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This edition of the *Peoples Paper* is indexed No. 1 of Volume 100.

The first edition of the *Peoples Paper* was issued on 1 July 1918, which means that, if it continues to be published until 30 June 2018, it will have been published for 100 years. While the first two issues planned for 2017 are in the 99th year of publication, it is considered noteworthy that this edition opens Volume 100 (research indicates that Volume 1 was used for the 6 issues published each month from July 1918 until December 1918; the January 1919 issue opened Volume 2. It is planned, D.V., to reprint the first article of the first edition in the July-September 2018 issue: No. 3 of Volume 101).

Their expectation

One may wonder which subjects were exercising the minds of the publishers almost 100 years ago, and whether they had any expectation that the *Peoples Paper* would continue until Volume 100.

In the early years of the twentieth century some Bible students expected that by, or shortly after, 1915 the present order (kosmos) would be dissolved and God's kingdom would be established. Indeed, a list titled *"Twenty Time Proofs That The Reign of Evil Will Cease and The Earthly Phase of the Kingdom of God Be Established in 1914-1915"* was compiled and distributed prior to 1914. The articles and publications referenced in the list were compiled between 1895 and 1907, which means the earliest of the articles mentioned in the list was written about 20 years before its expected fulfillment, and the latest article was written just 7 to 8 years before its expected fulfillment.

However the events that transpired during the twentieth century, and that are now occurring in the twenty-first century, indicate that evil has not ceased. Indeed a broad scale summary of the evil in the world today may be justifiably interpreted to mean that evil is waxing worse and worse, as Paul warned Timothy: *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own*

elves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away... Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth... evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:1-13).

On a national level

While Paul's warning related to the corruption that would characterize many individuals, the same characteristic of unrest and conquest has been evident at the national level in the form of wars. Some of the more significant wars fought during the twentieth century were:

- 1914-1918:** World War I;
- 1915-1918:** Armenian Genocide;
- 1917:** Russian Revolution;
- 1918-1921:** Russian Civil War;
- 1919-1921:** Irish War of Independence;
- 1927-1937:** Chinese Civil War;
- 1936-1939:** Spanish Civil War;
- 1939-1945:** World War II;
- 1950-1953:** Korean War;

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1954-1962: French-Algerian War;
1955-1972: First Sudanese Civil War;
1959-1973: Vietnam War;
1980-1988: Iran-Iraq War;
1990-1991: Persian Gulf War;
1991-1995: Third Balkan War;
1994: Rwandan Genocide.

The nations that fought the wars listed above are nations other than Israel, that is, they are Gentile, and hence the twentieth century may justifiably be considered to be a fulfillment of Joel 3:9-12: *“Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up: Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD. Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about”*.

In stark contrast to the present situation, the kingdom of God will be a kingdom without war as Psalm 46:8-9 prophesies: *“Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire”*. It is not clear how God will *“break the bow, and cut the spear in sunder”*, but one strategy might be energizing the nations to stop manufacturing armaments, as prophesied by Isaiah: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Isa. 2:2-4).

Israel’s wars in the twentieth century

Both Joel’s and Isaiah’s prophecies relate to the Gentile nations. God’s dealing with Israel was also significant during the twentieth century, not only because the State of Israel was established in 1948 but also because of the struggles that beset the fledgling nation. Some of Israel’s battles during the twentieth century were:

1948: War of independence;

1956: Suez war;

1967: Six day war;

1973: War of Yom Kippur.

A broad view

Yet another interpretation of the events of the twentieth century and how they fit into God’s plan is that the early part of the century was the beginning of the fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy. Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a giant man to be the fore-telling of four world empires, in sequence, starting with Babylon and ending with one that would be composed of several dynasties. It was to be in the days of those kings that God would set about setting up His kingdom. Daniel 2:44 reads: *“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever”*.

Daniel’s prophecy declares that it will be God’s kingdom that will *“break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms”*. The current kingdoms have to be removed before God’s kingdom can be established, and thus it may be understood that World War 1 was the beginning of the removal of those kingdoms. Some historians record that at least 11 kings began to lose their realms as a consequence of World War 1. The kingdoms included the Turkish Ottoman Empire (which had been in power since the fourteenth century), Serbia, Russia, Romania, Montenegro, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Germany, Austria and Belgium. Thus it may be that the reign of evil, as perpetrated by those dynasties, is continuing to be “gradually” overthrown, and the transition from the previous regimes to God’s kingdom is a process that God will accomplish over a period of time, the length of which is not disclosed in the Scriptures.

God is working out all things

It is now almost 100 years since the first edition of the *Peoples Paper* was issued, and the kingdom for which Jesus taught His disciples to pray—*“Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matt. 6:10)—is not yet a reality. However, whether the events of the last 100 years constitute the first stages of the establishment of God’s kingdom—*“the removing of those things that are shaken”* (Heb. 12:27)—or whether they are the last stages of Satan’s rule, one can be assured that all things are working out God’s plan for the eventual welfare of all mankind: *“For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”* (Rom. 8:20-21).■

“Global Messiah Happening” as Saudi-Iran Conflict Presages Prophesied Nuclear War

“And when ye go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresseth you, then ye shall sound an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before Hashem your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies” [Numbers 10:9 (The Israel Bible™)]

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

The two elements are:

- God has a time schedule; and
- Israel has a special place in God’s plan.

The first element—that God has a time schedule—is entwined in the statement *“in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem”*. The statement is prophetic in that it declares that God would not carry out certain actions immediately but would perform them at a later time.

The second element—that Israel has a special place in God’s plan—is entwined in the statement *“my people and for my heritage Israel”*. As Deuteronomy 7:6-8 declares, Israel is 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. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But 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”*. Hence it is that God would *“plead for them”*.

Those two elements of God’s plan were manifest at Jesus’ first advent: *“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). Jesus did not come to earth until God’s appointed time—*“the fullness of time”*—and *“He came unto His own”* (John 1:11)—Israel. And regarding the future, Paul wrote *“God has not cast away His people”* (Rom. 11:2).

Jesus’ coming to earth

Before Jesus came to earth, Israel was made aware of the imminence of Jesus’ coming: *“... the word of God*

came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Luke 3:2-4).

John was not the only one to whom God revealed that the coming of their Messiah was nigh: *“And as the people were in expectation and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ”* (Luke 3:15-16). The expressions *“in expectation”* (Strong G4328: *prosdokaō*: to anticipate) and *“mused in their heart”* seem to indicate that the expectation was widespread and hence it seems unlikely the people were aroused because of John’s preaching alone, but that God revealed the time to others also: *“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). God revealed to the wise men that the time had come for the fulfillment of the prophecy He gave to Micah centuries earlier (Micah 5:2). However the Scriptures do not give any detail regarding how God revealed His secret to the wise men.

Israel’s rejection of Messiah

In spite of what God had done for Israel—His special people—in times past, the Israelites did not accept that Jesus was the Messiah: *“But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not*

see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him” (John 12:37-41).

In that context Romans 11:25-27 is particularly precious because it proclaims that, in His time, God will open the eyes of the Israelites and enable them to recognize their Messiah: “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins”.

Being fulfilled today?

And so it may be wondered whether today—in 2016-17—the time has come for God to begin the process of revealing their Messiah to the Jews.

The following article is printed with the kind permission of *breakingisraelnews*. It was written by Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz on November 8, 2016. Adam made aliyah to Israel in 1991 and served in the IDF as a combat medic. For more information see <http://www.breakingisraelnews.com/78225/alliance-israel-saudi-arabia-presage-propheisied-nuclear-war/#YP3cvLvEo0cjX67L.99>. **The text below in bold type has been highlighted by the Peoples Paper to emphasize those statements.**

* * * *

“The aftershocks of the US-brokered deal with Iran concerning their nuclear program have left many political analysts stymied, but **one ancient Jewish source presents a scenario, unthinkable just a few years ago, which is now a strong possibility: a nuclear war between Saudi Arabia and Iran that leaves Israel untouched and makes way for the coming of the Messiah.**

So much is still unclear about Iran and the Middle East, but the Yalkut Shimoni, **a collection of Biblical teachings believed to have been arranged in the 13th century, predicted a scenario that is becoming more relevant as time goes on, anticipating our present political reality.**

Rabbi Yizchok said: “**The year that Melech HaMoshiach [Messiah the King] will be revealed, all the nations of the world will be provoking each other. The King of Persia (Iran) will provoke the King of Arabia (Saudi Arabia), and the King of Arabia will go to Edom (the West) to take counsel, but the King of Persia will in turn, destroy the entire**

world. The nations of the world will be outraged and panicked. They will fall on their faces, and they will experience pains like birth pangs. Israel too will be outraged and in a state of panic and ask, where do we go? But say unto them, ‘My children, do not fear, the time of your redemption has come. And in the last redemption will be different from the first which was followed by further bondage and pain. After this last redemption, you will not again experience any further pain or subjugation.’”

The Yalkut Shimoni predicted a global conflict involving all of the nations. The focus of the conflict, though, will be Iran pitted against Saudi Arabia, resulting in total apocalypse which, in light of today’s weapons technology, would likely be nuclear.

With radical Islam stoking the flames, and the opposing sides of the Islamic world arming up, the nuclear showdown prophesied by the Yalkut Shimoni now looms closer than ever, especially in the wake of a recent clue that **Israel and Saudi Arabia may be approaching an unlikely partnership.**

Just a few weeks ago, Salman Al-Ansari, the founder and president of the Washington DC-based Saudi American Public Relation Affairs Committee (SAPRAC), made waves when he published an article in *The Hill* suggesting that Israel and Saudi Arabia form an alliance.

Al-Ansari noted many mutual interests (financial, technology, water engineering), claiming that “it is common knowledge that Saudi Arabia and Israel have committed to rational and balanced foreign policies over the past 70 years, never seeking any provocative or hostile actions against each other.”

Al-Ansari stated that the basis of this revolutionary coalition would be a shared threat: “The totalitarian government of Iran which is classified internationally as a global sponsor of terrorism.” Implicit in Al-Ansari’s article is that the catalyst for this new era of cooperation between Israel and the leader of global Sunni Islam is the looming threat of a revived Iranian nuclear program.

Until recently, conflict with Saudi Arabia would not have included a threat of nuclear escalation, since they were not known to have a nuclear weapons program and were a member of the coalition of countries demanding a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East. This changed as a result of the P5+1 agreement brokered by US President Barack Obama last year. In May 2015, *The Sunday Times* of London reported that the Saudis had “taken the ‘strategic decision’ to acquire ‘off-the-shelf’ atomic

weapons from Pakistan amid growing fears of a nuclear-armed Iran.”

Professor Ze'ev Maghen of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic studies agreed that the situation is close to exploding. “Iran and Saudi Arabia are indeed poised with knives at each other’s throats,” he told *Breaking Israel News*. “This can certainly explode, as Saudi Arabia is the leader of Sunni Islam and Iran is the leader of Shi’ite Islam.”

However, he expressed doubt at the idea of an Israeli-Saudi alliance. “I’ve heard reports of cooperation between Israel and Saudi Arabia, but I am not sure how far that can actually go.”

Rabbi Yosef Dayan, a member of the nascent Sanhedrin who can trace his lineage back to King David, thinks that current events fit perfectly into the Yalkut Shimoni.

“The Yalkut Shimoni emphasizes that Messiah is a process that includes the entire world, not just Israel. It involves the entire world,” explained Rabbi Dayan to *Breaking Israel News*.

He emphasized that the prophecy is a prediction of modern, tangible events. “It is not a supernatural process, brought about by angels coming down from heaven,” he said. “These things we hear about in the news, happening between nations, this is the Messianic process unfolding in front of our eyes.”

Rabbi Dayan connected the prophecy to non-Jews outside of Israel who see Biblical prophecy.

* * *

Comment:

While it is recognised that not all of the contentions mentioned in the article above have clear Scriptural support, several of them might indicate that God is beginning to open Israel’s eyes. As the article states: “These things we hear about in the news, happening between nations, this is the Messianic process unfolding in front of our eyes”. It is a process, which means it is not an instantaneous work but it will be accomplished over a period of time. Some statements that indicate God’s time might have come to remove Israel’s blindness are:

- The “strong possibility” of war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, “considered unthinkable just a few years ago”. If war eventuates, will it be a fulfilment (at least in part) of Ezekiel 38:21: “And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord GOD: every man’s sword shall be against his brother”? In a broad sense, can Saudi Arabia and Iran be regarded as Islamic brothers?

- The statement that one prediction is based on “Biblical teachings from the thirteenth century” raises the question whether it could be a parallel to Daniel 12:4 in that the book has been sealed from Daniel’s time until now?: “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased”;
- When Messiah comes “all the nations of the world will be provoking each other”. At the present time there is friction between many countries;
- Adam questions the likelihood of an alliance between Israel and Saudi Arabia, in spite of their seemingly co-operative attitude towards each other. The borders of Arabia are not defined in the Scriptures, there being only seven references to Arabia (1 Kings 10:15; 2 Chron. 9:14; Isa. 21:13; Jer. 25:24; Ezek. 27:21, Gal. 1:17; Gal. 4:25). Hence it is unclear whether the suggestion of Israel and Saudi Arabia coming together **might in any way** relate to Isaiah 19:23-25: “shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria”.
- The prediction that at the time of Messiah’s coming “the nations of the world will be outraged and panicked”. Is that an alternative expression for Luke 21:25: “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”?;
- At that time Israel “will be in a state of panic”. It is difficult to be certain about when all the prophecies concerning Israel will be fulfilled, but maybe this statement reflects Isaiah 26:17-18: “Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD”;
- Another Scripture which might foretell Israel’s fear is Jeremiah 30:5: “And these are the words that the LORD spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness?”;

Perhaps the message for the students of God’s Word at this time is to heed Jesus’ words: “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is... And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:32-37).

Is it possible articles such as the one above are part of God’s way of revealing where the twenty-first century fits into God’s time line?■

THE GOSPEL HOPE FOR YOUNG AND OLD

The previous two articles in this issue focus on change: the changes that have occurred during the last 100 years and the changes that are occurring today in Israel and neighbouring countries. This article focuses on the unchanging gospel, both during the course of an individual's life and throughout history the hope of the resurrection of all who have ever lived is unchanging. The text is almost verbatim of an address given in a convention in Australia some 40 years ago.

* * * *

Young and old alike are to share the blessings of God's kingdom promised to all. Youth in good health and in vigor of life may still find satisfaction to some extent in the present unsatisfactory world ruling conditions, but it still leaves a vacuum, acknowledged or not, to all who have no belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But when we grow old it is different.

Merely to grow old is in itself not a bad thing if one continues to enjoy the faculties of youth. But when our faculties and abilities fail and we require others to assist in the supply of our needs, it is a sombre experience. To lose the sense of independence is a tragedy we all wish to avoid.

Those who read God's Word and have any faith in it know that God has promised a kingdom upon earth wherein all subjects will find complete happiness with good health and provision of all needs without stress or strain.

Isaiah in his prophecy mentioned such in many places. Without referencing them all in full we will use a verse or two which give us a glimpse of this wonderful time to come.

In Isaiah 25:8 we read "He will swallow up death in victory (in other words death will not be allowed to deny the privilege of opportunity to enjoy this time) and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces...". And again in Isaiah 35:1: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, it shall blossom abundantly...". And in verse 5 "the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped, the lame man shall leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb sing, in the wilderness shall waters break out and streams in the desert...". These verses are telling us that there will be no more droughts or famines and all the afflictive diseases and infirmities of mankind will be healed away.

The 33rd chapter of Isaiah has a lot to say about

conditions leading up to this wonderful time and declares in the last verse "and the inhabitant shall not say I am sick...". Can we imagine a world inhabited by people who will never be sick? According to the last book of the Bible it is going to come!

Revelation 21 from verse 3 onwards reads that when this time comes it can be said that the tabernacle of God will be with men (that is, all his favours will then be poured out upon them), that He will wipe away all tears from their eyes, there will be no more sorrow, or crying, or pain and no more death!

The majority of people still turn away in total unbelief that such a time will ever come upon this earth. But some, although the prospect seems to them to be too good to be true, still have hope that it might be true.

Many say, "it will be wonderful if such a time does come and they will be blessed indeed who live to see it; but what of us elderly ones who are on the brink of the grave, it means little to us".

This is where a knowledge of God's plan and the gospel of the resurrection become so precious. The Scriptures we have been referring to are not picturing events and conditions which will ever take place during the present world order. They refer to a new day that will come in the future. The present life will end in death when each one is laid in the grave.

The joys of the kingdom of God which will be made available to all, do not occur now, for it is Satan's deceptive evil reign we are presently participating in.

Not that there are no present experiences that believers in Christ may now enjoy, but they are experienced midst the tribulations of the present time, and they are related to the hope set before us in days to come. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:19 declare "if in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable".

The blessings God has promised to mankind because of the sacrifice of His Son come through a resurrection from the dead. Every person who has ever lived has a right to resurrection, but it is still the same today as it was in the apostle's day—men will listen to a hope or remedy for mankind's ills which can become operational now, through man's effort, but they are not privileged to believe in the resurrection of the dead. It has ever been thus: many in the Apostles' day scoffed at the hope of a

resurrection of the dead: “And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Act 4:1-2). A few did not out rightly reject the hope, but it did not influence their present thinking—“we’ll hear you again perhaps some day” (Acts 17:32).

In view of the fact that the Bible so fully substantiates a resurrection from the dead we would echo Paul’s words in Acts 26:8; Why do you think it incredible that God should raise the dead? Did not Jesus himself say “Marvel not at this for the time is coming in the which all that are in their graves will hear my voice and will come forth?” (John 5:28).

Everyone will share in the benefits accruing from resurrection. It doesn’t matter if one died thousands of years ago, or if you only go into the grave tomorrow, all will live again and in vastly different circumstances to those with which they were acquainted in their former life.

So now we meet with the hypothetical question that Paul presented in 1 Corinthians 15:35: How then are the dead raised up and with what body do they come?

Exact detail as to how the dead will be brought back to earth for a new life is not given us, but there are enough assurances in God’s Word to give us faith that it will occur.

Most certainly the literal graves will not be opened to return men and women to this earth with bodies of disability. The old worn out bodies return to the dust as it was from the dust they were first formed (Gen. 2:7). God will give to each a new body as it pleaseth him (1 Cor. 15:37-38).

However there will be one sense in which the dead will return as they were before: they will be brought back to life with the same character they had before. If in this life they had endeavoured to live justly and righteously they will retain that character in resurrection. If they had lived selfishly, were hard hearted and unmindful of goodness they will come back with similar character disposition.

If the teaching of Jesus Christ had prompted the development of character to any degree, it will provide a great start to the new life. If His teachings had been ridiculed and perhaps His name used only in blasphemy, they will come back to the sterner “judgement” (John 5:29; the word “damnation” is incorrect). In such scriptures as Matthew 11:20-24 we see clear intimation that rejection of any light

given in this life for the formation of good character will have a mitigating influence in the day of resurrection; it will be more tolerable for some than others to come into line in the new world where only God’s righteousness will be acceptable.

God is no respecter of persons and he will not be mocked—as a man sows so shall he reap.

In the new world of resurrection, in the day of true judgement the wicked will no longer “prosper as the green bay tree” (Psa. 37:35), as they can now under the rule of Satan; but men everywhere will be obliged to amend wrong character and come into line with the precepts taught by Jesus so that all can prosper and be at peace (Micah 4:3,4): no wars, every man having his own vine and fig tree (ample food requirements is thus pictured) and nothing to make them afraid.

God is all powerful and absolutely just. He is merciful, kind and good, and none will be denied because of ignorance—His requirements for enjoyment of His beneficence will be made clear to all. Every person that has ever lived will receive opportunity to enjoy the “times of restitution” which all the Holy prophets have foretold from the beginning (Acts 3:21). It is the wisest counsel that can be given to young and old: “Fear (reverence) God”, seek to understand his requirements and rest assured that no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly (Eccl. 12:13, 14).

There is of course another very important segment of Gods’ purpose: the call and preparation of His true church during the present time, to become associates of Christ in establishing the “times of restitution” referred to. That work seems nearly complete and because it involves only a small portion comparatively of human kind, this message is sent out to arrest the attention of all who will heed, of the countless millions of those who will soon receive opportunity to enjoy resurrection conditions and the fulfilment of the prayer: “Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”.■

CONVENTION BROADCAST

The annual convention sponsored by the Berean Bible Institute Inc. is to be held from Friday 20 January through Monday January 23, 2017.

For details and the program see:

www.bbi.org.au/node/374.

The broadcast link for the broadcast will be:

<http://biblestudents.acrobat.com/australia>.

A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART

“Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely. The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds: He telleth the number of the stars: He calleth them all by their names. Great is our God: His understanding is infinite. The Lord lifteth up the meek. He casteth the wicked down to the ground” (Psalms 147:1-6)

God is the Great One who numbers the stars, whose power and understanding are infinite, yet He deals with mankind in the most compassionate way: *“He healeth the broken hearted”*.

There are several examples in the Scriptures that record God’s dealings with individuals, and their different reactions to those dealings. Consistent with Paul’s instruction to the Romans—*“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”* (Rom. 15:4)—it is profitable to reflect on those examples, and to realise afresh that God, the Creator of the Universe, is dealing with every individual whom He has called. Such reflection should spur every individual to run the race with increased zeal (1 Cor. 9:24-27).

David

David was one who responded to the lesson God gave him through Nathan the prophet after his transgression with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:1-12:13). David acknowledged his transgression and sought the Lord’s forgiveness: *“When Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me”* (Psa. 51:1-10). David continues his repentance and concludes that the most precious sacrifice of the Lord’s people is a broken and contrite heart: *“For thou desirest not burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise”* (Psa. 51:16,17). [The word “contrite” occurs only five times in the Scriptures and means ‘bruised or smitten’ (Young’s Concordance).]

Nathanael

David’s yearning for a pure and contrite heart may be attributed to some extent to his realisation of his transgressions. However not every one has to experience such errors; Nathanael was one who had a pure heart, seemingly without having committed any

gross errors: *“Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him and said, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile”* (John 1:46-49). Nathanael’s heart condition was as the Lord desires: *“For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word”* (Isa. 66:2). Notwithstanding all the honour and glory that is due to God because of His wondrous creation, His greatest treasures are those who have a contrite heart.

Cornelius

The example of Cornelius, a devout Gentile who feared God, reveals that a righteous heart is not solely the province of God’s chosen people of Israel: *“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always”* (Acts 10:1-2).

Not only did God acknowledge Cornelius’ right heart condition but He used him to open the gospel to the Gentiles through the agency of Peter: *“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him... While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 10:34-45). Thus began the grafting in of the Gentiles: *“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name”* (Act 15:14).

Peter

Peter was one of Jesus’ disciples but he was given an experience that caused him some anguish of heart: *“The Lord Jesus said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. Peter said, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison and into death. Jesus said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day before thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me... And about*

the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed saying *Of a truth, this fellow was also with him, for he is a Galilean... Peter said, I know not what thou sayest, and immediately, while he yet spoke, the cock crew. The Lord turned and looked upon Peter, and he remembered the word of the Lord, before the cock crow he would deny him thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly*" (Luke 22: 31-62). That experience broke Peter's heart and maybe it was necessary for him to suffer such an experience because of the work that God had for him later: "*and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren*". Peter's experience was both severe and strengthening.

Paul

Paul also experienced anguish of heart, although his trial erupted after the Lord had dealt with him; it related to his actions prior to his conversion. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, taught under Gamaliel, and he persecuted the early church of God beyond measure, even consenting to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1, 3). Acts 9:1-2 records Paul's actions against the early church: "*And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem*".

However in the Lord's due time He opened Saul's mind to understand what the Lord had planned for him: "*And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do*" (Act 9:3-6). Such a dramatic experience was a necessary first step to prepare Saul for the work the Lord had planned for him: "*the care of all the churches*" (2 Cor. 11:28).

Paul's experience before his conversion is also a lesson for those who follow after in that it presents an example that nothing is too grave for the Lord to forgive: "*And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all*

acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare" (1 Tim. 1:12-18).

Stephen

The individuals mentioned above experienced personal correction. Stephen was an agent God used to cause others to realise the need for them to change their heart. However the immediate effect was to increase their animosity: "*The elders and scribes came upon him, caught him and brought him before the Council*" (Acts 6:12-7:60). Stephen had recounted Israel's history from Abraham, their exodus from Egypt, their forty years in the wilderness, and their idolatry. And he had rebuked them: "*Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised of heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted and slain, them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers... When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth... and stoned him*". Although "*they were cut to the heart*", the effect was not to produce a remorseful or repentant attitude; they didn't have a contrite or broken heart. The Christian should ensure they recognize God's chastening, accept they needed correction and modify their character accordingly.

Pentecost

On the other hand those to whom Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost were corrected: "*...at that time there were many devout men, Jews and proselytes, in Jerusalem, who heard these Galileans speak in their own language and were amazed. Others mocked, saying, These men are full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, said these are not drunken as ye suppose, for it is the third hour of the day. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy...*" (Acts 2:5-17).

Peter went on to tell them about Jesus' life and how they had put Him to death: "*When they heard this they were pricked in their heart and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent and*

be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... Then they that received his word were baptised..." (Acts 2: 37-41).

Our day

Thus it is apparent that individuals respond in various ways to the experiences God gives them. In general terms, in our day the majority react as described in Revelation chapters 9 and 16: *"The rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hand, that they should not worship devils and idols of gold, silver and brass and stone and of wood, which can neither see or hear nor walk; neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts"* (Rev. 9:20-21). Such a reaction is consistent with the warning Paul gave to Timothy: *"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived"* (2 Tim. 3:13). Evil seems to be flourishing in this present evil world, as prophesied in Revelation: *"... they blasphemed the name of God and repented not of their deeds or to give him glory"*. (Rev. 16:9).

Summary

In general terms it may be said that individuals react to God's dealing in either of two ways: either a contrite heart to repent, or to continue in their own determined way. The Christian should be exercised by every experience God gives them to develop a contrite heart. The attitude of a contrite heart should be carried over into all their activities. In that vein Peter exhorted his readers: *"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting of the hair and of wearing of gold or of putting on of apparel, but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price"* (1 Pet. 3:3-4). Although Peter's words were addressed to the women in the ecclesia, the principle applies to the men also: *"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God and He will exalt you in due time. He is the Holy One who inhabiteth eternity, who knows all the stars by name, who counteth the hairs of our head — who dwelleth with those also who have a broken and contrite heart. He heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds. He lifteth up the meek"*. Contrition and humility go hand in hand!■

GOD LIVES UNDER THE BED

Kevin was born 30 years ago, mentally disabled as a result of difficulties during birth.

He reasons and communicates with the capabilities of a 7-year-old. He will probably always believe that God lives under his bed, that Santa Claus is the one who fills the space under our tree every Christmas and that airplanes stay up in the sky because angels carry them.

Up before dawn each day, he goes off to work at a workshop for the disabled. He does not seem dissatisfied. He doesn't know what it means to be discontent. His life is simple. He will never know the entanglements of wealth or power, and he does not care what brand of clothing he wears.

His needs have always been met, and he never worries that one day they may not be. He is not obsessed with his work or the work of others.

His heart is pure. He still believes everyone tells the truth, promises must be kept, and when you are wrong, you apologize instead of argue.

Free from pride and unconcerned with appearances, Kevin is not afraid to cry when he is hurt, angry or sorry. He is always transparent, always sincere. And he trusts God.

In my moments of doubt and frustrations with my Christianity, I envy the security Kevin has in his simple faith. It is then that I am most willing to admit that he has some divine knowledge that rises above my mortal questions. Kevin has spent his whole life in that kind of innocence, praying after dark and soaking up the goodness and love of God.

It is then I realize that perhaps he is not the one with the handicap. I am. My obligations, my fear, my pride, my circumstances—they all become disabilities when I do not trust them to God's care.

And one day, when the mysteries of heaven are opened, and we are all amazed at how close God really is to our hearts, I'll realize that God heard the simple prayers of a boy who believed that God lived under his bed.

Kevin won't be surprised at all!' —Anonymous
* * *

Kevin's story is simple, and in one sense heart-breaking. Nevertheless it is true of so many who have lived in the past and who are living today.

His acceptance of his situation—albeit largely in ignorance—provides an example and lesson to all who consider themselves to be of some worth. Surely Kevin has a contrite heart!■

THE CHILDREN OF GOD

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26)

There are at least three senses (or concepts) in which the terms “child” and “children” are used in the Scriptures. Distinguishing the difference between them adds to the grandeur of the privilege of being one of God’s church.

Jesus Christ

John 3:16 declares: *“... 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 is a child of God.

It is pertinent to note that, in the context of John 3, Jesus is called the *“only begotten Son”*. Jesus was with God at the very beginning: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (a deity). The same was in the beginning with God”* (John 1:1-2). John clarifies that *“the Word”* was Jesus: *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). [Dr. Strong explains the meaning of the term *“the Word”* (#G3056) as *“the Divine Expression (that is, Christ)”*].

It is also pertinent to note that Jesus was *“the firstborn of every creature”*, and that He was God’s agent in all subsequent acts of creation: *“For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him”* (Col. 1:14-16). Hebrews 1:1-2 confirms that Jesus was God’s agent in creation: *“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”*.

Israel

God regards the nation of Israel also as His child: *“Ye are the children of the LORD your God... For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth”* (Deut. 14:1-2). Israel’s place as a child of God was on the basis of God choosing them, after they existed, in the days of Jacob: *“And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed”* (Gen. 32:27-28).

The name Israel extended from Jacob to the whole nation: *“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. 19:6).

While God regarded the nation of Israel as His son, their role was that of a servant: *“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).

The Church

The members of the church are also children of God. Galatians 3:26 (quoted above) states they are children *“by faith in Jesus Christ”*: Whereas Jesus was the first created Being and hence was the begotten One of the Lord, and Israel were deemed to be sons of God because God chose them to be a special people unto Himself, the church are sons by faith because God has given them of His Spirit: *“Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts”* (2 Cor. 1:21-22).

The privilege of the church being sons of God promises the reward of heirship: *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption (sonship), whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 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”* (Rom. 8:14-17).

The sonship of the church sets them apart from the sonship of fleshly Israel because fleshly Israel were servants whereas the church are heirs, and have the prospect of being *“priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years”* (Rev. 20:6).

However the hope of heirship and living and reigning with Christ does not provide any cause for pride because it is God, who *“of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures”* (James 1:18). As John declares: *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...”* (1 John 3:2).■

PREACHING THE WORD

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2)

The Apostle Paul regarded Timothy as a son: *“To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (2 Tim. 1:2).* As such He exhorted Timothy to *“...continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14-15).*

Regarding the Scriptures, Paul continued: *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16).*

Every aspect of the Scriptures that Paul listed deserves emphasis. Firstly, that all Scripture is given *“by inspiration of God”*. There is no higher authority than God: *“Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding” (Isa. 40:28).* It is consistent with Him being the creator of the earth that there is *“no searching of His understanding”*. As Paul confirmed: *“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. 11:33-34).*

Omnipotence

God is all powerful—omnipotent—as Revelation 19:5-6 declares: *“And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev. 19:5-6).*

God’s omnipotence cannot be over emphasized. Every benefit to mankind promised in the Scriptures is dependent on God’s omnipotence, that is, His ability to carry out every one of His promises. Those “promises” include the resurrection from the grave of all mankind and the restoration of the earth (to the glory that existed in the garden of Eden?). In summary *“... the times of restitution of all things,*

which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21).

The fact that God has delegated His power to His glorified Son—*“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:18-20)*—has not diminished God’s overall power, as Paul explained to the Corinthians: *“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. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:24-28).*

Charge to Timothy

When the supremacy of God, and the fact that the Scriptures have been given by Him, are borne in mind, the authority of Paul’s letter to Timothy takes on an air of substantial importance. Paul wrote: *“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ...” (2 Tim. 4:1).* “Therefore”—that is, it was because of the authority of the Scriptures, and that Timothy had known them *“from when he was a child”*—that he “charged” him (that is, commanded him) with the responsibility of preaching “the Word”, that is, the gospel, to all, regardless of the consequences: *“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3).* ■

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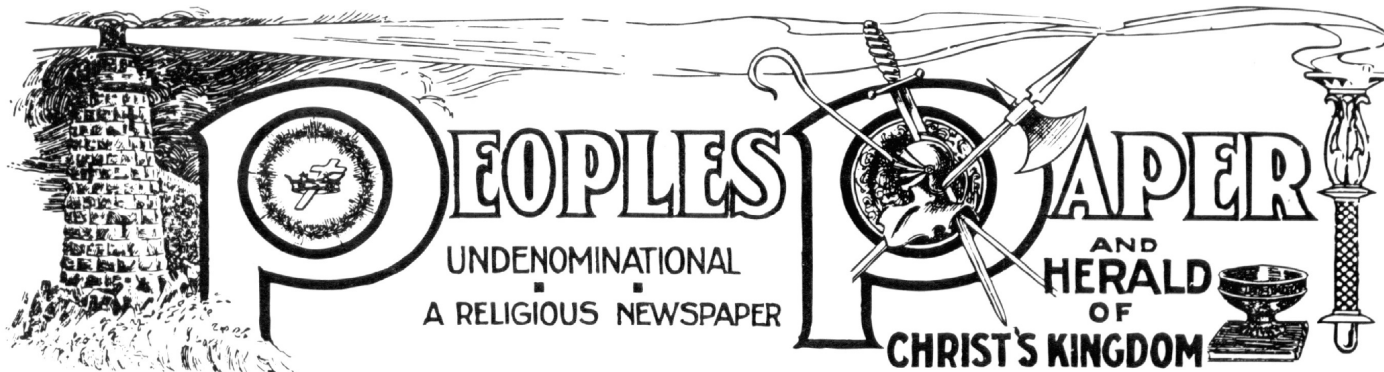
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THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Jesus’ coming down to earth from heaven brought great joy: *“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:10-11). The great joy was that He would *“save his people from their sins”* (Matt. 1:21) and so bring them life.

While Jesus’ coming brought great joy, it is His death on the cross that makes that joy a possibility: *“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die”* (John 12:32-33). *“Lifting up”* means crucified.

He will draw all men unto Him when they are resurrected from the grave: *“I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues, O grave, I will be thy destruction”* (Hosea 13:14), *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time”* (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

God’s only begotten Son

The wonder of Jesus’ coming to earth and His death on the Cross is magnified when it is realised that He 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. 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).

Down from heaven

Another feature of His coming to earth that magnifies His sacrifice is that He was God’s agent in creation: *“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 He left a high and lofty station to come to earth.

Lower than the angels

The significance of Him leaving heaven and coming to earth cannot be fully realized by any man because no man has yet ascended to heaven: *“If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man”* (John 3:12-13).

Not only did He leave heaven but He was made lower than the angels: *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man”* (Heb. 2:9).

The cross

His humility and obedience to His father are emphasized by the fact that He not only came down to earth and adopted human form, but that He came to die, and that by the most demeaning method in His time: *“But made himself of no reputation, and took*

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upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:7-8). The qualities expressed in those verses are worthy of consideration: He made Himself of no reputation; He became as a servant; was made in the same fashion as a human being; was obedient to endure death by crucifixion. No other creature has demonstrated such loyalty to God and humility within themselves.

Without hope

Christians today are accustomed to the idea of there being life after death and so it is difficult to imagine what it was like to live when there was not any idea of life after one died; that there was nothing to follow. It meant there was no purpose in life other than to enjoy the present, as Solomon concluded: *“Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun” (Eccl. 8:15).* Eating, drinking and being merry abide only for the days of one’s life.

Solomon also said: *“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Prov. 29:18).* In the same vein Jeremiah also recorded the importance of hope: *“Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border” (Jer. 31:15-17).* The only pacification for Rahel was the hope that her children would be restored to her.

Gave them life

Thus the significance of Jesus’ coming to earth and His death on the cross are evident. As John recorded, He came so that mankind could have life. The prospect of blessing mankind after He had suffered the cross and been raised again with His father was a powerful factor in sustaining Jesus throughout His life on earth: *“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. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:2-3).* His followers are exhorted to keep the same vision in their minds.

Life more abundantly

The effect of Jesus’ life is not just to restore mankind to life as they have known it, but to enjoy *“more abundant life”*. Dr. Strong defines *“abundant”* as *“superabundant in quantity or superior in quality”*. The life that mankind will enjoy because of the sacrifice of Jesus in giving His life will abound in both respects: **quantity** in that it will be everlasting (in contrast to the duration of the present life), and in **quality** in that there will not be any sickness or death: *“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert... And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa. 35:5, 6, 10).*

See Him like He is

There is yet *“a more excellent”* hope for the Christian: *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:1-3).* The promise of being with Him includes the promise of reigning with Him: *“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)” (Rom. 8:16-17).* *“... they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev. 20.6).* They will be with their Lord, seeing Him as He is and reigning with Him—they will have life in abundance!■

Our Lord’s Sacrifice

**CHRIST gave His life for me
His precious blood He shed
That I might ransomed be
And quickened from the dead
He gave, He gave His life for me
How grateful I should be.**

**He now has brought to me
Down from His throne above
Salvation full and free
Pardon and life and love
He brings, He brings rich gifts to me
Lord, I give all to thee.**

THE CHRISTIAN'S GOAL

It has been said that life is a means to an end, not an end in itself. That statement reflects the words of Solomon, who is commonly regarded as the wisest man who has ever lived. Nevertheless Solomon's wisdom did not provide him with a satisfying answer regarding the purpose of life. He wrote: "*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh... I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit*" (Eccl. 1:1-14).

Solomon's conclusion that "*all is vanity and vexation of spirit*" led him to conclude that God must have given this "*sore travail*" to mankind for a purpose, but he could not identify precisely what that purpose is, so he described it as "*to be exercised therewith*".

The Apostle Paul agreed with Solomon: "*For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now*" (Rom. 8:20-22). Paul wrote that God subjected—that is, deliberately subjected—mankind to a life of "vanity".

And so it continues unto this day: a human being's life is soon ended, and all that he has striven for during his life will pass away. Thus it is a great blessing to realize the truth of the conclusions of both Solomon and Paul: that God deliberately gave Man his present plight. However Paul adds that God has subjected it "*in hope*", that hope being that the creation will be delivered from this present "*bondage of corruption*" into something much better: "*the glorious liberty of the children of God*".

The Christian's goal

Jesus understood the temporary nature of Man's present existence, and told His disciples of a much better reward for their labours: "*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where*

thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt. 6:19-20). Jesus contrasted the temporary nature of earthly riches to those in heaven.

John records Jesus telling His disciples how this was to be brought about: "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*" (John 14:1-6).

However Jesus' words were all a bit of a mystery to the disciples: just what did Jesus mean? Hence Thomas asked him for clarification; since he did not know where Jesus was going he did not know the way. Likewise Philip asked for clarification in that he asked Jesus to show them the Father: "*Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the 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. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake*" (John 14:8-11).

Jesus' explanation of the Father did not refer to the form in which God exists, and could not, because "*God is a Spirit*" and "*a spirit hath not flesh and bones*" (John 4:24; Luke 24:39). Since Jesus was not able to give His disciples a visual picture of God that they could physically see, the hope He was holding out to them was abstract—mystical, something outside their physical world. Hence Jesus told them that they had to believe Him, that is to have faith that what He was telling them was true, faith being "*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1). Not seen! And that also continues unto this day: "*they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*". As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "*we walk by faith and not by sight*" (2 Cor. 5:7).

The Christian's sojourn

The Christian's goal is a spiritual goal—a heavenly

goal that is invisible to the human eye: their goal is “spiritual”. It is a goal to which they have been called: “*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling*” (Eph. 4:4). At the present time that goal is only a hope, and the Christian’s principal goal in life is to make that hope a reality.

Guidance

The Christian is not left without guidance regarding the principles to be practised during their sojourn on earth in order for them to achieve their spiritual goal. To the Romans Paul wrote: “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*” (Rom. 12:1-2). The Christian’s mind—that is, their objectives or goals in life—has to be changed from striving for temporal (or earthly) goods to a reliance on God to provide their needs: “*Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*” (Matt. 6:31-34).

However that is more easily said than done—the Christian must earn their living: “*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*” (1 Tim. 5:8). Earning one’s living requires some dedication and expenditure of earthly resources, however the Christian must balance that with running the race for their heavenly goal.

Humility

Pride (self esteem) is one obstacle that has to be overcome for the Christian to achieve their goal. Paul exhorted the Philippians to strive to overcome pride by focussing on the virtues of others, and not on themselves or their own achievements: “*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the*

likeness of men” (Phil. 2:3-7). It has been well said that, just as the centre letter in the word “pride” is “I” so also focusing on self—“I”—is the main obstacle to overcoming pride.

There are several components of Paul’s exhortation to the Philippians, but perhaps the most powerful is his reference to Jesus. He was God’s agent in the creation of the worlds: “*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. 1:2), yet He considered Himself a servant and suffered a humiliating death on the cross. The development of humility is one of the Christian’s main goals during their sojourn here on earth, and remembering Jesus’ example is a powerful weapon for the Christian to employ.

A sympathetic disposition

The Scriptures testify to Jesus’ compassionate nature: “*And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it*” (Luke 19:41). Jesus knew what was going to befall Jerusalem in 70 A.D.—that there would be much agony and heartbreak by those living there—and He wept. Weeping is an outward manifestation of a sorrowing heart, which in turn arises from consideration of others and not of self.

Jesus also wept just before the resurrection of Lazarus: “*Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept*” (John 11:32-35).

One of the Christian’s goals during their present sojourn should be to develop that same sympathetic attitude: “*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep*” (Rom. 12:15). The development of a sympathetic attitude goes hand in hand with a spirit of humility; there is an important place for both in the Christian’s character if they are running for their prize in heaven.

On the other hand the Christian must not ignore their responsibility as lights in the world: “*Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world*” (Phil. 2:14-15). They must not condone unrighteousness, just as Jesus did not tolerate the sinfulness in the temple: “*And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money*

sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:14-17).

The wilderness

Another exhortation to the Christian to help them obtain their goal is to remember that Jesus was not accepted by "the establishment", and neither will the Christian be popular in the present era: *"We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. 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. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. 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"* (Heb. 13:10-15). Drawing on the example of the practices that were required under the Law Covenant, including the sacrifices Israel was required to perform, the Christian is to be prepared to also suffer *"without the gate"* as did Jesus. The wilderness experience might be difficult to accept, especially when the wonderful hope of the gospel is the only hope for the world and is so precious to the Christian. The Christian must remember that it is a privilege to have been called to run for this glorious future, as John wrote: *"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure"* (1 John 3:1-3). The ultimate goal of the Christian is to be like their Lord Jesus and see Him as He is; their sojourn here in this life is preparation for their role in God's kingdom.

Patience

Focusing on their heavenly goal helps the Christian to develop the patience that is so necessary for them to endure the present trials. One aid to that end is to continually remember that God is working out all things according to His will: *"Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath*

purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him" (Eph. 1:8-10). Thus the Christian should be encouraged by the prophecy God has given through the prophet Zephaniah: *"Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent"* (Zeph. 3:8-9). God is working out His plan—in His time!

The Divine nature

Another exhortation available to the Christian is the words of Peter: *"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. 1:4). There are several issues that must be examined before a firm decision can be made regarding the precise details of what Peter meant by "the divine nature": whether he was referring to the Christian's ultimate goal in heaven or whether he was exhorting them to develop divine characteristics during their earthly life time. Both understandings have the same ultimate goal and provide much encouragement in this present life.

May God's grace enable each and everyone of those whom He has called to *"glory and virtue"* enable them to achieve their goal: *"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, 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"* (2 Pet. 1:2-3).■

CONVENTION NOTES

We apologize that the internet link printed in the January-March 2017 issue of the *Peoples Paper* for the broadcast of the Bible students' convention in January 2017 was incorrect. The correct link was: <https://biblestudents.adobeconnect.com/Australia>.

Queensland Convention

Friday 6—Sunday 8 October, 2017; Alexandra Park Conference Centre, 13 Mari Street, Alexandra Headlands, Qld 4572.

Contact: Darryn Greenhalgh, 164 Steys Road, CURRA Qld 4570; darryngreenhalgh@hotmail.com

2018 Convention

From 5 p.m. Thursday 25 until 2 p.m. Sunday 28 January, 2018. Camp Wilkin, 57 Noble Street, Anglesea, Victoria 3230.

Contact: EnquiryBBI@gmail.com; www.bbi.org.au/contact

RUNNING THE RACE

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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" (Hebrews 12:1)

The objective of Hebrews 12:1 is to encourage the Christian during their pilgrimage by relating their pilgrimage to running a race.

There are several aspects of competing in physical races that may be compared with the race set before the Christian. The aspects to which reference is made in Hebrews 12:1 relate to the Christian who has begun the race, however there are some steps that need to be taken before one decides to enter the race, which, when pondered, provide encouragement to enter.

Entry qualifications

Many events in secular competitions require would-be competitors to meet specified criteria before they are entitled to nominate for entry. Two of those criteria are age (not too young nor too old), and a requirement to have previously met certain performance standards. Additionally, in some cases, they might need to be selected from amongst other applicants.

Neither of the first two criteria apply to entering the Christian's race; the only requirement is to be selected: *"And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein"* (Luke 18:15-17). Hence no one is barred from entering the race because they are too young. Indeed a child-like disposition is to be developed as the race progresses: *"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 18:3).

On the other hand, one is never too old to be invited to enter the race: *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"* (John 3:3-6). The only requirement to run the race is to be begotten of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit can be received at any

age: *"For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit"* (1 Thess. 4:7-8). Jesus did not specify any age requirement to Nicodemus.

Another example of the Spirit being received by a fully grown man is Jesus giving sight to the blind man: *"But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself"* (John 9:18-21). When Jesus explained His identity to the blind man the blind man responded: *"... Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him"* (John 9:36-38). The blind man first believed when he was old enough to speak for himself.

Background

One's background is not a barrier to being selected to enter the race. Saul was called by God even though he had committed atrocities against Christians: *"Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities"* (Acts 26:10-11).

At the other extreme neither do prosperity and social standing in the world of mankind grant any privileges regarding being selected to enter the race: *"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that*

are: *That no flesh should glory in his presence*" (1 Cor. 1:26-29). God has deliberately reserved to Himself the privilege of choosing those who may run the race. As Paul reminded the Ephesians: *"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"* (Eph. 2:8-9).

Temporal considerations

Three fundamental elements of any race that a human being should consider before deciding to enter any contest are the nature of the activity, its duration and the cost of taking part.

Of these three, duration is the only certain factor regarding the Christian's race: the precise nature of what one will be required to do, and the personal cost, are not known before one begins the race.

Duration

Regarding duration, the Christian's race lasts for the rest of their earthly life: *"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10). The charge to the Christians at Smyrna was to be faithful until they died.

Another consideration regarding the duration of the race is that no one gains their prize until they have finished the course God has mapped out for them. As Paul wrote to Timothy: *"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing"* (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Cost

Running the race incurs a cost; the cost is losing popularity with one's fellow men: *"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved"* (Matt. 10:22).

In that vein Jesus counselled them to be wary of popularity: *"Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets"* (Luke 6:26). Popularity should be a signal to the Christian to *"examine themselves, whether they are in the faith"* (2 Cor. 13:5).

Objective

One factor that contributes to the Christian not being popular is that their objective in life is different from the non-Christian. Jesus said: *"Lay not up for*

yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). Consequently, Paul declared to the elders at Ephesus: *"I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel"* (Acts 20:33). Focusing on earthly treasures will distract one from concentrating on their course and hence will reduce the chance of them receiving their reward (or prize).

Encouragement

Since there is no precise detail available before one enters the race regarding what one will be required to do along the way, it is important to know that God will sustain the Christian; He will provide their every need: *"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you"* (1 Pet. 5:10). God will strengthen every one whom He calls: *"... 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), and *"... he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me"* (Heb. 13:5-6).

The importance of being assured that God will provide unfailing support to everyone whom He has invited to run the race is emphasized by the fact that not every one runs the same course. Paul explained to the Galatians that Peter was called to be the minister to the Jews while he was called to be the minister to the Gentiles: *"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles)"* (Gal. 2:7-8).

Paul was confirming what Peter had already told the Jews: *"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe"* (Acts 15:7). Peter was the first to preach to the Gentiles but later that work was given to Paul: *"Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches"* (2 Cor. 11:28). As Paul confirmed to the church in Rome: *"Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, That I should be the*

minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:15-16).

The cloud of witnesses

In addition to the personal assurances one receives along the way, the Christian may gain encouragement from the examples of those who have gone before.

There are several examples recorded in the Old Testament of persons who demonstrated great faith that God would provide for them throughout their earthly sojourn, the greatest of whom is Abraham: “... *who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith*” (Rom. 4:12-13). Abraham believed God even though there was no visible evidence that He would keep His promise; in other words, Abraham “*walked by faith*”. Likewise the Christian’s walk is “*by faith and not by sight*” (2 Cor. 5:7).

Another factor that should strengthen the Christian is that Abraham (and all those who lived in Old Testament times) did not have the Holy Spirit to guide them, the Holy Spirit not being given until Jesus was glorified after His resurrection: “...*the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified*” (John 7:39). Hence it may be held that the Christian has greater support than those who lived in those times: “*Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*” (Rom. 8:14).

Their leader

Some temporal races are team events in which case there is one who is appointed as the leader or captain. The leader sets an example for the other participants to follow. The Christian’s leader has set the example: “*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*” (Heb. 2:9-10). Hence the Christian should always be strengthened by “*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). The Christian’s leader has already completed His course and is now “*set down at the right hand of God*”. So also can the Christian be assured of their reward: “*Blessed is the man that*

endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12).

Fellowship of the brethren

While the previous examples refer to those who have already finished their course, it must be remembered that another source of encouragement along the way is the fellowship of one’s contemporaries: “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together... but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*” (Heb. 10:25).

Lightening the load

Progress is easier if no excess baggage is carried. The Christian should cast off those burdens that do not contribute to making progress or which indeed hinder progress: “*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier*” (2 Tim. 2:4). As Paul wrote to the Romans: “*The night is far spent, the day is at hand: 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. 13:12-14).

Patience

The task of running the race becomes more onerous if one begins to believe that the task is more demanding than is necessary. It is necessary to remember “*that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (Rom. 8:28). All the obstacles God places in one’s way are there because He knows they need to experience those trials to prepare them for the task He has allotted them in the kingdom. As James exhorted: “*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing*” (James 1:2-4).

The concept of patience “*having her perfect work*”—that is, her complete work—confirms there is a benefit to be derived from experiencing hardship. As Paul explains: “*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us*” (Rom. 5:3-5). The greater the difficulty of their course, the greater will be their yearning for its end and the fulfillment of their hope, that is receipt of their reward.

The prize

Keeping the value of the reward in mind throughout the race is also a source of strength. For some athletes, winning a gold medal at an Olympic games is the pinnacle of their ambitions, and they devote several years' training to achieve that objective. It is in that vein that Paul reminded the Corinthians of the prize for which they were running: *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore run not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air"* (1 Cor. 9:24-26). In the ultimate sense even a gold medal is a corruptible reward, whereas everlasting life is just that—everlasting—that is, never ending: *"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed"* (John 6:27).

The faithful of old

A final source of strength and encouragement for the Christian is to remember that the opportunity to run in the race for *"the prize of the high calling"* was not offered to those who lived in Old Testament times: *"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect"* (Heb. 11:39-40). Hence Paul's exhortation to the Christians at Philadelphia is powerful: *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you"* (Phil. 3:13-15). May all whom God has called to run the race appreciate their privilege and let nothing hinder them along the way. ■

GOD'S PLAN: AN OVERALL VIEW

The article below is reprinted with the kind permission of *Christian Friends of Israeli Communities* (www.cfoic.com). It was written in December 2016 but was received too late to be included in the January 2017 issue of the *Peoples Paper*. The emphasis (**bold type**) has been added by the *Peoples Paper*.

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One of my favorite Christmas carols is Silent Night, Holy Night. It evokes images of a pastoral peaceful scene of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. Unfortunately, today Bethlehem is far from that vision of peace and goodwill. When I really think about it though, Bethlehem in Judea wasn't all that peaceful 2,000 years ago either. The nation of Israel was under savage Roman rulers who were determined to break the Jewish spirit and destroy their devotion to God.

Sadly, not much has changed in 2,000 years. There are still evil forces in every nation working to destroy faith in God, and annihilate mankind's ability to worship God. This is seen in many "Christian" nations through a blatant disregard for the Bible, not valuing the sanctity of human life, and the general idolization of many unholy and ungodly men and women, their lifestyles and ideas. Yet, how different is today's society from that of Rome? Rome didn't have the media, Internet, Facebook, YouTube or Twitter, so they built the Coliseum that seated 50,000 people. Here early Christians and Jews were fed to

the lions as sport, along with grueling horrific fights to the death. How different is that from what we bring into our homes via the media every day?

"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us. 'He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill'" (Psalm 2:1-6).

No matter how desperate the situation today seems, King David wrote about it 1,000 years before Rome ruled Jerusalem. He said "He who sits in the heavens laughs". No matter how bad our current world system may seem, God is still on the throne, He is sitting in heaven and laughing at the vain plots of the enemy. He knows who will sit as King on Zion. I love the last line of Psalm 2, *"Blessed are all who take refuge in Him"*. **God has a plan, He has had a plan from the very beginning. His plan began with Abraham in the Land of Israel, and it ends in Zion, Jerusalem, Israel! These are exciting times as we witness God's plan in motion. We are seeing the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy coming to pass every day. Truly we are a blessed generation; everyone who takes refuge in God today is blessed.**

Kimberly Troup, Director, US Office ■

WHO OWNS THE LAND OF ISRAEL?

This article is the second in this issue that is based on a view from Israel. The *Peoples Paper* unashamedly gives such prominence to Israel because of Israel's prominence in the Bible: there are more than 2570 references to Israel in the Scriptures, compared with 983 references to Jesus, 848 to Moses and 311 to Abram (plus 250 to Abraham). Thus to ignore what the Bible has to say about Israel is to ignore a substantial proportion of God's Word.

Once again the following article is written by Kimberly Troup, Director, US Office of *Christian Friends of Israeli Communities*, an organization that has a keen interest in the developments in the Middle East, and in Israel in particular, relating them to the prophecies in the Bible. It is printed here with their kind permission.

* *

Recently, someone posted the following comment on our Facebook page: *"They may be God's chosen people, but that does not give them the right to deprive others of their land and their homes and their livelihoods. God loves those who seek JUSTICE, not land."*

And that got me thinking -- whose land is it anyway? Since I've worked most of my adult life to support Jews living in the land of Israel, specifically, those living in the Biblical heartland, Judea and Samaria, I've come to realize this is a critical question that every Christian who loves Israel should answer with Scripture: **Psalm 24:1-2 The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.**

King David says it so clearly in this verse: the Earth, the entire world belongs to the creator. When you think of a creative masterpiece, who initially owns that piece of art? The people who have created it. They are the only people who truly own it; they see its full potential, they see it with a vision for its ultimate destiny. They are trying to express an idea or a vision, to capture the inexpressible and share it with others. Then they choose who and how they will give their masterpiece to someone else. This is what God did when He created the world. He built paradise and shared it with mankind. So it truly is His to give to whomever He chooses. As we look further into Scripture we can see that He has made it very clear who is the rightful recipient of the Land of Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:8-9 When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples

according to the number of the Children of Israel. But the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

From this verse, we learn that the Most High gave each nation their inheritance; He divided mankind, and fixed the borders. Moreover, he fixed the borders of the nations, based on what the Children of Israel would require! God's borders, then, are not set by governments or political parties. When I think about all of the borders that have been drawn and re-drawn in my short lifetime, I find it amazing that the borders of Israel cause so much angst for almost every nation on earth! When you look at it with a purely natural eye, the situation in Israel today with regard to borders is beyond ludicrous! If someone remodels their kitchen, or adds a porch to their house in Judea or Samaria, it causes consternation from the White House to the Kremlin, to parliaments across the world, and of course in The Hague. National borders changed and entire countries were created between the two world wars and no one made a fuss. So why is Israel different? Could it be because there is a spiritual element involved? **Genesis 12:1-8: Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."** So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the Oak of Moreh (Alon Moreh). And the Canaanites were then in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.

This one Scripture has two very important themes: 1) God's commandment to Abram, first *"Go to the land that I will show you"*, and secondly His initial

promise, *"To your descendants, I will give this land.*

2) There are four very distinct city names mentioned, **Shechem, Alon Moreh, Bethel and Ai**. Look closely at a map to see where all four of these named cities are located. All four are found in the area that today the world calls the "West Bank". This is the area that our friend on facebook says doesn't belong to the Jewish people. Where Jews are "land-grabbing" and forcing Palestinians out of house and home. When we look at this map with our Bible open and we read God's commandment, *"Go to the land that I will show you"*, and then His promise, *"To your descendants I will give this land"*, it paints a very powerful picture. I think we can begin to see why world leaders get heartburn when a Jew builds a house in Judea or Samaria. He is fulfilling God's commandment and partaking of God's promise. The devil never likes to see anyone obey God or walking in the blessing of God.

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

you at this set time next year."

God knew what was going to happen in the twentieth century, when He fulfilled His promise to return the descendants of Abraham to the Land of Israel. He knew that the modern State of Israel would be established in 1948, and the Arab world would dispute Israel's legitimacy. God states very clearly to Abraham, your descendants, your heirs to the promise, those that I will establish My covenant with will come through Isaac. Ishmael is your son, and he will also receive an inheritance, but My covenant people will be the sons of Abraham and Isaac."■

• * *

And now a word about Abraham

The title "Abram" is composed of two Hebrew words "Av" and "Ram", and means "the father is lofty". On the other hand the name "Abraham" contains the words "Av" and "Hamon", which is a reference to the phrase *"I have made you ancestor of a multitude of nations"* (Gen. 17:5). While the change is minor—the only difference being one Hebrew letter: ה (pronounced hey)—this one letter changes the meaning of the word "ram" from "lofty" to "multitude". The emphasis is no longer on the individual distinction of one leader, but on the collective greatness of the entire multitude. Hence it is to the nation of Israel, Abraham's descendants—the whole twelve tribes of Judah and Jacob (Israel)—that God has given the land of Israel.■

JERUSALEM INSPIRATION

"Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall come trembling unto the LORD and to His goodness in the end of days" (Hosea 3:5)

This article is printed with the permission of "Israel365" (www.israel365.com). It was published in February 2016 and reflects the conviction of former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin that God would fulfill His promises to Israel. Begin was born in 1913, was the sixth prime minister of Israel—1977-83—and died in 1992. He witnessed the Second World War, the Six Day War in 1967, and in 1978-79 he negotiated and signed the Camp David Peace Accords.

* * *

The prophet Hosea promises that despite the period of punishment and separation, ultimately, 'b'akharit ha'yamim', Israel will return and seek the Lord their God. Contrary to the often translated 'end of days', Prime Minister Menachem Begin is quoted as saying, "'Acharit hayamim' does not mean 'the last days' or 'the end of days.' On the contrary! The key word, 'acharit,' is a synonym for a

bright future. It means 'hatikva,' - hope, as we find in Jeremiah 29:11: 'latet lachem acharit v'tikva' - 'to give to you a future and a hope,' or, 'to give you a hopeful future.' Hence, 'b'acharit hayamim' really means the days of redemption, when mankind shall enjoy the full blessings of eternal peace for all generations to come." No matter how difficult the present may be, one must continue to persevere in his or her relationship with God, confident that there is a bright future on the horizon. Gain insight into the Bible and its eternal messages for Israel and the world with your own complete set of The Israel Bible.

* *

Comment: Prime Minister Begin believed God's promise recorded in the book of Hosea. In view of peace not being accomplished during his term as Prime Minister, one may wonder about his belief in the promises in Jeremiah 31:27-37 and 32:37-44.■

PREACHING THE WORD: INSTANT IN SEASON

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2)

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus and charged him with the responsibility of correcting some who were straying from the gospel: *“Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith... As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine... Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim. 1:2-7).*

1 Timothy 1:6 contains the only occurrence of the term *“vain jangling”*, and so it is difficult to be assertive regarding the subjects the vain talkers were propounding. However the statement that they were desirous of teaching the Law might indicate that they were matters relating to the Law. Such a conclusion might be justified to some extent by comparing the Christians at Ephesus with those at Galatia and Crete. To the Galatians Paul wrote: *“This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:2-3).* It seems the practices that were required under the Law Covenant were proving difficult for some Galatians to discard.

Regarding those in Crete, Paul wrote: *“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... For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake” (Titus 1:4-11).*

If the assumptions above are correct, the situations that confronted both Timothy and Titus involved correcting those who were going astray because they were failing to leave the traditions they had received from their fathers. Additionally their adherence to past doctrines and practices was misleading others, hence there was a need for them to take action.

Instant

Regarding taking action, Paul told Timothy that he had to be *“instant in season”*. There are at least three

aspects to be considered regarding being *“instant in season”*. Just as it is important to note what Paul told Timothy what to do, it is also important to note when and how Paul told him to preach the Word.

Firstly, Timothy was to be ever ready to preach to others just as Peter exhorted those who were scattered throughout Asia Minor: *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15).* Thus it is incumbent on all God's people to be always ready and prepared to share the gospel with others, and particularly when one is asked for a reason for one's hope.

Secondly, the servant must be ready to address the enquirer's question, that is, whatever they are asked, not necessarily what one might like to talk about at that time. Such a response requires one to listen to the questioner. Paul exercised this wisdom in his preaching to the Corinthians: *“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).* Paul withheld some aspects of the gospel because he realized they were unable to understand them at their stage of growth. Thus he continued: *“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6).* It is as Jesus told His disciples: *“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12).*

Thirdly, Peter added that their preaching was to be *“with meekness and fear”*. The principle to be observed at all times is as Paul wrote to the Romans: *“Be not wise in your own conceits” (Rom. 12:16).* The objective must always be to *“let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor. 14:26).* ■

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OUR DAILY SERVICE

“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23)

Jesus told His disciples that following Him would not be a part-time occupation, but would require their full time devotion, just as He was serving His Father daily: *“And he taught daily in the temple...”* (Luke 19:47).

Serving God has always required continual (that is, repeated and constant) attention to duty:

- When God gave Israel the Law Covenant on their exodus from Egypt, He required them to serve Him every day: *“Thou shalt daily prepare a burnt offering unto the LORD of a lamb of the first year without blemish: thou shalt prepare it every morning”* (Ezek. 46:13). The sacrifice of a lamb was a daily requirement;
- Jesus taught His disciples that they were to pray daily, that God would provide their sustenance for that day: *“Give us this day our daily bread”* (Matt. 6:11);
- Paul’s dedication was so all-consuming that he wrote *“I die daily”* (1 Cor. 15:31);
- Peter wrote: *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”* (1 Pet. 3:15). Peter urged his readers to be ready at all times—daily—to help those who enquired after heavenly things. Such readiness requires one to be free of all other obligations and to be devoted solely to the one purpose to which they have been called.

Both Paul’s testimony and Peter’s letter exhorted their readers to practise what Jesus had told His followers: *“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Matt. 6:33). The exhortation to seek *“first”* means to place it first in “time, place, order, or importance” (Strong’s Concordance #G4412), and to place it first in each of those categories means the Christian must be always ready—every day—to serve God and His Son Jesus.

The first requirement

The first requirement to enable one to serve God is to believe He exists: *“... he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”* (Heb. 11:6).

Belief in God is not as simple as it might sound. In spite of God’s miraculous provision and care of the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt, they did not continue to acknowledge that all they had received during their journey was God’s gracious provision. Deuteronomy 1:30-32 reads: *“The Lord your God which goeth before you... in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. Yet in this thing ye did not believe the Lord your God”*. Reviewing the written records of Israel’s journey might leave one wondering why they did not continue to acknowledge God’s miraculous care. However the same test applies today to all who have experienced hardship: when their trials are lifted there is a temptation to forget how God sustained them and cared for them throughout their “desert” experience. One must continue to be ever mindful of God’s care.

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Trust

In order to serve God one must not only believe that He exists but they must also put their trust in Him. As Jeremiah wrote: *"Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is, for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit"* (Jer. 17:7-8). Those who completely trust that the Lord is caring for them are able to withstand the heat of their trials and also withstand the desert experiences when they are unable to readily enjoy receiving the water of life by, for example, fellowshiping with others.

David also emphasized the importance of trusting in God. He wrote: *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths"* (Prov. 3:5-6).

Israel failed to implicitly trust God: *"Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the Lord!"* (Isa. 31:1). Israel trusted in their own resources.

Prayer

Daily prayer is necessary for the Christian to ensure they are walking with the Lord. Indeed it must not be just a daily routine but the Christian must be in a prayerful attitude at all times. Colossians 4:2 reads: *"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving"*.

Singleness of purpose

As mentioned above, serving the Lord daily means there is no room in one's life for any other goal. As Jesus told His disciples: *"No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon"* (Luke 16:13).

Paul had a single purpose. He wrote: *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you"* (Phil. 3:13-15). Paul had time for only one thing: *"pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"*, and so he exhorted his hearers: *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Cor. 11:1).

Paul also used the analogy of running in a race to exhort the Corinthians to focus on one single purpose in accordance with their consecration: *"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain"* (1 Cor. 9:24). One who is competing in a race, with the objective of winning the prize, must devote themselves totally to running and not allow themselves to be diverted by any other goal.

Hope

One source of motivation to those who are competing in a race is the value of the prize. Regarding the prize for which the Christian is running, Paul wrote: *"Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13).

There are several aspects of the *"glorious appearing"* to which Paul referred and it is the prerogative of every Christian to decide for themselves which aspect Paul particularly had in mind when he wrote to Titus. Strong's Concordance defines the Greek word *"epiphaneia"* (#G2015), from which *"appearing"* is translated, as *"a manifestation, that is, (specifically) the advent of Christ (past or future)"*. Paul used that Greek word only six times in His writings and in five of those instances it is translated *"appearing"* in the King James Version, (1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 1:10. 4:1, 8; Tit. 2:13). The remaining instance is in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 where, in the King James Version, it is translated *"brightness"*: *"And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming"*. Depending on the context of each occurrence, *"epiphaneia"* may be understood to refer to various times:

- the end of one's present earthly life, after which they will be unconscious in the grave until they are resurrected at Jesus' *"coming"* (1 Tim. 6:14);
- the enlightenment each Christian experiences in this present life due to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 1:10);
- when Jesus takes control of earth's affairs (2 Tim. 4:1 and probably verse 8).

Hence Titus 2:13 may be understood to refer to the enlightenment of the world at the start of His earthly reign or, for the Christian, the glorious prospect of *"living and reigning with their Lord"* (Rev. 20:6).

Self examination

Paul also urged Titus to *"put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work"* (Tit. 3:1). *"To be ready"* means to be ready at all times, that is *"now"* or *"immediately"*. Thus it is important that Christians examine themselves often—daily—to ensure they are *"ready"*. As Paul

wrote to the Corinthians: *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (2 Cor. 13:5). A “reprobate” is one who is rejected, that is cast away. God reads the heart and knows whether one is truly grateful and thankful and hence ready for service.

Paul’s instruction is precise: each one is to examine themselves; which means not compare themselves with others. The words of Romans 12:1-2 are a timely exhortation: *“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. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”*.

While the Christian should not expect to be popular: *“We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. 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. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come”* (Heb 13:10-14). The Christian must remember that the call is to go unto Him *“without the camp”*, and to examine themselves to ensure they are developing the standard described in Hebrews 13:12: *“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”*. Such scrutiny requires daily attention..

Nutrition

Achieving the standard of conduct (conversation) described in Hebrews 13:12 is possible only if one adopts the correct “diet” and avoids contrary influences. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: *“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you”* (2 Cor. 6:16-17). While Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians contained an exhortation to correct their ways, his letter to the

Philippians contained only “positive” advice: *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you”* (Phil. 4:8-9).

In summary

Paul summarised the Christian’s daily service in an earlier part of his letter to the Philippians: *“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 2:1-5).

As well as examining and correcting oneself daily, the responsibility of the Christian is to also encourage each other: *“The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back”* (Isa. 50:4-5). Likewise God instructed Zechariah to teach the Israelites that the first requirement is to be truthful with each other: *“These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates”* (Zech. 8:16).■

BOOKS AVAILABLE

The following books are available free and post free to your postal address anywhere in the world (while stocks last):

- **“Armageddon Then World Peace”** (15.2 cm x 9.5 cm, 32 pages, soft cover); (an electronic copy is posted on our web site: www.bbi.org.au)
- **“God’s Grand Plan of the Ages”** (23 cm x 15.5 cm, 94 pages, soft cover);
- **“This Land is Mine”** (22 cm x 15 cm, 31 pages, soft cover).

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WHEN YE SEE THESE THINGS

"Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matthew 13:13).

Jesus' explanation to His disciples regarding why He spoke to the multitude in parables illustrates God's power over the human mind, that is, that physically seeing an event does not mean the observer understands its significance. As John recorded: *"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them"* (John 12:37-40). They had physically seen the miracles but they did not realise that they identified Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus declared that it was God who blinded the Israelites' "eyes"—*"He hath blinded their eyes"*—so that they could not understand. Paul explains that it is only by the Holy Spirit that anyone can understand the things that are a mystery to all who have not received God's Holy Spirit: *"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God"* (1 Cor. 2:9-10).

The challenge of our day

The privilege of the Christian is three-fold: to realise that the events occurring in the world today are significant, that they are a fulfillment of Bible prophecy, and consequently that the establishment of God's kingdom on earth is nigh: *"And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand"* (Luke 21:29-31).

Hence the question: which events in the world today indicate that the kingdom of God is nigh?

Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 all refer to events that have occurred since Jesus uttered the words recorded in those chapters: false teachers, wars and rumours of wars, distress of nations. The continued existence of these phenomena leads those who have not been blessed with God's Holy Spirit to conclude that "nothing is

changing", and that there is no evidence that God's kingdom is nigh. However Peter forewarned that would be the temptation for the Christian to resist in the last days: *"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"* (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

The fig tree

One of the signs to which Jesus referred in His prophecy is *"the fig tree, yet tender putting forth leaves, and all the trees"* (Matt. 24:32; Mark 13:28; Luke 21:29). Trees feature in several Old Testament prophecies, for example Isaiah 55:12: *"For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands"*. The trees in Isaiah's prophecy are symbolic because trees do not have literal hands and hence do not literally *"clap their hands"*.

Jesus' reference to the *"fig tree"* and *"all the trees"* implies fig trees have particular significance in Bible prophecy, and all of Jeremiah chapter 24 relates fig trees to Israel. Some verses of particular significance are verses 1, 5, 6-9: *"The LORD shewed me, and, behold, two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the LORD, after that Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, and the princes of Judah, with the carpenters and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon... Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good... For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart... And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: And I will deliver them to be*

removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them" The challenge for every Christian is to decide for themselves whether the present regathering of the Israelites from all the countries to which they have been scattered is a fulfillment of Jeremiah's and Jesus' prophecies, and hence whether their regathering is a sign that the kingdom of God is nigh.

Other events

Jesus also prophesied that *"... there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken"* (Luke 21:25-26). Do any of the events in the world today qualify as any of these signs?

Global warming

One current topical issue is "global warming", that is, the rise in the Earth's average temperature: is it due to industrial effluent that was not part of the environment in the Garden of Eden? Some events which have been attributed to global warming include increased frequency of typhoons and cyclones, and the melting of the polar ice caps. 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.

On the other hand, some news reports indicate that the USA is currently intending to withdraw from an international agreement to reduce carbon dioxide emissions because the presently intended targets would create huge unemployment problems for USA. Solve one problem and create another!

Social unrest

Recently there have been several acts of violence in Europe, the mid-east and south-east Asia which have been attributed to terrorism.

Finance

During the first decade of this century there was stress in the financial sector. Its effect was so wide spread that it was termed the Global Financial Crisis; "the GFC". It is still attracting references 9 years after it "ended".

Religious turmoil

The religious arena has also experienced dramatic changes, including the Roman Catholic Church, which has changed its stance on

several hitherto sacred doctrines. The internet site www.vaticanatholic.com provides details of some of the changes. The changes are a stark contrast to the teachings and unilateral authority the Church taught and enforced for centuries.

Computers

The development of computers has added to the complexity of the present problems. The internet is an innovation of the last 30 years or so. While it is a marvellous resource for the promulgation of knowledge it has also provided a ready means for the dissemination of immoral and Satanic material. Such material undermines many of the principles upon which western societies are built. Additionally, the development of computerised machines is relieving mankind of many arduous physical tasks, but those machines are causing increased unemployment and hence financial and social problems. Again, solve one problem and create another!

The kingdom

In view of present world conditions, one question is to what extent will the present industrial activity, financial systems and immoral practices be continued in the kingdom of God?

The Bible does not answer the first part of the question, other than Peter's statement: *"And He shall send Jesus Christ which before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"* (Act 3:20-21). One of the prophets to whom Peter referred may have been Micah: *"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever"* (Micah 4:1-5).

May Micah's prophecy soon be fulfilled!■

WHO MAKETH THEE TO DIFFER?

“And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Corinthians 4:6-7)

Paul presented the Corinthian church with a challenge: on what basis did they consider anyone to be more worthy than any other, and to whom did they attribute the acquisition of their possessions?

Paul referred to himself and to Apollos as examples for them to consider, and hence realise that no one had any grounds for esteeming one more important than another. He expressed his instruction in forthright terms: *“that no one of you be puffed up for one against another”*.

Esteem

Paul implied that there are two aspects to esteem: esteem for oneself (which is pride) and esteem for another (which is a form of worship).

Regarding esteem for oneself, Paul reminded them that neither he nor Apollos considered themselves to be “better” than anyone else, but simply that they were the Lord’s ministers: *“who then is Paul and who then is Apollos but ministers by whom ye believed even as the Lord gave to every man”* (1 Cor.3:5). It was a powerful argument: Paul—who was given charge of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:28)—did not claim any honour or glory for that position. Additionally he did not claim any credit as their teacher but reminded them that all they understood of God’s plan was God’s gift to them, and not a gift from himself or Apollos.

An extension of Paul’s message is that no one should esteem another simply because what the other has written is published in a book. The responsibility to *“receive the word with all readiness of mind”* and then to *“search the scriptures daily, whether those things are so”* (Act 17:11), applies to every individual, regardless of whom the Lord might have used to open their eyes.

On the other hand it must be remembered that another’s studentship must not be denigrated nor discarded on the basis of how they are regarded by others. Again it is a matter for the individual.

Oratory

Paul made mention of oratory. He did not esteem himself above another on the basis of his oratory (public speaking). His remark is significant

because it is possible that, in his day, oratory was the principal method of spreading the gospel: *“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God... and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power”* (1 Cor. 2:1-4).

Paul’s refusal to esteem himself, or to encourage others to esteem him because of his preaching, is particularly significant in view of some evidence that he was a powerful orator, confronting the Jews in the synagogue: *“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him”* (Acts 17:16-17). Paul did not pander to them—He *“disputed”* with them—and his preaching was effective: *“Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few”* (Acts 17:12).

Maybe Paul’s example contains a lesson for all who preach the Word from a public platform today. Sophisticated media such as Powerpoint and video presentations are available to influence their audience and bring acclaim to the speaker, however the technical media are not responsible for any growth in anyone’s knowledge: it is God who gives the increase.

Flattery

In similar vein all who teach another must firstly remember that their knowledge is God’s gift to them and not a result of their own study. Nevertheless any who would teach another must be well versed in the Scriptures: *“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat”* (Heb. 5:12). However their knowledge must not be a cause for self esteem. They must always realise that they have gained their knowledge only because God has revealed it to them. Thus a teacher must be on guard and reject any flattery from another. Their mission must always be to recognise the spiritual status of their hearer and seek to provide only those things that will assist

the other to grow in their knowledge of God's Word: *"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another"* (Rom. 14:19). *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"* (Phil. 2:2-3).

Another effect of esteem

Esteem has the potential also to cause division by enticing or encouraging some to follow the one who is esteemed, and in turn that has the potential of creating a sect or cult. Hence in his message to the Corinthians, Paul exhorted them to strive for unity: *"now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you, but that you may be perfectly joined together in the same mind"* (1 Cor. 1:10). It is as Jesus instructed His disciples: *"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. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:42-45).

Gifts.

Another temptation that confronted the Corinthians was the miraculous gifts. 1 Corinthians 12: 4-18 reads: *"Now there are diversities of gifts but the same spirit, for to one there is given by the spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same spirit, to another faith by the same spirit, to another the gifts of healing by the same spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. 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 the body of Christ 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?"*

Those words mean that some learnt by a different medium than did others; some were given the gift of "seeing" while others had been

given *"ears to hear"*. Hence one must be aware that God reveals certain aspects to His chosen ones by different means.

Once again the overall lesson is that it is God who gives gifts to the members of the body and that *"the whole building fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple"* (Eph. 4:16).

Doubtful disputations

Paul wrote: *"To him that is weak in the flesh receive ye but not to doubtful disputations"* (Rom. 14:1). Paul reminded the Romans that there were some elements of God's plan that were not clear at that time, and likewise there are some elements of God's plan that have not yet been revealed.

One issue that troubled the Romans was which foods they may eat and which were prohibited: *"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 that eateth not judge him that eateth for God has received him"* (Rom.14:2-3). The Christian must realise that such a matter must not be a cause for division or judgement of another: it must always be remembered that everyone's knowledge is God's gift to them.

Another issue that troubled the Romans was the day of the week they were to set aside for worship: *"One man esteems one day above another, another esteems every day alike, let everyman be fully persuaded in his own mind"* (Rom.14:5). Opinions on this matter have existed all down the ages and still exist today. The Christian must not condemn those who believe it is necessary to worship on one particular day; it must be remembered that it is God who has revealed the liberty of not being constrained to one particular day, and that He has not yet revealed that freedom to everyone. Such uncertainty in the mind of another must not be despised.

Looking at it the other way around, if one is tempted to claim they have superior knowledge, they should remember that maybe God has revealed something to others that He has not revealed to them. One must not be *"wise in one's own conceits"* (Rom. 12:16).

Gradual revelation of truth

Those who consider themselves knowledgeable in God's Word should remember that there are some aspects of God's plan that He has not yet fully revealed to anyone. Some are:

- The times of the Gentiles. It should be acknowledged that God might not yet have revealed to everyone the precise date of the

commencement of the *Times of the Gentiles* and the time of their completion. It is the prerogative—and the responsibility—of each individual to decide for themselves what the Scriptures say about this “time”, and whether such knowledge is so crucial to their sanctification that it should determine whether they should not associate with anybody who has a different conviction regarding the precise times of the start and ending of that “time”;

- The time of the end (Dan. 12:4). Likewise the beginning and conclusion of the “time of the end” may be understood differently and one must realise that it is God who reveals these details to each one.

- The treading of the winepress. This is another event which some believe is not categorically defined in Scripture, and hence it may be regarded as another aspect of God’s plan about which He has not yet revealed some details;

- The expression “*which God ordained before the world unto our glory*” (1 Cor. 2:7). This expression may also be understood differently. “Ordained” is translated from the Greek “*proorizō*” which Strong’s Concordance defines as to “*limit in advance*, that is, (figuratively) *predetermine*”. At this point it is timely to note that Paul goes on to remind the Corinthians that it is God who reveals His truth by giving them of His Holy Spirit: “*What man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man that is in him even so the things of God knoweth no man but the spirit of God, the natural man seeth not the things of God for they are foolishness unto him neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned*” (1 Cor. 2:11-14).

Unbelievers

While the exhortation is to exercise tolerance and understanding among Christians regarding several points of doctrine, another issue that troubled the Corinthians was the attitude they should adopt towards “unbelievers”.

The Christian must realise that it is by God’s grace that they are different from “unbelievers”. Paul wrote: “*Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: 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: 6-10). Paul continued and

introduced the concept of them being the temple of God; a concept that God has not yet revealed to all those who profess to be His servants.

The temple of God

Paul wrote: “*And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God, for God has said I will dwell in them and walk in them and I will be their God and they shall be my people*” (2 Cor. 6:16).

While it might seem proud or conceited to consider oneself to be a member of God’s Temple, nevertheless that is the privilege He has given to those to whom He has given His Holy Spirit. Realisation of this privilege means the Christian has no reasonable option but to comply with Paul’s instruction to separate from those who practise deeds that are contrary to God’s Will: “*Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord and touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you*” (2 Cor. 6:17). However such separation must be due to God having given His Holy Spirit, and not due to personal pride.

The temptation to be proud is overcome to some extent by remembering that at one time “*such were some of you*” (1 Cor. 6:11), and that it is only because of God’s grace that anyone is able to understand anything of God’s plan. One must remember that God may yet enlighten the unbeliever just as He enlightened them.

The path of the just

Daniel wrote: “*But thou O Daniel, Shut up the words and seal the book even till the time of the end: Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased*” (Dan. 12:4). God is revealing more of His plan as time progresses, and the fact that greater light is shining today than in previous times is no basis for pride.

Such a gradual revelation is consistent with Proverbs 4:18: “*The path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*”. The path is being increasingly enlightened by both the revelation of God’s plan overall and also as each individual “*grows in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Summary

No one may consider themselves to be superior to another, or to esteem another better than another: “*For by Grace are we 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 that God has before ordained that we should walk in them*” (Eph. 2:8).■

ACCOUNTING THAT GOD ...

"Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Hebrews 11:19).

Abraham's faith may be held up as an example for Christians to emulate. Its virtues are magnified when the details of the tests the Lord gave him are examined in detail.

Accounting

The first consideration is that he *"accounted"* that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead.

There are several aspects to "accounting", and hence each occurrence has to be considered in its context.

The parent Greek word in Hebrews 11:19 is *"logizomai"*; defined by some authorities as:

- Strong's Concordance: *"take an inventory, that is, estimate"* (literally or figuratively);
- Young's Concordance: *"to reckon"*;
- Vine's Expository Dictionary: *"to reckon, whether by calculation or imputation"*;

Every instance where *"logizomai"* occurs contains an element of "the unknown", which is consistent with the concept of faith as defined in Hebrews 11:1: *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"*. As Paul wrote: *"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"* (Rom. 8:24). Thus Abraham believed—accounted—that God would do something Abraham had not seen: bring a person back from the dead.

Abraham's faith

Abraham's faith was based on his belief in God's promise that *"in Isaac shall thy seed be called"*. That promise required Isaac to be resurrected. Those words comprise almost all of Hebrews 11:18, and if that verse is taken alone it might give the impression that they were a major part of God's message to Abraham. However in Genesis 21:12 they appear as the last few words of just one verse, and are immediately followed by God's promise that He would also raise up a nation by the bond woman (Hagar). Hence Abraham's grasping onto God's promise to him is an example of his attention to the detail of God's words: an aspect relevant to the Christian.

The Christian's challenge

The challenge confronting the Christian is also to believe that God is able to—and will—do things He has not yet visibly demonstrated to mankind. Some of them are:

- The world-wide resurrection of the dead. Just

as Abraham had not seen an individual who had been resurrected from the dead, so it remains today (except as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:1-7). However one difference between the situation today and the challenge to Abraham is that today, in Christian circles, the idea of a resurrection has been discussed—although not believed—whereas previously it was original;

- Another difference is that in Abraham's case it was the resurrection of only one person, whereas today the promise is that millions will be resurrected: *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice"* (John 5:28);

- With the resurrection of all mankind comes the challenge of providing for everyone's needs: room on planet Earth, food, water and shelter. God has given several promises that He is going to provide these needs, but not in detail, except passages like Isaiah 35:1-2: *"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God"*. Isaiah 34:1-2 indicates that this promise will not be confined to the land of Israel but will apply to the whole of the planet;

- Many of the world's problems today are due to conflict. But God has promised: *"Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth"* (Psa. 46:8-10);

- The challenge is more than stopping war; it is the long term maintenance of peace. In that regard Nahum 1:9 reads: *"What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time"*.

And so, in spite of many of God's promises having been fulfilled already—the rise and fall of earthly kingdoms, the life and death of Jesus, the scattering and regathering of the nation of Israel, and the rapid increase in knowledge during the last century—belief in the promise of *"the times of restitution of all things, which have been spoken by all the prophets since the world began"* (Acts 3:21) means that there is much accounting for the Christian to do today!■

CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

"For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God"
(1 Peter 2:15-16)

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

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

Israel's bondage under the Law Covenant was two-fold: there were certain things the Law prohibited them from doing and there were other things they were required to do, both of which limited their freedom.

Prohibitions

Some of the prohibitions imposed by the Law Covenant are expressed directly in the "Ten Commandments" (Exod. 20:1-17). One gauge of how restrictive the Ten Commandments were is to consider their effect on the lifestyles of the Western World in the twenty first century:

- No work on the Sabbath Day: *"Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it"* (Exod. 20:9-11). If that prohibition applied today it would destroy the life style of the inhabitants of every industrialised country. Many of the processes that contribute to modern day life, such as the generation of electricity, require factories to operate 24 hours per day 7 days per week. In factories such as metal foundries the processes cannot be started and stopped at the end of every day but must run continuously;
- No marriage between peoples of different nations: *"When the LORD thy God shall bring*

thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son" (Deut. 7:1-3). This prohibition had two effects:

- the prohibition of making covenants with other nations. This prohibition would mean the European Union and the United Nations would not exist, along with the huge number of trade agreements between nations;
- no marriage between people from other nations. Today there are many families whose parents are descendants from nations which in times past have been at war with each other;
- Only certain animals may be eaten: *"These are the beasts which ye shall eat: the ox, the sheep, and the goat... And every beast that parteth the hoof, and cleaveth the cleft into two claws, and cheweth the cud among the beasts, that ye shall eat. Nevertheless these ye shall not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the cloven hoof; as the camel, and the hare, and the coney: for they chew the cud, but divide not the hoof; therefore they are unclean unto you. And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh... These ye shall eat of all that are in the waters: all that have fins and scales shall ye eat: And whatsoever hath not fins and scales ye may not eat; it is unclean unto you. Of all clean birds ye shall eat. But these are they of which ye shall not eat: the eagle, and the ossifrage, and the ospray, And the glede..."* (Deut. 14:3-21). Bacon and pork were prohibited and only fish with fins and scales was permitted; both of those restrictions are widely ignored in Western countries today;
- Restriction on borrowing: *"For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee"* (Deut. 15:6). Such restriction would bring the world's financial system to a complete stop with a

collapse of life styles in many countries;

- Not permitted to wear garments comprised of more than one material: *"Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together"* (Deut. 22:11). This prohibition would exclude many fabrics used today;
- Not permitted to gain interest from a loan to one's countrymen: *"Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury..."* (Deut. 23:19-20). No interest bearing loans within one's country would be permitted; the only loans permitted would be across international borders;
- Not permitted to seek the return of anything lent to another: *"When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge"* (Deut. 24:10). There were no enforceable repayment provisions for loans.

The present day Western World would not be able to operate under the restrictions imposed by the Ten Commandments.

Obligations

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

The burden was greater on the Sabbath day when two lambs had to be sacrificed: *"And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot..."* (Num. 28:9-10).

The lusts of the flesh

The end of the Law Covenant relieved Israel of those restrictions and responsibilities. However their new found liberty brought the temptation of loose living and so Paul urged them not to succumb to those temptations: *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another"* (Gal. 5:13). His message was for

them to resist the temptations of the flesh; they were to use their liberty to serve one another.

Regarding the lusts of the flesh, Paul continued: *"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish... Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revels, and the like, of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practise such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such there is no law"* (Gal. 5:16-23).

When Paul wrote to the Galatians the term *"lust of the flesh"* had a broader meaning than what is generally ascribed today. Nowadays *"lust"* is usually taken to involve sexual desire, but in those days it embraced all of the desires that stem from the human frame as Paul has listed them. Paul did not claim his list was exhaustive but included the expression *"and the like"*, which in turn required them to understand the principle behind the examples he quoted.

A second category of *"works of the flesh"* relates to religion: *"Idolatry"* and *"sorcery"*. *"Idolatry"* means the worship of things other than God, whereas *"sorcery"* means taking an interest in the powers of evil, such as consulting spirit mediums, attending séances, attempting to communicate with the spirit world and the dead (who were thought to be alive in some other form of existence).

A third category of the *"works of the flesh"* that Paul listed relates to pride: *"hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revels"*. All must be resisted.

Christian conflict

Thus discipline is required to properly exercise Christian liberty. On the one hand the Christian must be prepared to cast off the traditions and customs of one's previous life, including past ungodly associations if they are contrary to the development of the fruits of the Spirit, and on the other to consciously endeavour to develop the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, long suffering... Indeed *"...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature..."* (2 Cor. 5:17).■

PREACHING THE WORD: OUT OF SEASON

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2)

Paul's charge to Timothy required him to *"preach the word in season" and "out of season"*. The *"season"* was not to be determined by Timothy but by his hearer. In other words, Timothy had to be ready always to minister to others regardless of whether or not it was *"convenient"* for him at that moment in time.

Isaiah

Isaiah is one who immediately accepted the Lord's call: *"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me"* (Isa. 6:8). There is no indication whether it was convenient for Isaiah to undertake the task at that time.

Isaiah volunteered for the task before he knew the details of what was involved. It was after he had volunteered that the Lord told him: *"... Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed"* (Isa. 6:9-10).

Duration

Further, Isaiah accepted the task before he enquired about its duration: *"Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate. And the LORD have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land"* (Isa 6:11-12). The time frame would be determined by the Lord, not Isaiah. And so it is with the Christian today: as it was with Paul, their ministry is to continue until the work the Lord gives them is done: *"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God"* (Acts 20:24).

Ready to serve

Those who would be the Lord's servant must be ready to serve Him whenever the Lord calls them. Samuel did not hesitate to accept the Lord's call—as soon as he realised it was the Lord (and not Eli) who was calling him, and in spite of him being asleep his response was immediate: *"And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel."*

Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. 3:1-10).

Jesus' disciples also immediately answered His call: *"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me... And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him"* (Matt. 4:18-22). All four of them were engaged in other tasks when Jesus called them but they left off their present tasks immediately.

Levi, the publican, was another who responded immediately to the Lord's call: *"And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him"* (Luke 5:27-28).

Contrast

In stark contrast to the examples cited above, one disciple wished to delay taking up the Lord's service due to the death of his father: *"And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead"* (Matt. 8:21-22). In countries where some importance is attributed to the passing of a loved one, it might be considered rude to not attend such a ceremony. However Jesus did not esteem it thus, but relegated it to the province of those who are not privileged to serve Him. A call to serve Him must be given the highest priority, regardless of whether it is convenient for the individual.■

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CUNNINGLY DEvised FABLES

"Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:15-16).

Peter's first letter was written to *"the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit..."* (1 Pet. 1:1-2).

Their election was not their doing, but God's: *"ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light"* (1 Pet. 2:9). It was God who called them out of darkness, to which Paul also testified in his letter to the Corinthians: *"... 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). It is God who, by His Spirit, has revealed His mysteries.

In His second letter Peter repeated that the revelation of God's secrets is God's work alone. He wrote: *"... to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:... 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. 1:1-4). It is by God's divine power that He revealed His great and precious promises which had enabled them to escape the corruption that is in the world.

Both of Peter's letters, and Paul's letter to the Corinthians, remind their readers of their privileges: they were *"elect"*, they were *"chosen"*,

they had been *"called out of darkness"* and had been given the hope of being *"partakers of the divine nature"*.

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul contrasts their privileged position with those who had not been called, by comparing the privilege of one walking in light with one who was walking in darkness: *"For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light... Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness..."* (Eph. 5:8-11). *"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. 4:6).

Peter's demise

Peter realised that, while he was with them to encourage them, it was relatively easy for them to believe, but the time was coming when he would not be with them, and they would need to be fully convinced in their own mind regarding the truths of God's Word. They were to be *"ready always to give an answer to every man that asked them a reason"* for their hope (1 Pet. 3:15).

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Consequently he exhorted them to believe that what he had told them was not a “*cunningly devised fable*”, but was true, that is, that Jesus truly was the Messiah as evidenced by the events that accompanied His baptism: “*And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*” (Matt. 3:16-17).

Peter exhorted his hearers that after he had died they would remember the things he had told them. Remembering the things he had told them would be a powerful tool, so much so that, towards the end of his letter, he reminded them again to keep them in their minds, and especially to believe that what he had told them was not a whim of his imagination but was a repetition of what God has given to His prophets of old: “*This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness*” (2 Pet. 3:1-11).

Twenty first century

As “*evil has waxed worse and worse*” as the end of this age approaches (2 Tim. 3:13), it is important for all of the Lord’s people to keep the promises of the prophets in mind—to remember them—and to remember that they are not fables.

Fables

A fable may be defined as a short story conveying a lesson. That is, the information in a fable is not necessarily fact but imaginary, and that definition distinguishes Peter’s message regarding the situation in the end times. Peter’s message was not imaginary but factual: the flood of Noah’s day, that Jesus was the Messiah, that the events in the world indicate that the end of this kosmos is near, and that the promises of God regarding “*the restitution of all things spoken by His holy prophets*” (Acts 3:20-21) will soon be fulfilled.

Devised fables

Peter assured his readers that the fables that confronted them were not only false but also “*devised*”. That means they constituted a complex system, whereas the truth that Peter taught was simple: that Jesus’ ministry was foreordained before the foundation of the world, that His ministry was spoken of by all God’s holy prophets, that Jesus came to earth and died as foretold by those prophets, that the present order of things will be removed and replaced with God’s righteous kingdom—a new heavens and a new earth—and that it is “*natural*” that those who live righteously now will be despised by the god of this world and his followers.

The philosophies now rampant in the world, particularly in the Western world, testify to the accuracy of God’s Word regarding mankind’s attitude towards any divine authority, and hence Peter’s advice to his readers is applicable to Christians today.

Cunningly

The King James Version of the Bible includes the adjective “*cunningly*” to describe the fables with which Christians would be confronted.

Some English dictionaries define “*cunningly*” as:

- “the use of clever but false arguments, especially with the intention of deceiving”;
- “Cunning, artifice, craft imply an inclination toward deceit, slyness, and trickery”; and
- “Cunning implies a shrewd, often instinctive skill in concealing or disguising the real purposes of one’s actions: not intelligence but a low kind of cunning”.

However Strong’s Concordance indicates that “*cunningly devised*” is translated from one Greek word (#4679-sophizō) which is defined as “From G4680; to *render wise*; in a sinister acceptance, to *form* “*sophisms*”, that is, *continue plausible error*”.

The definition in Strong’s Concordance includes the word “*sophisms*”, which is defined in some English dictionaries as “the use of clever but false arguments, especially with the intention of

deceiving”, that is, a repetition of the definition of “cunningly”.

Consequently there is some evidence for interpreting Peter’s words to mean that there was some deliberate intention to deceive by the proponents of error in his day. And so one may wonder if there is some intention to deceive by the proponents of error in our day. The significance of that statement is not overlooked: one may propagate error but do so ignorantly, not realising the error, whereas to deliberately propagate error with the intent of leading others astray is quite a different matter.

Theory of evolution

Consistent with the above, the currently widely accepted theory of evolution may be regarded as a “plausible error”. The characteristics of the various species that comprise the animal kingdom (and in some respects their similarity with the vegetable kingdom such as their reproductive systems and dependence on water and oxygen) contribute to the theory being plausible. However the inability of any human being to consciously observe any changes within one’s lifetime requires changes to have taken place over a long period of time, indeed millions of years. And so, while the theory might be plausible on one front, there are many aspects that mankind cannot substantiate, one of which is the length of the time period involved. Any dating system that extends beyond mankind’s observed time frame involves extrapolation, that is, estimating the unknown. The conclusions that may be drawn from extrapolation, while being plausible, cannot be regarded as fact.

One example of extrapolation is weather forecasting; predicting the weather tomorrow on the basis of what it has been for the last relevant period or what it has been in the same season in previous years. However when the eventual weather is significantly different from expectations it is frequently regarded as “unseasonal”. The determination of the length of time Planet Earth has existed employs extrapolation; not forward looking, but historically, regarding changes that are assumed to have occurred several million years ago. It is not suggested that the theory has been developed specifically with the intention of deceiving but in an honest attempt to explain why mankind is here and what is their destiny. However it is complex science and is in stark contrast to the simple truth of creation as recorded in Genesis and attested by several of the Biblical authors, Peter included: *“For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:*

Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Pet. 3:5-6).

Bible prophecy

While it is “easy” to criticize others for making assumptions that have not or cannot be “proved”, the same principle must be applied to the interpretation of Bible prophecy. All students of God’s Word must be prepared to *“prove all things”* for themselves (1 Thess. 5:21)—that means, to be *“fully persuaded in their own minds”* (Rom. 14:5), regardless of what anyone else might believe, regardless of whether they be an “elder” or someone of “no consequence”.

One example of misinterpreting Bible prophecy was the expectation, in the latter years of the 19th century (1895 onwards) that God’s kingdom would be established on earth by about 1915, and the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914 temporarily gave substance to that prediction. However God had not revealed some of the features of His plan; that a second world-wide battle would break out some 25 years later (World War 2 in 1939) and that it would be a further 11 years (until 1948) before the nation of Israel would be established.

Likewise the identification of the *“four winds”* (Rev. 7:1) is still undisclosed. About 50 years ago, during the “cold war”, there was some thought that maybe they were the four dominant military world powers at that time—United Kingdom, United States of America, France and USSR. They were all heavily armed and able to destroy each other, held back by the realisation that to destroy their enemy would also result in destroying themselves; indeed they were being “held back” by the fear of annihilation. Nevertheless the prediction has not yet been vindicated; whether it will still eventuate is something for all to watch.

Watch

So then, regarding the times God has laid out in His plan, students of God’s Word should be content to rejoice in Jesus’ words: *“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is... And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch”* (Mark 13:32-37). One may wonder about the motivation of those who are not content to be a watcher. The Apostle Paul was forthright: *“... that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ”* (2 Cor. 11:12-13). Do not be confused by a cunningly devised fable. ■

THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7)

How can Christians be sure that God will answer their prayers? It is not enough to affirm their belief in prayer. Thousands of 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. Nor does affirming one's belief in prayer explain why, when a whole nation prays for peace, it often finds itself caught in a whirlpool of war.

On the other hand, 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.

However that is not in keeping with the Scriptural testimony: *"And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Act 10:30-35).* So observation decrees there must be some reason why God seemingly answers some prayers and not others. Understanding that reason helps restore the faith of some whose prayers have seemingly gone unanswered.

Significance

The desire to pray is an acknowledgment of dependency upon a Higher Power. It is an expression of a realization that help from another source is needed. That realisation is not peculiar to Christians: prayer is an integral part of all religions. Some, for example the Islamic faith,

have regulated prayer times which are mandated by the hierarchy. That regimentation is different from the Christian ideal where the Christian is to be ready always to seek God's help: *"Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12).*

Origin

The 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.

Nevertheless there may be millions who never pray, and others who feel they should and have a sense of guilt because they do not.

Seeming partiality

But the issue of God apparently hearing and answering the prayers of some while ignoring the prayers of others remains.

Jesus hinted at the answer to this question in his observations about the prayers of the scribes and Pharisees: *"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matt. 6:1-8).*

This seeming partiality is a reminder that there are proper and improper attitudes of prayer, as well as correct and incorrect methods. The heathen who spin their prayer wheels may be sincere, but their method is inappropriate.

Substance

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 what is proper to request.

The Purpose of Prayer

There is a divine purpose in prayer, and it is highly important that it be kept in mind if one is to understand why some prayers go seemingly unanswered. It is God who answers!

God did not design prayer as a means of finding out how He should manage His affairs here on earth. He is not looking for the Christian to tell Him what He should do or what He has planned. He has his own fixed plans and purposes, and the Christian’s prayer is the avenue by which they—not Him—learn of His ways for them. As James wrote, prayers that dictate to God what He should do will not be answered in the way the petitioner asks but are examples of “asking amiss”. This leads to the matter of substance.

Broad classification of the subject matter

The Scriptures outline various types of prayer.

Consistent with the foregoing, foremost among the types of prayers are prayers of thanksgiving. The Christian must always acknowledge that God is the source of all their blessings, and because of that they lift up their hearts and voices to him in thanksgiving.

There are prayers of adoration; prayers that give recognition to the glorious attributes of God’s character—his wisdom, his justice, his love, and His power. The desire to glorify God should be high on the agenda of the Christian’s prayers because it is the essential ingredient that justifies why one prays to Him and not to another authority. It is God who is overall.

Having got to that point, when Christians seek divine forgiveness they acknowledge that it is by God’s grace that He deigns to help those who petition Him: “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). The thought behind coming boldly to the throne of grace is not coming aggressively or demanding attention or consideration, but of frankness, bluntness or assurance. That attitude

is appropriate because “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 discernor 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). As Jesus reminded His disciples, God knows what things His people need before they ask Him (Matt. 6:7-8), and hence to come to Him with any camouflage of insincerity or veil indicates one does not acknowledge that He knows their need.

Specific request for blessing

Nevertheless there are prayers which are requests for certain blessings, or favours.

One example of a request for a specific blessing is Paul’s request for improved eyesight: “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

While it is natural for everyone to desire temporal blessings during their earthly sojourn, such requests must always be made with the realisation that the individual’s eternal spiritual welfare is more important, and which therefore is God’s interest: “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:26-28). God has called those whom He calls for only one purpose: “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your

calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:1-7).

Prayer changes things

One quotation that is common in some circles is that "prayer changes things". In one respect that is true, but not because God changes His plans on the basis of the petitions He receives, but because prayer is a moment when the petitioner is once again reminded of their significance in relation to the Omnipotent One (and their relative insignificance in the universe). God is not looking to Christians nor to anyone else for guidance but that His people will look to Him. In other words, the Christian's outlook should be as Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Thy Will Be Done".

In their prayers, God's people should have uppermost in mind and heart the desire that God's will be done in all their experiences. The greatest example of this attitude is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane: *"Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt"* (Matt. 26:36-39),

It was God's will that Jesus 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 of the Old Testament: *"In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled"* (Matt. 26:55-57). Years previously Jesus foretold His death, declaring that it was His Father's purpose for His coming to Earth: *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world"* (John 6:51).

Jesus affirmed His purpose later when he was about to be arrested: *"Then Simon Peter having a*

sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:10-11).

Suffering with Jesus

The followers of Jesus have the privilege of suffering and dying with him: *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin"* (Rom. 6:3-6).

Likewise to the Philippians Paul wrote: *"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake"* (Phil. 1:29). Thus the Christian is called upon to follow in Jesus' footsteps, and hence it is not God's will to spare them from all hardship. Thus, as with Jesus, the Christian's 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 their material blessings, but for His will to be done.

Jesus emphasized this point when he said to his disciples that while they were abiding in him and his words were abiding in them, they could ask in prayer whatever they desired, and it would be granted unto them: *"If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples"* (John 15:7-8). That might seem like an assurance that Christians are privileged to ask God for anything, but that is not so; the condition is *"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 the Head: *"And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all"* (Eph. 1:19-23). Prayer is a privilege!■

THE GREAT MULTITUDE

"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10)

John's vision recorded in Revelation 7:9-10 poses several questions, some of which are:

- Who will constitute the great multitude;
- Where are they;
- How did they achieve this status;
- What is their purpose?

Interdependency

The answer to any question might be influenced by the answers to the other questions, and in reverse might influence the answers to the other questions. For example, the answer to "who they are" might depend on "where they are", and "where they are" might influence one's answer to "how they achieved their status".

Deduction required

There does not seem to be any Scripture that specifically answers these questions, and so any conclusion is a deduction involving other Scriptures. For example, when they achieve their status and position depends on what is meant by the "great tribulation" from which they have come (Rev. 7:14). The question is whether the great tribulation mentioned in this verse is the same as the great tribulation mentioned in Matthew 24:21: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be".

It is not claimed that the considerations presented in this article are definitive, but that they provide some points for others to consider as each one strives to more clearly understand the details of God's plan, and specifically what might lie ahead for all people.

The starting point

As mentioned above, it is realised that the question one answers first has the potential to affect the conclusions one may deduce for the other questions. Nevertheless one has to start somewhere, and so this article begins with who will constitute the great multitude?

Who

The first point considered in trying to identify who constitutes the great multitude is that they are of human origin: "of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues" (verse 9).

Further they have come from "all nations",

whereas those who comprise the 144,000 come from "all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Rev. 7:4-8). Thus it may be concluded that the great multitude may be the "heathen nations" that will be given to Jesus as His reward: "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Psa. 2:7-8).

When

Regarding the time of the tribulation, there are other references to "tribulation" which may be reasonably interpreted to mean that the tribulation to which Revelation 7:14 refers will, at that time, be past.

For example Romans 2:8-9: "But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile". The tribulation mentioned in those verses may be interpreted as the tribulation experienced by evil doers during their present lifetime, that it is a conflict of conscience.

Where

The great multitude stands "before the throne, and before the Lamb". At first glance that statement may be interpreted to mean they are in heaven because God's throne is in heaven: "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool..." (Act 7:48-49). However is there a time element involved?

Another point that may be considered to support the great multitude being in heaven is that the risen Jesus is now seated in God's throne, so God and His risen Son are both in heaven. Jesus went to heaven when He was resurrected: "Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

However those who sit with Him are those who have "overcome"—"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his

throne" (Rev. 3:21). There is no mention of the great multitude being overcomers or sitting with Him in His throne: they "*stand before the throne*"—they do not sit in the throne—and, according to Strong's Concordance, "*before*" is translated from the Greek *enōpion* which means "*in the face of*" (literally or figuratively)".

The throne

Jeremiah 3:16-17 opens the door for another understanding of the whereabouts of the throne. Jeremiah 3:16-17 reads: "*And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart*". The time setting for this prophecy is when Israel has cast off the rituals of the Law Covenant: "*they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind...*". At that time "*they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it*". There are several points in this prophecy that bear on the great multitude.

The first relates to when the prophecy will be fulfilled. Quoting again from Jeremiah 3: "*the ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it neither shall that be done any more*". This aspect of Jeremiah's prophecy indicates that it refers to a time when the Israelites will cast off the Law Covenant. The original commandment to Israel was for them to keep it forever: "*Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant*" (Exod. 31:16). In large measure the Israelites today still keep the requirements of the Law Covenant.

"*They shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD*". Does this expression mean that, in the broad spectrum of Biblical terminology, Jerusalem maybe be regarded, at some time in the future, as being where God's throne will be?

Such a proposition may be deemed to comply with Isaiah 2:1-3: "*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".

"All the nations shall be gathered unto it "

This expression may be aligned with Zechariah 8:22-23: "*Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you*".

It is noteworthy that it is to Jerusalem that the nations will come, and hence is it plausible that the great multitude will also come to Jerusalem to worship "*before the throne*"; in other words, will the great multitude be on Earth?

Multitude

The number comprising the great multitude is so great that no man can number them: are they the whole world of mankind, "*people from all nations, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb...*" (Rev. 7:9)?

Revelation 21:2-3 reads: "*And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God*". Is it possible the vision relates to the multitudes on the earth being "*before the throne*", that is before Jerusalem; which at that time will be "God's throne"?

Their qualifications

Finally, one interpretation some have given to the qualifications of the great multitude is that, after being called by God, they have failed to "*make their calling and election sure*" (2 Pet. 1:10), that is, they have failed to be "*more than conquerors*", whereas those who "*live and reign with Christ a thousand years*" (Rev. 20:6) are "*more than conquerors*": "*Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 8:37-39). Should that be the case, the concept of being "*before*" the throne and not "*in it*" should be an inspiration.■

DANIEL'S PROPHECIES

"And he said unto me, O Daniel, a man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak unto thee, and stand upright: for unto thee am I now sent..." (Daniel 10:11)

The article below may be deemed a superficial overview of the prophecies God gave to Daniel and which Daniel recorded. And rightly so because it does not address the deeper mysteries recorded in the book of Daniel, such as the identification of, and the contest between, *"the king of the south and the king of the north"* recorded in chapter 11. Neither does it dictate specific dates because historical records seem to differ regarding some dates, the differences perhaps being due to commentators and historians ascribing different events to be the beginning or end of a prophesied era. However some dates are mentioned, trusting they are sufficiently accurate to give a chronological outline of the major players recorded in some of Daniel's prophecies.

Nevertheless the article is presented here because of Peter's exhortation: *"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets... knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation"* (2 Pet. 3:1-4).

Additionally, even an elementary knowledge of the prophecies recorded in the Bible is a privilege that God has revealed to those whom He has called (1 Cor. 1:9), the *"natural man"* not being privileged to understand them: *"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. 2:14).

For example, Peter's prophecy *"that there shall come in the last days scoffers"* is manifestly true in the general community in Australia in 2017. Not only is there little faith in the coming of the Messiah, there is little faith in any of the prophecies contained in the Bible. Hence refreshing one's mind regarding even the elementary prophecies helps resist the atheism that currently bombards believers.

Daniel

Daniel was *"a man greatly beloved"* (Dan. 9:23; 10:19), to whom it was given to *"understand the words that I speak unto thee"* (Dan. 10:11).

Daniel's prophecy is the foundation for much of the understanding God has given to His people regarding the events that have occurred in the world during past centuries. Such understanding is not the result of any human skill or wisdom but, as it was with Daniel, *"God gave them knowledge... and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams"* (Dan. 1:17).

Nebuchadnezzar's dream

Chapter 2 records Daniel interpreting one of King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams: *"The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king; But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart"* (Dan. 2:27-30). Daniel did not take any credit for his understanding of this vision but attributed his understanding to God: *"Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his"* (Dan. 2:19-20).

Daniel was given several other visions additional to the understanding of the dream God gave to Nebuchadnezzar. Chapter 7 records one such vision. However the meaning of that vision was not revealed to Daniel: *"Hitherto is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my cogitations much troubled me, and my countenance changed in me: but I kept the matter in my heart"* (Dan. 7:28).

Prophecy concealed

In similar vein Chapter 12 records Daniel being instructed to *"... shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased"* (Dan. 12:4). Consistent with this edict, the secrets of the dream God gave Nebuchadnezzar and which Daniel interpreted were not revealed until many centuries later, and might still be in process of being revealed.

Israel

Some knowledge of the standing and history of the people broadly known as "Israel" is necessary to appreciate the significance of the dream God gave Nebuchadnezzar. The nation of Israel is 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. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you..."* (Deut. 7:7-8).

In spite of being God's chosen people, Israel did not remain faithful to Him: *"Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them..."* (Joshua 7:11). Their waywardness continued for centuries, and God told another of His prophets—Jeremiah—that He would punish Israel by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar: *"The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that was the first year of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon... which Jeremiah the prophet spake unto all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying... ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations"* (Jer. 25:1-9). God revealed to Jeremiah that He was going to use Nebuchadnezzar to punish Israel, and hence God calls Nebuchadnezzar *"my servant"*.

God also revealed to Jeremiah that Nebuchadnezzar would take Israel captive to Babylon and that they would be captive there for seventy years: *"And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations"* (Jer. 25:11-12).

The captivity prophesied by Jeremiah is recorded in the book of Chronicles: *"Against him*

came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon" (2 Chron. 36:6-7).

Symbolisms in Nebuchadnezzar's dream

The connection between these historical events and the dream God gave Nebuchadnezzar is entwined in the symbolism God used in the dream He gave Nebuchadnezzar. The dream was an image of a man that was composed of several parts; the various parts represented four world empires.

The first empire was the Babylonian Empire (approximately 605-539 B.C.), represented by the head of gold: *"This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory... And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold"* (Dan 2:36-38).

Nebuchadnezzar's empire—Babylon—would be replaced by a succession of empires: *"And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee, and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise: (Dan. 2:39-40).*

The identity of the second and third empires was revealed to Daniel in a different vision, recorded in Chapter 8. The second kingdom would be the empire of Medo-Persia, represented by the breast and arms of silver, which existed from approximately 539 to 331 B.C..

Medo-Persia was succeeded by Greece which was represented by the belly and thighs of brass (approximately 331-168 B.C.).

Finally a fourth empire would arise which is not named and which is represented by *"legs of iron and feet part of iron and part of clay"*. (Dan. 2:33). It is further described in verses 40-42: *"And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet*

were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken" (Dan. 2:40-42).

Fulfillment

The kingdom of Babylon was overthrown by Darius Cyrus, king of Medo-Persia: *"And them that had escaped from the sword carried he (Nebuchadnezzar) away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah... to fulfil threescore and ten years. Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the LORD God of heaven given me..."* (2 Chron. 36:20-23).

Greece

The Medo-Persian empire was overthrown by Greece, commanded by Alexander III of Macedon, commonly known as Alexander the Great. When Alexander was broken the empire was divided into pieces, in stark contrast to the *en masse* changes that had occurred previously.

The end time

Secular historical records confirm that the Biblical prophecies given to Daniel regarding Medo-Persia and Greece were fulfilled. However the secret of the fourth empire is not attested with the same surety.

Isaac Newton (1642 -1726 A.D.) believed the fourth empire was the Papal dominion, and that it would have a life span of a *"time, times and an half"* (Dan. 12:7). Newton concluded, from "his observations" (God's revelations to him), that there was still about a century remaining before the empire would be dissolved. Such a revelation was indeed "miraculous" and testifies to the fact that God is the *"revealer of secrets"* (Dan. 2:47).

In 1789 the French revolution broke out and in 1799 the Pope was taken prisoner by Napoleon. The time had come for God to reveal to several Protestant expositors that the prophetic visions He had given to Daniel had been fulfilled, and in the nineteenth century they began to preach that the return of Christ—His "second coming" or "second advent"—was near. Such preaching gave rise to what is commonly known as the "Adventist movement" and the "Miller movement". God was gradually revealing His plan. Although the dates they preached for the "second advent" were not precise, these early reformers and

expositors fulfilled the purpose God planned for them. Nevertheless the inaccuracies in the chronology have led some expositors to discard all the prophecies recorded in the book of Daniel.

The stone cut out

While there is general agreement among secular historians regarding the succession of the empires of Medo-Persia and Greece, there does not seem to be the same conviction regarding verses 34 and 35: *"Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth"* (Dan. 2:34-35). Indeed, even at this time, God might not have fully revealed the details of the prophecy.

The stone will firstly break all the empires—*"the brass, the silver and the gold"*—into small pieces until they are blown away by *"the wind"*, and then it will grow to fill the whole earth: *"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure"* (Dan. 2:44-45).

One question is whether the *"braking in pieces"* is still in progress. Perhaps the fragmentation of Yugoslavia in 1991-92 into seven nations—Slovenia, Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Bosnia—is evidence that the nations are still being broken down. On the other hand some students of God's Word believe that a study of chronology suggests that the *"times of restitution"* (Acts 3:21) have begun.

Whichever viewpoint one takes, the extent of the new order will be world wide, as prophesied also by Zechariah: *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass... he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth"* (Zech. 9:9-10). The extent of the kingdom will indeed be world wide.■

PREACH THE WORD: REPROVE

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2)

Perhaps one of the more challenging aspects of the task that confronted Timothy when Paul left him at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3) was to reprove wayward believers: *"... the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4).*

The objective of any corrective action must be to enhance the defaulter's spiritual welfare: *"... we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying" (2 Cor. 12:19).* However in spite of one's best intentions, any "counselling" has the potential to cause animosity, and so Paul wrote to the Corinthians before he visited them the second time: *"For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing" (2 Cor. 7:8-9).*

Meekness

In order to minimise animosity all correction must be undertaken in a spirit of meekness: *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).*

Notwithstanding correction must be given in a spirit of meekness, there are occasions when forthright action is required: *"This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13),*

Partiality

All action must be undertaken without partiality: *"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons... if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors" (James 2:1, 9).* One's judgement must not be swayed by the esteem others might ascribe to the offender.

When and where

The time and place when any advice is given must be chosen to ensure the outcome will be edifying. Jesus said: *"Moreover if thy brother*

shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:15-17). Jesus told His disciples that, sadly, there would be situations when the congregation should be apprised of the matter; Paul faced that reality and instructed Timothy accordingly: *"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Tim. 5:20).*

Truth

It goes without saying that, as well as complying with the criteria mentioned above, all efforts to correct another must be factual and based on the Scriptures: *"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9).* The objective must be to let the truth effect the reproof and not any personal feeling or antagonism: *"But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light" (Eph. 5:13).* The Word of God must be the weapon: *"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 discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).* The reproof is effective when it convinces the offender to change their heart condition: *"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Act 2:37).*

Paul gave Timothy a challenging task!■

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