaac was regarded as his "only son" (Gen. 22:12, 16), God had promised Abraham that his seed would be fruitful (Gen. 15:5) and that it was through his seed that all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 22:18).

Jesus the only begotten son

All of those features apply to Jesus:

- Jesus was *"a sacrifice to God"* (Eph. 5:2);
- Jesus was God's only son: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16);
- Jesus was God's first born son, indeed, in the spiritual realm He was *"the firstborn of every creature: that in all things He might have the preeminence"* (Col. 1:18), and when He came to earth: *"Then Joseph... took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and He called his name JESUS"* (Matt. 1:24-25);
- Jesus is God's heir: *"God... hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things"* (Heb. 1:1-2). ■

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WHEN YE SEE THESE THINGS

“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28).

So far the 21st century has been characterised by turmoil, so much so that one might wonder if the earth will be peaceful ever again. Events have occurred in every sphere, and the number of them, combined with the speed with which they have occurred, has the potential to cause uncertainty in the minds of those who ponder the future.

Physical events

Some of the events have been termed “natural disasters”. They have caused severe suffering, their magnitude, if not exceeding at least equalling, the most severe on record. In Australia there have been floods in areas which previously have been characterised by drought. There have also been extensive bushfires which have caused loss of life and huge losses of property. In USA there have been typhoons and cyclones that have caused deaths, with some damage not yet rectified, even after several years. There have been earthquakes in several parts of the globe, some of which have caused tsunamis which in turn have caused extensive damage and loss of life. In other areas, specifically New Zealand, Spain and Japan, some earthquakes have not caused tsunamis but have caused other significant damage. In the gulf of Mexico there was a problem with an oil well which resulted in the spillage of large amounts of oil into the sea, killing much marine life. An earthquake in Japan damaged a nuclear power station from which harmful radio-active material escaped. The polar ice caps have continued to melt with huge pieces breaking off; some marine biologists believe the molten ice has diluted the local sea such that the concentration of salt in the local ocean is now so low that some salt water fish cannot survive in that area. Debate continues whether the phenomena are consequences of mankind’s industrial pursuits or whether they are part of a long term “natural” cycle.

Social changes

The events have not been confined to the physical environment. There has been, and it is continuing,

social and political unrest in several countries, particularly in the nations in the mid-East (Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Sudan). The conflicts in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan continue, and it is alleged that, in some countries, the military has fired on and killed some of their own citizens.

Finance

The financial framework also has suffered crises. One period of instability has been termed the Global Financial Crisis. The monetary imbalance is such that some countries have required support from others, some of the more notable ones being Greece and Spain. The USA is heavily in debt to China.

Religious turmoil

The religious arena also has experienced dramatic changes. Religious organisations, particularly in the Western World, have struggled to maintain viability; the Roman Catholic Church has a crucial shortage of priests, so great is the crisis that some priests have been recruited from Nigeria to serve in Australia. Further to that, the very structure and authority of the Roman Catholic Church is under challenge. One example is the publication on the internet by a Catholic faction (www.vaticancatholic.com) of

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allegations that some of the recent popes of the Roman Catholic church were imposters, and that Vatican II was anti-Catholic. The publication of such material constitutes a stark contrast to the unilateral authority of that Church which it exercised for centuries—unilateral to the extent of being suppressive. The thought of an organisation within the church explicitly declaring that any one of the popes was an imposter constitutes a rebellion and may be interpreted as a fracturing of that Church. And it is not just the Catholic church that is undergoing change. In the early years of this century the Anglican Archbishop of Perth, West Australia (who at that time was the primate of the Anglican Church in Australia), invited a Muslim mufti to preach in the Perth Cathedral. Such inter-faith events provide grounds for adherents to wonder where the trend is going to stop, and to query the principles upon which their institutions were founded.

Computers

The contribution of computers to the present turmoil cannot be overlooked. The internet is an innovation of the last 20-30 years or so and already its influence is world-wide. While it is a marvellous resource for the promulgation of information it has also provided a ready means for the dissemination of immoral and Satanic material; such material undermines many of the moral and social principles upon which many western societies are built.

Confusion

Such rapid and far reaching changes in the constitutional platforms of many countries provokes some to wonder what they should believe and, ultimately, what is Man's destiny. Such a quandary highlights the importance of a standard upon which to base belief.

There are a number of different standards that may be considered. One of them is the Bible. However there are many different renditions (translations) of the original text which provide a variety of meanings. Another document which has widespread acceptance is the Quran which, to the Muslim, is the equivalent of what the Bible is to the Christian.

The question remains: which one is the ultimate authority—which one contains “the truth”—and how does one decide?

History and prophecy

One measure is the prophecies contained in The Book. If the events foretold in the script come to pass it can justifiably be concluded that the source of the prophecy (the author of “The Book”) has divine authority and therefore the message contained in The Book is “the truth”.

Another medium by which one may ascertain the truth is their personal experiences—some believe they have had personal experiences that testify to the authority of the message in “The Book” (“answers to prayer” being one example), and hence they regard the author of “The Book” as The Ultimate Authority.

The Bible record

The Bible contains many prophecies and records much history. Many of the events foretold in its pages have already come to pass, with current world conditions indicating that the fulfilment of many others is either happening now or is imminent.

One of the prophecies recorded in the Bible which has been fulfilled, at least in part, is the sequence of the kingdoms prophesied in the book of Daniel. In summary, the prophecies are that the kingdom of Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:36-38), would be superseded by the kingdom of the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:5-28), then by Greece (Dan. 8:1-21) and finally by a fourth kingdom (Dan. 7:1-28), after which the kingdom will be given to the “*saints of the most high*” (Dan. 7:18). Several details of the transitions from kingdom to kingdom are given in the book; however it is sufficient to say here that the rise, fall and sequence of the first three kingdoms are testified by secular records.

And the story does not stop there. While the fourth kingdom mentioned in the book of Daniel is not named, that kingdom will be followed by one set up by the God of heaven (Dan. 2:44; 7:9-14). Many of the events occurring in 2015 may be deemed to be indications the world is in transition between the fourth kingdom and the kingdom that will be set up by the God of heaven. However some will argue that the events are merely part of a repetitive cycle.

Nevertheless there is one event occurring in the world today that has not occurred previously, at least not to the same extent and in the same manner. And that is the establishment of the nation of Israel, and the immigration of Jews from around the world. This event alone indicates the establishment of the kingdom of heaven is imminent.

Israel in the Bible

In the King James Version of the Bible the number of references to Israel is second only to the number of references to God:

- God: more than 4400;
- Israel: more than 2500;
- Jesus: approximately 980;
- Christ: approximately 570;
- Adam: approximately 30.

Thus it would seem that Israel is an important identity in God's overall dealings with humanity.

God's chosen people

The number of references to Israel is consistent with Israel being God's chosen people: *"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth... because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy..."* (Deut. 7:6-9).

Those verses declare that the events that attended Israel's exodus from Egypt are testimony to God's preferential care for them—He *"brought them out with a mighty hand"*—exemplified by their crossing of the Red Sea and sustenance in the wilderness.

Likewise the current regathering of the Israelites from all the nations of the world is testimony that, in spite of their transgressions during the centuries past, Israel is still under the care of God's hand: *"Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered... then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence... and they shall know that I am the LORD their God"* (Ezek. 28:25-26). While that prophecy has not yet been fulfilled in every detail—Israel is not dwelling safely in their land in the fullest sense—nevertheless they are in process of being gathered to the Promised Land and are planting vineyards and other crops, and are exporting produce. Thus to deny that Israel is still God's favoured people is, in effect, a denial of the promises of God's Word.

Israel today

While it is not suggested God's promises regarding Israel are yet fulfilled, it is suggested that, in some circles, there is more faith among modern day Israelis regarding those promises than there is among the Gentile nations. An excerpt from ***Israel Video News of March 7, 2015*** reads: *"Then I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them happy in my house of prayer, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar; for my house shall be called, House of prayer for all peoples"* (Isaiah 56:7). Those verses are not referring to the Jewish People but, rather, to the nations of the world. The prophet Isaiah declared there will come a time when all the nations will surge towards Jerusalem. And God Himself will bring them to the temple mount—His holy mountain. All people of the world will not only be

accepted but moreover, will be sought after and appreciated. The holy temple will become a House of Prayer for the entire world... There will come a time when all people of the world will surge to the holy mountain in Jerusalem, and they will bring their desires and intent with them in their hearts" (end of quote). Those words were published in 2015!

Israel's transgression

Notwithstanding the promises contained in the Bible regarding Israel's future prosperity, it must be acknowledged they have transgressed God's directions. However the Bible explains that God's promises will be fulfilled—He will forgive their transgressions—and further, their history will be used to instruct the Gentiles.

The Apostle Paul explains: *"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). The Apostle Paul declared that God has not cast off Israel. Indeed God had a higher purpose: *"According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day."* (Rom. 11:8). Paul declared that Israel's blindness was God's doing.

God's higher purpose is summarized in Ezekiel 39: *"So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies... According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel... Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD"* (Ezek. 39:22-29). Indeed, as the Apostle Paul explained in his letter to the Romans: *"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 God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"* (Rom. 11:26-34). Yes indeed, Who?■

INTEGRITY AND CONSCIENCE

“Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Peter 3:16)

Conscience is the automatic or emotional sense that persuades an individual whether something is right or wrong. It is determined by what one knows. A lack of knowledge regarding an issue means there is no inner feeling about that issue; such ignorance is reflected in the common saying “ignorance is bliss”—that is, if one does not have any knowledge about an issue, they are not constrained by their conscience to react in any particular way regarding it.

Integrity is measured by how one’s actions reflect their conscience. One has integrity when they act in accordance with their conscience, and they lack integrity when they act contrary to their conscience.

In the Scriptures there are examples and exhortations regarding both conscience and integrity, and the relationship between them.

In the King James Version, all the verses that contain the word “integrity” are in the Old Testament (however some verses in the New Testament relate to integrity without using the word), and all the verses that contain the word “conscience” are in the New Testament, although some verses in the Old Testament imply they refer to conscience.

Conscience and knowledge

The relationship of conscience and knowledge is exemplified by the case of Saul before his conversion to Christianity. Before his conversion he persecuted Christians to the extent of consenting to the stoning of Stephen: *“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:1-3).*

After his conversion Paul did not deny the persecution he had rained on Christians before his conversion: *“And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you... I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into*

prisons both men and women” (Acts 21:40—22:4). Nevertheless Paul did not consider he had acted contrary to his conscience, even though he recognised later that those he had “*persecuted (were of) the church of God*” (1 Cor. 15:9): *“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1).*

Another example of the relationship between knowledge and conscience is the advice Paul gave the Corinthian brethren regarding eating meat, some of which had been used in the heathen’s sacrifices to idols: *“Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake... If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake... Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other...” (1 Cor. 10:25-29).* Eating meat that had previously been offered to idols was permitted **provided they did not know** of its previous use, because in that case they were not consciously aware of the significance that had been ascribed to it.

Paul’s instruction had a further significance. When eating those meats they were to consider the impression their eating would convey to others, that is, that when others saw them eating meat that had been offered to idols their eating could be construed by others to mean the Christians ate because they were also worshipping the idols. Thus they were to be circumspect regarding what they ate and who else would view them doing so. Paul did not tell them not to eat because its previous offering to idols had an effect on its status, but purely because of the impression their eating would give to others: *“Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin*

so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ” (1 Cor. 8:7-12).

Paul’s instruction contains some dramatic concepts: such action not only had the potential to give a false impression to others but also it could defile their conscience to the extent their faith could be overthrown and they would “perish”.

One example of one being troubled by the improper conduct of another is when Paul rebuked Peter because Peter withdrew himself from eating with the Gentiles and caused doubt in Barnabas’ mind: *“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. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Gal. 2:11-14).* So is established the importance of one’s conscience being governed by an accurate understanding of the truth.

Law abidance

The relationship between knowledge and conscience has particular application also to a Christian’s attitude towards the law of the land: *“Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom. 13:5-7).* It is comparatively easy for those who live in a democratic and “free” country to give lip service to Paul’s instruction, but the hardship and persecution meted out by some more restrictive regimes makes it difficult to honour those words.

Nevertheless the admonition is that the Christian is to obey the law of the land. One aspect of doing so that might provide some courage and strength is to realize the temporary nature of Man’s current human existence, and also that all rulers are merely puppets in God’s hands, regardless of whether they recognise it—even Pharaoh was God’s instrument: *“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth” (Rom. 9:17).* Paul states that it was God who raised up Pharaoh, not to promote Pharaoh’s prestige but that God might shew

His power through Pharaoh; that is, when God’s purpose in restraining the Israelites in Egypt was accomplished, He caused Pharaoh to relent: The nature of Pharaoh’s “raising” is not clearly stated except that it is stated several times in Exodus that God *“hardened his heart”* (Exod. 4:21; 7:13; 9:12; 10:1; 11:10; 14:4). It was the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart that led to the Passover and fulfilled God’s plan.

Nebuchadnezzar

Likewise Nebuchadnezzar was the human agent God used to fulfill His plan: *“And Jehozadak went into captivity, when **the LORD carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar**” (1 Chron. 6:15)—it was the Lord who carried away Judah and Jerusalem; Nebuchadnezzar being merely God’s agent, as testified by both Ezra and Jeremiah: “But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon... who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon” (Ezra 5:12). Jeremiah records: “And now have **I given** all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, **my servant**; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son’s son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine... **until I have consumed them** by his hand.” (Jer. 27:6-8). Nebuchadnezzar was God’s servant.*

Thus the principle is established: God *“... removeth kings, and setteth up kings...”* (Dan. 2:20-21) as He pleases to accomplish His wishes, and so all human dynasties are working out God’s purposes. Hence Christians are to obey the laws of the land, as Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus: *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”*(1 Tim. 2:1-2), and *“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work”* (Titus 3:1).

Dealing with the world

The Christian’s walk is not easy, and perhaps no aspect is more difficult than keeping one’s conscience and integrity pure, and particularly since everyone is in the flesh and hence no one is perfect. One consolation is to always remember that God knows every intention of everyone’s heart: *“For the word of*

God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:12-13). It was on that basis that the Apostle Paul was able to write: “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward” (2 Cor. 1:12).

The Apostle Peter added that it is necessary to remember that our reward is not in this age: *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 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); and “...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet. 3:15-16). It might be helpful to remember that it will be in the kingdom that the Christian’s conduct in this age will testify to the wisdom and righteousness of God.*

Integrity

Genesis 20:1-6 records Abimelech being exonerated because he acted according to his conscience: *“And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man’s wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the **integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands** have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the **integrity of thy heart**; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her”*. Abimelech did not act contrary to what he knew, having been told by both Abraham and Sarah that Sarah was Abraham’s sister, and hence God attributed Abimelech with integrity—he had not acted contrary to his conscience.

David also was one who pleaded with the Lord that he would be judged according to the integrity of his heart: *“... judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me” (Psa. 7:8). David knew the Lord looks upon the heart, as the Lord told Samuel: “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). David had a “pure heart”—he had acted in accordance with what he believed was right—and hence he asked God to judge him as one having integrity.*

Guidance

Integrity is not just a characteristic that is measured by one’s action but it also provides guidance; determination to preserve one’s integrity helps overcome temptations to act in an improper way: *“The integrity of the upright shall guide them...” (Prov. 11:3); and “the just man walketh in his integrity” (Prov. 20:7).*

Every member

There is a similarity between the assessment of the integrity of a building and the integrity of the Lord’s church. The assessment of the integrity of a building involves the assessment of the individual members that comprise it and whether they have been assembled correctly. Faulty components can cause the building to fail even though they are assembled correctly, and also improper construction might lead to failure even if the components are of an acceptable standard. Both aspects have to be examined to ensure the building will be strong enough to withstand the stresses that will be put upon it.

Likewise the integrity of the church—*“God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9)*—depends on the quality of each member and also on their contribution to the integrity of the overall structure.

The assessment of each individual involves their doctrinal conviction and also their dedication to the welfare of the church—together they are the antitypical assessment of the suitability of a structural component of a building. Assessment of both those aspects is required to ensure the building will have the strength that will be necessary to endure the stresses that will be brought to bear upon it.

However there is at least one vital difference between the acquisition of the properties required of the members of a physical building and the acquisition of the properties required of the members of God’s building: the members of the material building must possess the required attributes before they are

selected for the building, whereas the members of God's building are required to continue to grow and develop after they have been incorporated into the building: *"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). As Peter expressed it the members are to *"... grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..."* (2 Pet. 3:18).

Examine yourselves

The Christian must continually assess their innermost qualities—their conscience and integrity—to ensure their character is able to provide support for the

building, which in simple terms is their association with the saints. As Paul declared *"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men"* (Acts 24:16). It was an on-going exercise for Paul, and so it must be for all who would be members of the Lord's building: *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"* (Eph. 2:19-22). Indeed, *"know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which ye are"* (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Yes, indeed!■

MILK AND HONEY

The expression "flowing with milk and honey" is commonly used to describe the land of Israel—the "promised land". The phrase occurs in Exodus 3:8: *"And I will come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and bring them up out of that land unto a good, ample land, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite."* (Exodus 3:8).

According to <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/> published by IsraelVideoNetwork on 19 June 2015, many Jewish scholars believe that the milk and the honey are actually referring to the plentiful and magnificent produce of the land of Israel. The milk represents the livestock—the goats and cows—that give milk. Honey in Biblical times was mostly produced from dates and figs, thus representing the fruit of the Holy Land. The phrase almost gives the impression the produce will miraculously flow into the land; that "someone above" is overseeing things.

However, to those who know better, it is perplexing to hear the land described that way. Israel is not an easy land to develop. It has little natural resources, and, until this day, is highly dependent on rain, which is not a constant. When the people of Israel were exiled over 2000 years ago, it seems almost as if the Land of Israel went into mourning. It lay barren, a desert wasteland, where Bedouin tribes wandered to find areas of vegetation for their flocks of sheep and goats. Little grew and there were few who tried to produce anything from its dry and barren earth. In his book "Innocents Abroad", Mark Twain, after travelling through Israel, describes his impressions of the land in the year 1867: *"A desolate country whose*

soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds... a silent mournful expanse.... a desolation.... we never saw a human being on the whole route.... hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country."

However things have changed dramatically since those days. There is plenty of milk and honey. In the Kibbutz Yotvata in Israel's arid Arava region, Israel's cows produce far more milk per capita than in any other country in the world. For example, a cow in the U.S. or the U.K. produces, on the average, about 6000 litres of milk per year. A cow in Israel produces twice that much.

Not far from Kibbutz Yotvata lies Kibbutz Keturah. The kibbutz is known for its delicious dates. From the 12 date trees imported from California in the 1970s have sprung 10,000 date trees. Each tree produces 350 pounds of dates a year.

Date honey is the thing in Israel. Dr. Elaine Soloway, head of the kibbutz's orchards, managed to grow a date tree from a 2000 year-old date seed found in the archeological digs at Masada. The kibbutz has named the tree "Methusela".

Several Jewish scholars believe the current prosperity is a true sign that "the redemption" is near. *"But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come home."* (Ezek. 36:8). Today the trees of Israel have begun to yield fruit, and the land flows with milk and honey, while it awaits the greater abundance promised in Isaiah 35.■

A LOVING BROTHER FINISHES HIS COURSE



Br. David Simkin passed away on the 18th April 2015 aged 91. David had been attending the Melbourne Berean Bible Class since the late 1940's with his wife Sr. Betty.

David was an Elder in the Melbourne Class for many years and was instrumental in establishing a Sunday school for the Melbourne Class.

In 1983 he was elected Assistant Secretary to the Berean Bible Institute. With the failing health of Br E.E. Martin, David took over the activities of the Institute, moving the office equipment and stock from 19 Ermington Place, Kew to his

home in Briar Hill. He was instrumental in preparing the documents to facilitate the incorporation of the BBI in 1990, a move that exhibited great foresight and wisdom and which is the legal basis of the Berean Bible Institute Inc. today. David was editor of the Peoples Paper from August 1988 until 2007.

From approximately 1968 until 1980 Bro. David acted as "Ernest" in the weekly Australian production of the radio "Biblical Dialogue" program titled "Frank and Ernest". The program discussed Bible doctrine and prophecy. The program format was for "Ernest" to ask questions and "Frank" (Bro. E. Martin) would provide the answer. The program aired on 3GL (Geelong) and 3AK and 3UZ in Melbourne until the stations denied access.

David remained a member of the BBI until his death. He was always ready to assist the brethren. Many brethren in Australia are indebted to Bro. David for the encouragement God provided through him. ■

ZION HEARD—AND WAS GLAD

The following article is an excerpt from a presentation given in 1965; 50 years ago. It is published here because it might give some indication of the changing times in the world and also of the stability and continuity of the grounds for Christian faith: *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever"* (Heb. 13:8).

Of particular interest is the opening expression: *"in the midst of all this trouble and tumult in the world"*. If the unrest in the world in 1965 was justifiably described in those terms, what terms need to be used to describe the turmoil in the world in 2015?

* *

"But in the midst of all this trouble and tumult in the world, what is the attitude of the Lord's truly consecrated and faithful people? Are they, too, in fear? As the judgments of the Lord fall heavily upon the wayward and disobedient so that the whole earth reels and staggers as a drunken man (Psalms 107:27), are the saints in dismay and distress?

Ah, no; for it is written, *"Zion heard, and was glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoiced, because of Thy judgments, O Lord"* (Psa. 97:8). It is the "sinners in Zion" that are "afraid." Psalms 91 and 46 show why the saints rejoice and are restful of heart while others weep and lament. It is because they *"dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty"* (Psa. 91:1).

These dwellers in the secret place of the Most High are provided in these perilous times with a clear knowledge of the Divine Plan, with its times and seasons, which enables them to see both the necessity for the present method of Divine discipline upon the world and also the peaceable fruits of righteousness which will result therefrom. In the midst of the storm and battle of this great Day of the Lord, they hear the commanding voice of the Lord of Armies, and their hearts rejoice; for they have full confidence in His ability to bring order out of all the confusion. They realize that in the judgment of this day it is the Lord Who speaks from Heaven—from the high place of authority and control; therefore they give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness (Psalm 30:4)—of His Justice, Wisdom, Love and Power, which ensure that He is doing all things well.

The guidance and covering protection God gives to His people may be equated to the guidance and protection He gave the nation of Israel when He brought them out of Egypt: covered by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). Indeed God is their "Refuge and Strength".

And the place of this security and protection is indeed a secret; it affords a peace and quietness that is known only by those who are privileged to dwell there: *"under the shadow of the Almighty"*. May we all continue to rejoice in the rest this place provides. ■

SHALL HE FIND FAITH?

“Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)

In some circles emphasis has been placed on the word “faith” in Jesus’ words in Luke 18:8, contending that a “more precise” meaning of Jesus’ words is that He was referring to THE faith.

One basis for the contention is the Vatican manuscript as quoted by Benjamin Wilson in the interlinear translation in his Emphatic Diaglott. However the smooth reading translation is *“will he find this belief on the land”*—hence to what belief did Jesus refer?

The inclusion of the word “the”, as in the Diaglott interlinear column, is supported by a note in the margin in the Companion Bible that *“faith = the faith”*; and the Concordant Literal New Testament (which reads *“will He be finding the faith on the earth?”*). Also the Revised Version contains a note in the margin *“or the faith”* which means it is regarded as an alternative translation.

Strong’s Concordance lists only two occurrences of “the” in Luke 18:8, which may be allocated to its occurrence in the phrases *“the son of man”* and *“the earth”* in the verse. Unless Strong’s Concordance has overlooked a third occurrence in the verse, there is no provision in the verse for “the” to be included as a qualifier for “faith”.

A study of the Greek word translated “faith” in Luke 18:8 reveals that it occurs approximately 244 times in the King James Version, and an examination of several occurrences seems to indicate the word can be applied in a general sense. Thus resolution of the issue resorts to the inclusion of the word “the” in the Vatican manuscript as noted in the Diaglott (the parable is not reported in any of the other gospels).

More recent translations

Some more recent translations read:

- Scofield (1909): *“shall he find faith on the earth”*, with a note in the margin: *“The reference is not to personal faith but to belief in the whole body of revealed truth”*;
- Revised Standard Version (1881, with revisions in 1901 and 1946): *“will he find faith on earth?”*; and
- New International Version (1985): *“will he find faith on the earth?”*.

The declared objectives of the revisers are honourable and thus it is difficult to contend their translations are biased by their individual understanding. For example the Preface to the New International Version reads: *“The New International Version is a completely new*

translation of the Holy Bible made by over a hundred scholars working directly from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. It had its beginning in 1965...” (the project took 20 years).

The faith

Even if one concludes that Jesus was referring to a specific point of doctrine, that point has to be identified. The Emphatic Diaglott smooth reading uses the words *“this belief”* and so the question remains: to which belief was Jesus referring?

One guide should be the context. Luke 18:1 seems to indicate Jesus was referring to faith in a general sense, and particularly faith that God would hear their prayers. He illustrated His point by referring to a judge who did not believe in God and who for his own expediency absolved a petitioning woman. Jesus’ lesson was that if an unjust judge was prepared to (ultimately) hear the plea of a woman, they could be assured God would hear their prayers.

Such an interpretation might be deemed superficial and elementary, particularly by those who have been given deep insight into the Scriptures, as Paul implies: *“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 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 the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God”* (1 Cor. 2:7-10). Nevertheless the question remains: what was the faith to which Jesus referred?

Faith generally

Looking at the world at large, it seems possible that there is less faith now than in previous times—not necessarily religious faith but faith in anything. The contention is consistent with the general definition of faith: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb. 11:1). Compared with previous generations, the present generation (in the developed world) is impatient—2015 is a “now” generation; everything has to be instantly provided, the mind set perhaps being augmented by computers and other technological devices that eliminate or reduce waiting. One example is email: email provides an almost instantaneous means of obtaining written documents.■

THE CHRISTIAN'S PRAYERS

How can the Christian be sure that God will answer their prayers? It is not enough that they affirm their belief in prayer. For example many mothers have believed in prayer and have asked God to protect their sons on the battlefield, only to receive a message that they had been killed.

However there are thousands who are eager to testify that God has answered their prayers for the safety of their boys. Other thousands will testify of the wonderful manner in which God has given them other special blessings they requested. On the basis of experience alone, therefore, it may seem that God answers the prayers of some, yet does not answer the prayers of others. But that conclusion is inconsistent with a simplistic understanding of Romans 2:11—that “*there is no respect of persons with God*”. So, there must be some good reason why God seemingly answers some prayers, and not others.

Fundamental disposition

Prayer is a very important component of religion. It is practised widely by the adherents of all religions. The desire to pray is an acknowledgment of dependency upon a Higher Power; the expression of a realization that the one who offers the prayer needs help from some source outside of and higher than themselves. It would seem reasonable that God is pleased with the sincere desire of all who try to contact him in prayer, because to this extent at least it is a recognition of His sovereign power.

The almost universal urge to pray is due to the fact that originally man was created in the image of God. As a result of man's fall into sin and death the divine image in his character has been much blurred, in many cases almost erased, yet remnants of it still remain, and one of its manifestations is the urge to pray. There may be millions who never pray, yet often feel that they should, and have a sense of guilt because they do not. On this basis it is also reasonable to conclude that God is pleased with the spirit of prayer on the part of His creatures.

But why does God hear the prayers of some, while apparently other prayers go unheeded? Jesus hints at the answer to that question in His observations about the prayers of the scribes and Pharisees. They prayed to be seen and heard of men, Jesus explained, and they thought God would hear them for their much speaking. By this example Jesus reminded His disciples that there are proper and improper attitudes of prayer, as well as correct and incorrect methods. Those who spin their prayer wheels may be sincere, but their method is inappropriate.

Subject matter

The Scriptures also indicate that there are proper and improper things for which to pray. James wrote: “*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss*” (James 4:3). It is vitally important to ascertain for what the Christian has the privilege of asking God to give them in the way of favours.

God did not design prayer as a means of finding out how He should manage His affairs on earth. He is not looking to the Christian to tell Him what He should do. He has his own fixed plans and purposes, and if the Christian is to receive the riches of His blessing, it is essential that their prayers be in harmony with His plans. As James declared, the Christian asks “*amiss*” every time they petition God for blessings which He has not designed to give.

Intent

The Scriptures contain examples of various types of prayer. Foremost among them are prayers of thanksgiving. God is pleased when His creatures recognize Him as the source of their blessings, and because of this lift up their hearts and voices to him in thanksgiving.

Then there are prayers of adoration, prayers which give recognition to the glorious attributes of the Creator's character—His wisdom, His justice, His love, and His power. The desire to glorify God should be the motive for many prayers.

Prayers for God's mercy are also appropriate. The Scriptures urge all Christians to seek divine forgiveness of their sins through the medium of prayer. Hebrews 4:16 urges the Christian to “*come boldly to the throne of grace*” there to obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need.

Nevertheless there are prayers that are requests for certain blessings, or favours from the Lord. The question is to what extent should such prayers be the essence of the Christian's prayers?

Some pray for health, either for themselves or for others. Some pray for protection while on a journey. Millions pray for peace. It has often happened that citizens of countries which are opposing each other in war pray that their respective armies will be victorious. It is proper to presume that all who go to God in prayer are sincere, and ask Him for the things which to them seem the most important at the time.

But does the Bible declare that all such prayers should be granted? If such prayers are answered, it

simply means that it was in keeping with His will. God has a fixed plan, and that plan was not made to satisfy the whims and wishes of every individual. So what is the balance?

One common saying is that “prayer changes things” and that is certainly true from the human individual’s perspective, but it does not change God’s plans. God is not looking to human beings, nor to the nations, nor to the United Nations, to learn what changes He should make in order to improve conditions for any human being. How little confidence could the Christian have if God’s plans could be swayed or changed by the eloquence of human prayers!

“Thy Will Be Done”

God’s people should have uppermost in mind and heart the desire that His will be done in all their experiences, just as Jesus did in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with me. And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt”* (Matt. 26:38-39).

It was God’s will that Jesus should suffer humiliation and death as the Redeemer and saviour of mankind. This important feature of the divine plan had been foretold by the holy prophets in the Old Testament. And Jesus wanted above everything else to have the divine will accomplished, regardless of what it meant to Him. He affirmed this later, when He was about to be arrested: Peter drew his sword to protect his Master, Jesus said to him, *“Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”* (John 18:10, 11).

The followers of Jesus have the privilege of suffering and dying with him. Paul spoke of being “crucified” with Him, and he also wrote *“To you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”* (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:29). The Christian is called upon to follow in Jesus’ footsteps, so they know it is not God’s will to spare them from all hardship. Thus, as with Jesus, their chief concern should be that the Lord’s will might be done in their mortal bodies. The Lord’s will might be that for a time they enjoy certain earthly blessings, but the burden of their prayers should not be for them, but that His will be done. Jesus enlarged upon this point when He said to his disciples that as long as they were abiding in Him and His words were abiding in them, they could ask in prayer for whatever they desired, and it would be granted unto them (John 15:7). That might seem like an assurance that they are privileged to ask God for anything they may

happen to think of and want. But not so! Note the condition attached to this statement by the Master: *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you”*. To abide in Christ means to be a member of His body; He being their Head. This means that His thoughts become their thoughts, and His plans their plans. If their wills have thus been wholly surrendered to God, through Christ, they will have no will of their own, hence their prayers will not be requests for what they want, but only for those things which are in harmony with the will of their Head. By thus praying in harmony with the Lord’s will, they can be assured of favourable answers.

Such a disposition is in harmony with another statement made by Jesus to His disciples in which He informed them that the Heavenly Father will be pleased to give the *“Holy Spirit to them that ask him”* (Luke 11:13). To be filled with the Spirit of God means to have His thoughts dominate one’s thinking, and for their lives to be conformed to those thoughts. Then they will not be asking God for blessings except those which He has promised to give, and so there will never be any question about one’s prayers being answered.

“Thy Kingdom Come”

In response to the disciples’ request, *“Lord, teach us to pray”*, Jesus gave them what is now known as “The Lord’s Prayer”. An important part of this outline is the proper method of approach to God: *“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name”* (Luke 11:1, 2). Adam is styled a *“son of God”* (Luke 3:38). But when he sinned he lost his sonship, being alienated from God and sentenced to death. Adam’s children—the entire human race—are likewise aliens and strangers to God, so they cannot properly address him as *“our Father which art in heaven”*. To be able to address God as *“our Father”* is a privilege that belongs exclusively to those whom He has invited to be His sons, who have repented of their sins, accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour, and devoted their lives to God in full consecration to do His will. Such are described as having received God’s Spirit of sonship (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 4:6). As children of God, the Christian should desire above all else to honour the name of their Father. So by word and by action their attitude should always be *“Hallowed be thy name”*. To properly hallow God’s name necessitates that, when they approach God in prayer, they do so in the manner outlined by Jesus and recorded in the Scriptures—that their prayers will be offered in His name: *“Ye did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you”* (John 15:16). What a privilege it is to be invited to pray in His name!■

THE GOVERNMENT SHALL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Governance of an industrialized (developed) nation is a complex task. It requires detailed attention be given to a wide range of facilities and services, some of which are a national defence organisation, citizen access to health and welfare services (private and/or national), education, transport, national financial management, options for cultural pursuits and a regulatory framework that provides for input by the citizens.

Some of those functions are inter-related, for example, in Australia, the national financial interest rate is struck by the Reserve Bank. The rate affects both house prices and industrial investment—the lower the rate the greater is the incentive for industrial companies to borrow and invest (thereby stimulating the economy) but a low rate enables home buyers also to borrow more and so the price of housing increases, which makes it more difficult for some people to own their own home.

Another factor that increases the complexity is the difference in the living environments in different parts of the country, combined with variation in population density. Overall the population density in Australia is approximately 3 persons per square kilometre, but varies from 22.5 in New South Wales to 0.156 in the Northern Territory. Consequently it is not possible to provide the same level of services to those living in the Northern Territory as for those living in New South Wales. Such inequality has the potential to lead to dissatisfaction.

Additionally the difference in living standards is greater between developed countries and those countries that are more primitive.

Overall the situation is becoming more complex, as Jesus foretold: *“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”* (Luke 21:25). Perplexity is different from complexity: complexity is when there are many component parts and is made more complex when different parts interact with others; perplexity means a state of quandary—a puzzling situation for which there is no obvious solution.

The government

When individuals are unable to solve their problems they may appeal to the government for assistance. The resources available to the government are those

that have been recovered from its citizens and so in simple terms such requests are asking for help from the other citizens, masked in the term “government”. In such cases the government is expected to bear the responsibility of providing a solution. But in times of perplexity the government might not have the necessary resources to do so. Thus the promise in Isaiah 9:6 is that the Son will be responsible for the welfare of the people—He will be the government.

The shoulder

The certainty of the promise that the Son will take the reins and govern the people is confirmed by the statement that the burden of government will be upon His shoulder.

Historically the load required to be carried was placed on the shoulder: *“And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take ye up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder...”* (Joshua 4:5). *“And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder...”* (Isa. 10:27). Thus the promise that the government shall be upon His shoulder is a confirmation that He will take all responsibility for the events that transpire on the earth at that time.

No end

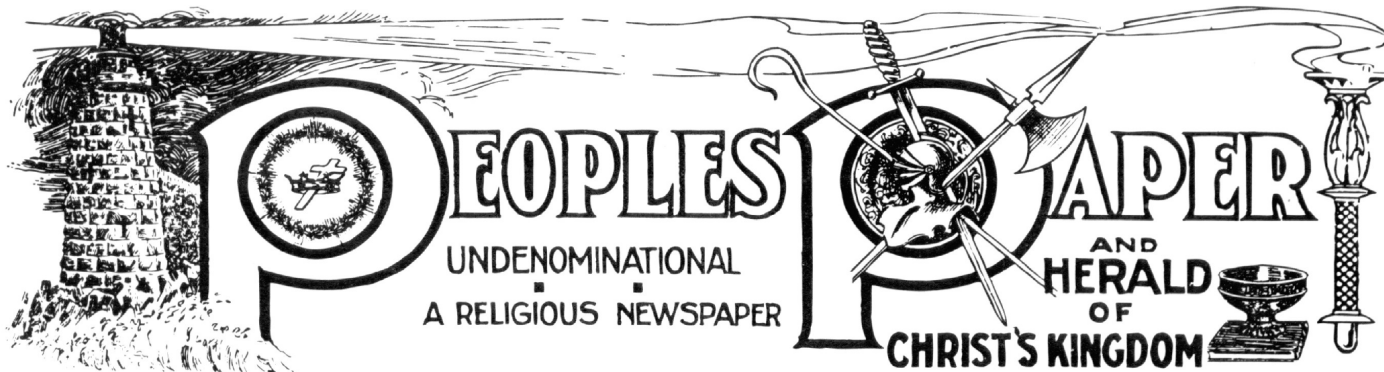
The final aspect of the kingdom being on the Son’s shoulder is that the benefits will extend to all peoples: *“Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end”* (Isa. 9:7). Such a promise means there will not be any disparity or inequality of the benefits afforded by the government due to the people dwelling in different locations: *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (Isa. 11:9). Indeed *“all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God”* (Isa. 52:10) and shall rejoice (Rom. 15:10).■

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THE BABE OF BETHLEHEM

“And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not” (Luke 3:15)

There are several features of Jesus’ first advent that confirm His coming was in accord with the Father’s plan, as Paul declared: *“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law”* (Gal. 4:4).

One feature is that it was *“the people (who) were in expectation”*; not the rulers or the prophets. The people believed there were prophets in their day—for example Agabus (Acts 21:10)—however the definition of the Greek word from which the word *“people”* in Luke 3:15 is translated confirms that it was the people in general who were in expectation of His coming. (Prophets were the successors of “seers” who could “see” or perceive future events that others could not “see”. 1 Samuel 9:9 equates the two: *“Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to enquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer”*).

The “foreknowledge” of the “seers” was not revealed only to their contemporaries but was recorded in the written prophecies for the benefit of later generations: *“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel”* (Matt. 2:1-6). The prophet to whom the priests and scribes referred was Micah (Micah 5:2), which means that, although the people were in expectation of Him, Herod did not know of the prophecy. Such selective

revelation shows that God reveals His plan only to those whom He wishes to enable them to carry out what He had planned for that time.

Consistent with God revealing His plans only to some, later Jesus’ identity was concealed from the general people: *“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). Thus at that time the Israelites did not realize who He was: *“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not”* (John 1:10-11). Thus the disciples’ realization that Jesus was the Messiah was given to them specifically by God in order to fulfill His purpose—as Jesus said: *“blessed are thou Simon Barjona for flesh and blood has not revealed it into thee”*.

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Ahaz

Another feature of Jesus' birth was that God gave the prophecy that He would be born of a virgin through an unrighteous king, Ahaz: *"In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign... and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem, and did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God, like David his father. But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel"* (2 Kings 16:1-3). 2 Chron. 28:19 gives further testimony that Ahaz was unrighteous: *"the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD"*. Thus it was to an unrighteous king that the Lord revealed that Jesus' mother would be a virgin: *"... the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying... the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"* (Isa. 7:10-14).

Jesus also confirmed God reveals His plan only to those whom He wishes: *"In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight"* (Luke 10:21).

Abraham

In view of Jesus' first advent being somewhat shrouded in mystery it is remarkable that when Mary became aware of her role in bringing the Saviour into the world, she immediately attributed it to being a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, a prophesy given centuries previously that *"In thee and in thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed"* (Gen. 12:1-3). Mary said: *"He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever"* (Luke 1:54-55).

Zacharias

Likewise Zacharias, in his declaration at the birth of John the Baptist, was given the realization that the time of the Saviour's birth was imminent and that John would herald the One by whom the Lord would redeem Israel, in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham: *"And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began... To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his*

holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins" (Luke 1:67-77). Zacharias' inclusion of *"remission of their sins"* in his declaration implies Zacharias was given insight into Jesus' mission—that He was the Saviour of mankind from the curse of death.

John the Baptist

Although Zacharias declared John the Baptist's mission and understood the relationship between John and Jesus, the scribes were not given such knowledge, even though they were aware of the prophecy of Elias: *"And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead. 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. 17:9-13).

Pentecost

The mystery of Jesus' redemptive mission was not fully understood even by His disciples, not even when He was crucified, in spite of Him having been with them for more than three years: *"And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done"* (Luke 24:15-21).

Their uncertainty persisted after His resurrection until they received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost:

“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:6-8).

Hence the significance of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost is brought into focus, a synopsis of which follows: *“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting... And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance... But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words... this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh... Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it*

was not possible that he should be holden of it... 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. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:1-36).

The culmination

The ‘mystery’ of the babe who was born in Bethlehem is still a mystery to the world of mankind at large, being understood only by those to whom God has revealed Him: *“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 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 the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:7-10).*■

OUR REASONABLE SERVICE

“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” (Rom 12:1 KJV).

Romans 12:1 contains only a few words, but the verse addresses several important aspects of the Christian’s walk.

Beseech

The first aspect arises from the word “beseech”. In the English language “beseech” means to “implore earnestly”, or to “beg eagerly” (Australian Macquarie Dictionary), and several of the 108 occurrences of the Greek word from which “beseech” is translated reflect that meaning, not denying the fact that the Greek is translated into several different English words, some of which are not normally understood to have the same degree of passion or urgency. Two instances are:

- *“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye*

be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Paul always urged the Christians—implored them—to live together in unity (as in Ephesians 4:3);

- *“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation)” (2 Cor. 6:1-2).* Paul urged the believers to recognise that the invitation that had been given to them was unique and must not be passed up nonchalantly: *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called... But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:26-30).*

Therefore

The word “therefore” implies Paul’s exhortation is the logical conclusion the Romans should have reached when they considered their privileged position: that is, being grafted in to the olive tree as explained in chapter 11: *“For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in (Rom. 11:25); “For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief”(Rom. 11:30).*

The nation of Israel as a whole had failed to appreciate their opportunity as explained in chapter 11—*“Israel had not obtained that which he seeketh for, but the election hath obtained it” (Rom. 11:7).* Paul urged the believers to realize that it was *“because of unbelief that they (the natural branches—Israelites) were broken off” (Rom. 11:20),* and which allowed them (Gentiles) to be *“grafted in” (Rom. 11:19)* and thus they were the *“election”*. Further they were to realize that the breaking off of the Israelites was in accordance with God’s plan and their (Gentiles) standing was not a cause for pride: *“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” (Rom. 11:25-26).*

Brethren

Paul’s exhortation (or beseeching) was not an appeal for mankind in general to come to repentance but was a call for the consecrated believers in Christ to be a living sacrifice—those whom he called *“brethren”*.

The expression “brethren” has special import: the Greek root contains the thought of closeness, as those who have come from the same womb, and in several instances the word applies specifically to siblings: *“And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them” (Matt. 4:21).* James and John were “blood brothers”—natural brethren.

Jesus regarded the relationship between Himself and His disciples as equally intimate: *“While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and*

said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Matt. 12:46-50).

The term “brethren” is also used by the Apostle Paul to express his emotional closeness to Philemon: *“Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?” (Philemon 16).* Paul regarded Philemon more dearly than a servant—indeed as a brother.

The spirit of brotherhood extended beyond the Jews, embracing Gentile believers: *“And they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia” (Acts 15:23).* Thus Paul’s exhortation to the Romans when he called them “brethren” had the full force of an intimate spiritual relationship.

The mercies of God

Mercy is extended when one who has superior resources extends favour and compassion to one who is indebted to them. Paul exhorted the Colossians to exercise mercy towards each other: *“... there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col. 3:11-13).* They were exhorted to practise mercy and forgiveness towards all, Greek and Jew alike.

God is merciful. It is because of His mercy that He sent Jesus to earth to redeem mankind from death and it is His mercy that He has called some to present their bodies as a living sacrifice.

A living sacrifice

A sacrifice is something that is surrendered to another. The nation of Israel was required under their Law Covenant with God to offer animals as sacrifices. This required the slaughter of the animals—the giving up of its life as a symbol of their subserviency and consecration to God.

Likewise Jesus gave up His life as a sacrifice to God: *“And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour” (Eph. 5:2).*

Hitherto the sacrifices offered by the Israelites because of their obligations under the Law Covenant,

and Jesus' sacrifice, required the physical (literal) death of the sacrifice. However the exhortation in Romans 12:1 is for the brethren to present their bodies as a "living sacrifice" that is while they remained alive.

The concept of being a living sacrifice is explained in Hebrews 13:12-16: "*Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach... By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*". The "sacrifice of praise" is to be offered during one's present lifetime on earth: "*the fruit of our lips*" is not limited to the words one speaks but includes one's whole life style. It may be summarized as practising love to all and fulfills the requirements of the Law, including the sacrifices required under it: "*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law... let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof*" (Rom. 13:10-14). As Hebrews 13:16 states, such a life style is pleasing to God.

Further, "casting off the works of darkness" requires a change from one's previous life style and hence brings criticism and ridicule from one's previous associates: "*For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you*" (1 Pet. 4:3-4). Suffering such disdain from previous associates is part of the Christian's "sacrifice of praise".

Holy, acceptable to God

One of the secrets of God's plan is that He deems those who are striving to live in accord with the instructions in His Word as being holy or righteous and thus their sacrifices are deemed "holy": "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love*" (Eph. 1:3-4). One should not imagine they are actually holy, but that they are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6), that is, God attributes the

righteousness of His Son to them. In a word, God regards them as justified—and therefore righteous.

Our reasonable service

In view of God's grace in deeming anyone as being righteous, it is **reasonable** the Christian should respond by presenting themselves to God as a sacrifice, that is, forgoing their personal preferences so they can serve God.

Serving God in one's daily life may be regarded as the least one can and should do in recognition of God's grace. However there is another concept that may be attached to the word "service". In general terms one worships another when they seek to please them, and hence serving God by conduct that is in accord with His wishes may be regarded as a form of worshipping Him.

Strong's Concordance confirms that the Greek word translated "service" embraces the idea of "worship": "G2999 latreia; *ministration* of God, that is, *worship*". The Greek word occurs five times: John 16:2, Romans 9:4, 12:1, Hebrews 9:1 and verse 6. Hebrews 9:6 reads: "*Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God*".

In view of the grace that God has extended to believers offering one's life as a sacrifice is a reasonable request. The Greek for "reasonable" (Strong's G3050: *logikos*) occurs only twice: Romans 12:1 where it is translated "service", and 1 Peter 2:2 where it is translated "of the word": "*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious*". Peter's use of the word "logikos" admits wide interpretation of its meaning, hence it is not possible to be definitive regarding the meaning of "reasonable" in Romans 12:1. However the idea of compliance with the code of conduct that God requires of those who wish to worship Him may be regarded as sensible and not beyond the bounds of what any human being may regard as fair.

Indeed it is by the mercies of God that any human being is invited to present their body as a living sacrifice which God regards as holy.■

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FAITH, VIRTUE AND KNOWLEDGE

"... giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge" (2 Peter 1:5).

The Apostle Peter's words quoted above imply the Christian's walk is progressive: they must *"add to their faith"*. Further, there is a sequence to be followed: firstly virtue is to be added to faith followed by knowledge to be added to virtue. However, before any additions can be made, there must be faith, which means faith is the cornerstone of the Christian's *"life and godliness"* (2 Pet. 1:3).

Faith

The first requirement is faith: *"Without faith it is impossible to please Him for he that cometh to God must believe that He is and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him"* (Heb. 11:6).

Faith is a gift from God: *"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's logic is sound—if faith were a result of one's own efforts it would be grounds for boasting.

It is necessary also to realise that the Christian's faith is not a vague mysterious concept but a positive conviction: *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Heb. 11:1). Faith requires there be a *"substance"*, that is, something definite for which one hopes—in 2 Peter 1:3 the Christian's hope is defined as for *"glory and virtue"*.

Evidence

Hebrews 11:1 also defines faith as *"the evidence of things not seen"*. In secular law proceedings evidence is the basis or information upon which a decision is made whether the accused is guilty, that is convicted of the alleged offence. And it is likewise with the Christian's faith—not only must there be substance to the faith—what they believe—but also they must be convicted their hope is real (supported by the promises in God's word).

Hence a mere profession of faith is not enough—it must be demonstrated by *"works"*: *"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works?... faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone"* (Jas. 2:14-17). It is only when one is convicted that what they believe is the truth, and to the extent that they are prepared to act in accordance with their conviction regardless of the

consequences, that their faith is complete—that is, testified by works.

Only those to whom God has given His Holy Spirit are able to have faith in God's word: *"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Cor. 2:12-14). Thus a person to whom God has not given the Holy Spirit is unable to have faith in God's promises because they cannot know the things that are revealed only to those who have the Spirit—the things that are the substance of faith.

Paul also explains that God's selection is not based on one's standing in the world: *"For you see your calling, brethren, not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called"* (1 Cor. 1:26), which is in accord with Jesus' words: *"And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"* (Mark 2:15-17). The Christian must be acutely aware of the privilege God has given them of understanding His purposes and plans.

Fullness of time

A Christian's conviction of the hope given to them should be strengthened not only by knowing God has given them their faith as a gift, but also by their knowledge of the privileged time in which they live. The opportunity to hope for the Christian's reward and of being adopted as a son of God was not available before Jesus' first advent: *"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son... that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father"* (Gal. 4:4-6). The giving of the Holy Spirit

after Jesus' death and resurrection marked the beginning of a new era in God's plan: "... *David... being a prophet... spake of the resurrection of Christ... Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear*" (Act 2:29-33). Thus Paul wrote: "*Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit...*" (Eph 3:1-6). As Jesus said to His disciples: "*But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men (who lived in previous times) have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them*" (Matt. 13:16-17).

All their needs

In spite of the called ones being of lowly human estate, God has provided all they need to overcome the world: "*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue*": *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*" (2 Pet. 1:3-4). Peter implies knowledge of the promises of God is essential for the Christian to overcome the corruption in the world.

Virtue

While faith—knowledge and conviction of things hoped for—is essential for the Christian to overcome the world, it is not sufficient on its own: the Apostle Peter states that the Christian must add virtue to their faith: "*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue...*" (2 Pet. 1:5).

The term "virtue" is not frequently used in common communication today. The Greek word occurs only five times in Scripture and is rendered "virtue" in four of them, the exception being 1 Peter 2:9 where it is translated "praises": "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy*".

Strong's Concordance defines the Greek word (#703) as 'manliness or valour, excellence'. Young's Concordance defines the Greek word as "force, strength (of mind or body)". Thus virtue means strength—either the strength of God as in 1 Peter 2:9—or the strength of character God has given to

man that enables them to demonstrate their faith—their conviction—by their works. Just as faith without works is dead, so also faith without virtue will fail because of a lack of strength to carry out the "works".

Knowledge

Once one has a conviction of the truths of God's word—that they have been called (given a special privilege to understand the basics of God's work in them), and having developed the strength to exhibit their belief by their life style (virtue)—they are ready to gain more knowledge regarding the advanced truths of God's plan, termed "meat" in Hebrews 5:13-14: "*For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*".

A gradual leading into the truths of God's word exemplifies His wisdom. As it is in the secular world so it is in the spiritual—knowledge tends to puff up: "... *Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know*" (1 Cor. 8:1-2). Initially God reveals only the milk of the Word to those whom He has called, providing the sustenance they need to grow until they are ready to appreciate that a knowledge of God's word is a privilege and must be accepted in a spirit of humility. In other words, they must grow until they have come to the realization expressed by Paul that a knowledge of God's plan is beyond price: "*Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things... that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness... but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith*" (Phil. 3:8-9).

Peter summed it up in his closing exhortation: "*Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever*" (2 Pet. 3:14-18). Growth in grace—the grace (or favour) of God in having given them of His Spirit—and knowledge of His purposes in the giving of His Son Jesus Christ that they may be called the Sons of God (1 John 3:1)—are essential to the Christian for them to attain unto "*life and godliness*".

Only those to whom God has given His Holy Spirit, who develop strength (virtue) and who progress in their knowledge of God's word will attain their goal of "*life and godliness*".■

THREE HOLY CITIES

The following article is an extract from a video presented by *Israel Video Network* on 6 June 2015. It provides some insight into the current Israeli psyche regarding the sanctity of their land.

* * *

If Israel is the “Holy Land”, there are some cities in Israel that have been deemed the “holy of holies”. These are cities with special historical and spiritual significance to the Jewish People. The three cities mentioned below have very different histories and qualities, and together they provide a blend of old and new, and an aura of spirituality of holiness to the Holy Land. And, although there are several other cities one can claim should have made the high-holy list, these three are those who have endured and maintained their special status throughout the centuries. The list includes Hebron, Jerusalem and Tiberias.

Hebron

Hebron, a truly ancient city, is mentioned repeatedly in the bible. The very beginnings of the People of Israel lie in this very city. Abraham and Sarah settled in Hebron after living in Shechem (Nablus). It was there that Sarah died and Abraham purchased a burial place for her, the Cave of Machpelah: *“And Sarah died in Kiriat Arba--the same is Hebron--in the land of Canaan; and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her”* (Gen. 24:2). *“And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the hearing of the children of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant... And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre--the same is Hebron--in the land of Canaan.”* (Gen. 24:16,19). It was in this very burial place in Hebron that all of the matriarchs and patriarchs were buried (with the exception of Rachel who was buried in Bethlehem), and Jewish sources say that Adam and Eve were buried there as well. Hebron houses not only the roots of the Jewish nation, but those of all mankind.

Hebron is located in the mountains, one of the highest cities in Israel. It is also one of the oldest cities in Israel and in the entire world. This was the capital of King David’s empire until he moved it northwards to Jerusalem, which is the capital of the State of Israel today 3000 years after.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem was not yet a city during the time of Abraham and yet, according to tradition, was the site of the offering of Isaac: *“And it came to pass after these things, that God did prove Abraham, and said unto him: ‘Abraham’; and he said: ‘Here am I.’ And He*

said: ‘Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of’” (Gen. 22: 1-2).

The land of Moriah, also known as Mount Moriah, was another name for the Temple Mount and thus, thousands of years later, it is that mountain that King David purchases and his son, King Solomon, builds the holy temple. There is so much tradition and Jewish history focused and concentrated in that one city, Jerusalem, the capital of King David’s kingdom and the kingdom of Judah, the home of the holy Temple. Jerusalem is a city that has experienced thousands of years of political intrigue, wars, peace, religious devotion, exiles, rebuilding, destruction and again rebuilding. For thousands of years of exile the Jewish people prayed for their return to the land of Israel and the rebuilding of their homeland and the holy Temple while facing Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

Another name for Jerusalem is Zion: *“Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion; the same is the city of David”* (2 Sam. 5:7). *“Do good in Thy favor unto Zion; build the walls of Jerusalem”* (Psa. 51:20). The name Zion in turn became the word which most strongly symbolized the longing of the Jewish People to return to their land and the holy city of Jerusalem. Thus the Zionist movement chose this as its name. From the day that King David moved his capital to Jerusalem, it has remained the heart and the soul of the Jewish People.

Tiberias

Yet there were dark times for the Jewish nation. One of these dark periods took place under the rule of the Roman Empire. The Romans wanted to weaken the Jewish People and persecuted and oppressed them and their spiritual leadership. The hub of the Jewish spiritual leadership was the Sanhedrin, the high court of the People of Israel, which consisted of 71 scholars of Jewish law, of high moral and spiritual stature, who sat in a hall called the Chamber of Hewn Stone adjacent to the Holy Temple. As the Romans began to persecute the members of the Sanhedrin, and consequently destroyed the Temple, it was necessary for the Sanhedrin to relocate again and again. Thus the Sanhedrin began a long journey, wandering from place to place until it came to its final residence in Tiberias, on the banks of the Sea of Galilee.

The Jerusalem Talmud was written and sealed in Tiberias and thus was considered to offer a refuge to the spiritual leadership and Torah scholars and so may be added to the list of the “holy cities”.■

KINGS OR A KINGDOM?

“And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen”. (Rev. 1:6 KJV)

“And he made us to be a kingdom, to be priests unto his God and Father; to him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever, Amen” (Rev. 1:6 RV).

One of the requirements of the Christian’s walk is to grow so that, over time, they will be able to explain the Scriptures to others: *“For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God...”* (Heb. 5:12).

To that the Apostle Peter adds the requirement that one should be able to answer any question, and that the answer be supported by reason: *“be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you...”* (1 Peter 3:15).

Revelation 1:6 is one verse of Scripture that may be used to support an understanding of the reward that awaits the over-comers. However the conclusion that may be drawn from the verse varies with the translation used to reference it: the King James Version uses the word *“kings”*, whereas the Revised Version translates the Greek word as *“kingdom”*.

Changing the Greek from *“kings”* to *“kingdom”* might have at least two effects:

- Changing the status of *“us”* from rulers (*“kings”*) to being subjects—of a *“kingdom”*; and
- Changing the time period to which the status of the *“us”* class relates—if *“kings”* is retained the verse may be used to describe the reward of the saints in the Millennial Age, whereas if the word is changed to *“kingdom”* the verse may be interpreted to refer to the status and mission of the church during the Gospel Age (and maybe not excluding its reference to the status of the church during the Millennial Age).

And so the question is for which *“hope”* is it proper to use Revelation 1:6 as *“the reason”*?

Other translations

All of the following versions translate Revelation 1:6 to read *“kingdom”*;

- Revised Standard Version (RSV);
- American Standard Version (ASV);
- New International Version (NIV);
- Concordant Literal New Testament (CLNT);
- The New Scofield Reference Bible (Scofield);
- Emphatic Diaglott (Diag.); and
- Companion Bible (margin).

Original text

Translation of the Scriptures into English is

particularly difficult because the original documents are not available, hence translators have had to rely on copies which might have consciously or inadvertently used different English words to translate the original Greek text.

Interpolations

The task is further complicated by some comments in the margins of copies having been incorporated into the text of later versions upon which further revisions are based. One example is 1 John 5:7-8. In the KJV it reads: *“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one”*.

However the RV reads: *“And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three who bear witness, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and the three agree in one”*—there is no mention of heaven, the Father, and that the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost are one.

The NIV does not mention the Spirit being truth, thus differing from the RV: *“For there are three that testify: the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement”*.

The difficulty of ascertaining the meaning of the original text is increased by the definitions given in the concordances being based on manuscripts which might contain such interpolations, and hence concordances cannot be used as the sole authority. Nevertheless it is worth noting what the concordances say about *“the Greek”* in Revelation 1:6.

Concordance analysis

Regarding Revelation 1:6 both Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance and Young’s Analytical Concordance agree that the Greek word is *“basileus”* and support its translation as *“kings”*:

- Strong’s Concordance defines *“kings”* as: “G935 βασιλεύς (basileus)—Probably from G939 (through the notion of a *foundation* of power); a *sovereign* (abstractly, relatively or figuratively)”. G935 is translated only as *“king”*. However the reference in Revelation 1:6 is prefixed with an asterisk to indicate that a different word is used in the Revised Version (Strong’s Concordance: page 4 “Directions and

Explanations” #1); and thus acknowledges the translation given in the RV;

- Young’s Concordance agrees the Greek translated “kings” or “kingdom” in Revelation 1:6 is “basileus”, and confirms the meaning is “king”. However it encloses its occurrence in brackets to indicate this occurrence is one of “Various Readings of the Greek New Testament” (Young’s Concordance page v).

Thus further analysis is required to ascertain why, in Revelation 1:6, several translations other than the KJV render “basileus” as “kingdom”.

The text for the Concordances

The next step is to investigate the manuscripts used by the Concordances.

Page 3 of Strong’s Concordance reads: *“This work, as the title page indicates, consists of... a verbal index to the Holy Scriptures, as they exist in the three most important forms now known to British and American readers and scholars, namely... the “Authorized” and “Revised” English Versions”.* Thus while the accuracy of Strong’s Concordance regarded the definition of each Greek word may be taken as beyond doubt, it is based on a “somewhat later” version of the original text and if there were errors in that later version the errors would be perpetuated in the Concordance. Nevertheless the consistency of the Revised Version and Strong’s Concordance is vindicated—the Revised Version was first published in 1884 and Strong’s Concordance was not published until 1894, ten years after the RV—Strong’s Concordance accurately reflects the text used for the RV.

On the other hand Young’s Concordance was first published in 1879, five years before the RV, *“and is designed to lead the simplest reader to a more correct understanding of the common English Bible, by a reference to the original words in Hebrew and Greek, as explained by the most recent critics—Furst, Robinson &c”* (Young’s Concordance page v).

Hence the KJV—*“appointed by The Most High and Mighty Prince James”* in 1611 *“to be read in churches”*—was produced more than 250 years before either Strong’s or Young’s Concordances.

Related Greek words

Ascertaining the meaning of the original Greek text—and keeping in mind that copies were made by hand—is made more difficult by there being five Greek words that relate to the concept of kings and kingdoms. The meanings below are those given in Young’s Concordance (chosen because it was published before Strong’s Concordance):

- Basileia: kingdom (in phrases “kingdom of God”);

- Basileios: royal;
- Basileuo: king; reign;
- Basileus: king;
- Basilikos: royal, kings country, nobleman.

The small differences in the spelling of the various words illustrates the potential for copies to differ from the original text. Nevertheless why do several translations translate “basileus” as kingdom in Revelation 1:6 when the KJV renders it “kings” and both Concordances agree the meaning is “kings”?

One possibility is that the original text used by the later translators differed from the text used for the translation of the KJV, that is, that the later manuscripts read “Basileia” whereas the manuscript used for the KJV reads “Basileus”.

The text of the Companion Bible is that of the KJV. However the Companion Bible margin for Revelation 1:6 contains the note: “kings and priests = (to be) a kingdom (so all texts) and (to be) priests”. It has not been possible to identify the authority on which this comment is based—just what is referenced by “all texts”. However the margin comment “to be” raises the question to which time period does the text relate?

Revelation 5:10 and Revelation 20:6

In the KJV, Revelation 5:10 reads: *“And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth”.* However all of the other translations listed earlier have changed “kings” to “kingdom” (the Diaglott uses “king” in the interlinear but “kingdom” in the smooth reading). The Greek manuscript from which the KJV is translated reads “basileus”—kings.

In the KJV Revelation 20:6 reads: *“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years”.* None of the translations listed earlier mention they will be “kings”—all state they will be priests. That point may be considered significant in trying to ascertain the meaning of the original text in Revelation 1:6. Indeed to add some weight to the significance of the omission of “kings”, the Companion Bible margin refers back to Revelation 1:6 where the margin states the proper meaning is “kingdom of priests”.

Basileios

The only verse where the Greek “basileios” occurs is 1 Peter 2:9 where it is translated “royal”: *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light”.* All of the versions listed above agree that the “chosen

generation is a “royal priesthood”; there is no suggestion of them being “kings”.

The “royal priesthood” may be considered to be servants in a royal household, rather than be a ruling class. In previous times the nation of Israel was a “royal priesthood”: *“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: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel”* (Exod. 19:5-6). The nation of Israel was not designated a kingly class but rather a serving class: *“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul”* (Deut. 10:12).

Witness

The prophet Isaiah introduces the concept that, as well as being servants, Israel was God’s witness: *“Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen...”* (Isa. 43:10).

Likewise the present “chosen generation” is both a servant—whose task is to “show forth the praises of

Him who has called them out of darkness” (1 Pet. 2:9)—and also a witness: *“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). Perhaps unknowingly to the world of mankind in general, the conduct of the present “chosen generation” will contribute to their restitution and glorification of God in the future.

A glorious future

While the thrust of this article might seem to deny a glorious reward for the over comers, their reward will be one of great glory: *“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God”* (Rom. 8:16-19). Hence *“... 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. 4:13).■

EAGLES: A LESSON FROM NATURE

*F*or the LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. *“As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him”* (Deut. 32:9-12).

The Lord used the eagle to illustrate His care for Israel. The eagle is a remarkable creature. It can use high winds to soar to great heights. It has keen vision that can see a mouse from a mile high and can also look at the sun at noonday.

These verses speak of the eagle stirring up her nest. Because eagles are big birds, they use sticks to make their nest. When the eaglets become of age to leave the nest, the mother eagle will tear out all the grass and down from within the nest and suddenly that comfortable nest begins to poke and stick the eaglets. It is time to leave the nest.

As the eaglets spread their wings while learning to fly on their rocky ledges, the mother eagle flutters over

her young. When each eaglet takes its maiden voyage, the mother eagle will spread her wings under her eaglet and bear them up, bearing them on eagle wings until they have sufficient strength to fly alone.

The last thing the eaglets are taught is how to soar. Unless these young eagles learn how to set their wings and harness the opposing winds, the winds would exhaust them quickly. By setting the wings at the proper angle they can stay aloft using the high winds to give them lift just as a sailplane.

The lesson is very clear. The Lord does not leave His people in comfortable nests for long. The day must come in every Christian's life when the Lord will stir up the nest, turning them out into the elements, but all the while fluttering over them and quickly bearing them up on eagle wings when their weak wings falter. Then they must learn to soar on eagle wings, using the opposing forces of life to soar to higher heights, renewing their strength as the eagle. The eagle does not fight the opposing winds, but harnesses them while renewing its strength.

As He did for Jacob, He leads, instructs and watches over them that are His—those He “found”. ■

HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED: WONDERFUL

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Elliot Rabin, in his treatise “Understanding The Hebrew Bible” writes: “Unlike the versions we read in translations the Hebrew text contained no punctuation, no commas, quotation marks, upper or lower case, no division between sentences, not even vowels”. Hence it is not surprising that the punctuation shown in current versions varies between translations. One example is Isaiah 9:6: the King James Version has a comma after the word “Wonderful”, whereas neither the Revised Standard Version nor the New International Version inserts a comma in that place.

The insertion of a comma separates the titles ascribed to The Child and so this article addresses the concept of Jesus being Wonderful.

The Hebrew word translated “wonderful” in Isaiah 9:6 means a miracle. The meaning of miracle is “something greater than or beyond human or natural powers” (Macquarie Dictionary; which is now the official Australian dictionary).

There are several aspects of Jesus’ role during the time to which Isaiah 9 relates, at which the world of mankind will marvel—wonder.

Firstly there is the phenomenon of Him being the agent by whom God created the universe: “*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). Such a position was indeed one of great glory as He said before He returned to 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).

His coming to Earth—being transformed from a spirit being that does “*not have flesh and bones*” (Luke 24:39) into a human being—represented a degree of humility about which mankind can only wonder.

The mechanism of His birth—born of a virgin—was also a miracle at that time, and indeed still would be were it not for Man’s intervention in the natural processes with which the Lord blessed mankind. But

maybe the main point in that procedure was that He did not come as a king but as a child, born in the same way as all human beings and learning the “mysteries” of the human race by asking questions of His elders: “*And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions*” (Luke 2:46).

In the light of His heritage it is remarkable that He was prepared to not only give His life for the welfare of others but to do so in the most despised way—crucifixion. Indeed, “*scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom. 5:7-8). Certainly no greater sacrifice could have been given: “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13).

While all these historic events are aspects about which one can wonder, the greatest source of amazement will be what He accomplishes when He takes control of the world: “*For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood... (but) Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever...*” (Isa. 9:4-7). “*Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*” (1 Cor. 15:24-28). When mankind understands these things they will call Him Wonderful!■

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