



Volume 103, Number 1

AUSTRALIA

January / March 2020

Looking Back, We Praise the Way

It is fitting that the Lord's people should continually keep in mind the mercies and blessing they enjoy, otherwise "the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:19 NASB), which prevents the word from ministering continually to our joy and refreshment in the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, it is appropriate that we have a daily review of the blessings we enjoy — that every evening we reflect on the privileges enjoyed, the providences which have guided our way and the blessings, both earthly and spiritual, which have come to us; some of them common to all mankind and others of a special kind reserved for those who know the Shepherd and are known of Him.

It is also appropriate to take weekly reviews, looking at the same mercies and blessings from a broader perspective. This reminds us of the rest we have through faith in the precious blood, and also of the rest that remains for the people of God, which God has given us as assurance that on the first day of the week He raised up Jesus from the dead. "For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, 'AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST' — although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:3,9 NASB).

It is especially important that at the close of the year we take an even broader and more comprehensive view of our experiences, looking prudently at the way we have travelled and deeply consider which have been steps that hindered our progress, and which have been proper steps in the footprints of Jesus, bringing us nearer to the goal — the "mark" which we must attain to be counted worthy of a share in the promised Kingdom.

An advanced Christian looks back through the year and recalls life's storms as well as its sunshine, its sadness as well as its joy, its tears as well as its smiles,

and sorrows not as others who have no hope. Their troubles have been stripped of their fearful features and minimised by the spirit of a sound mind and instructions of God's Word. This assures us that the trials, difficulties and adversities of life, are accepted as lessons, blessings in disguise. "Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:16-17 NASB).

They also regard their joys as being of a greater value than any they ever knew before they were begotten of the Holy Spirit. They have not been overcome with the bitterness of envy, malice and hatred and are unpolluted because they have not been rejoicing in iniquity but rejoicing in the truth. Their joys have been much more numerous than ever before; because they not only are able to have joy in the Lord, but also joy in His Word, in the Holy Spirit, in fellowship with brethren of like precious faith and by the grace of God they also rejoice in tribulation. Not because they love tribulation, but because they love the patience, experience and character, which God assures us are the fruits that all tribulations must produce under His providence; if we are rightly tested by them. As James

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wrote, “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:3-4 NASB).

Of whom are all these things true? Not of everyone for we know many who have no such experience — the world that lies in darkness knows not God. Nor are these experiences true of all people of intelligence even those professing to be Christians. Comparatively few of those who profess the name of Christ enjoy these precious experiences or will be able to look back upon the year with satisfaction of this kind, realising that God has crowned the year with His goodness. This is because they have not taken the necessary step of full consecration to the Lord, to bring them under His protecting care and under the enlightening influence of His Word through His spirit. Some who take the step of consecration, fail to perform their vow of consecration, seeking to serve both God and Mammon, without pleasing either, without receiving satisfactory blessings from either.

The class which can and does look back through the year from the standpoint described and can see that God’s goodness has crowned every feature of life throughout the year, is the “little flock,” the true Church, whose names are written in heaven — the body of Christ, the Bride class. They are the true



The Apostle James

Zion, which shall shortly be set up, filled with divine glory, the joy of the whole earth and the divine channel of blessing to all the families of mankind; “For out of Zion shall go the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” These are of the elect Church, of which Christ is the Head, the faithful members who, now fulfilling their vows of sacrifice, are companions in the suffering of Christ, they shall become His companions also in the glory that shall be revealed (Romans 8:17, 18). They are God’s choice, or His “elect,” for, as the Apostle informs

us, God has predestined that this class whom He is selecting shall all be made copies of His Son (Romans 8:29). They shall dwell in His house—they will be members of the great Temple which the Lord God is building of spiritual stones, in and through which He will bless the world with a knowledge of Himself and His grace (1 Peter 2:4-8).

Is it any wonder that they can rejoice in spirit saying, “Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits?” “He hath put a new song into my mouth, even the loving kindness of our God.” Surely, when looking back on the year, they see what has blessed and rejoiced them in every sense of the word has been of divine goodness that God has crowned their whole year with His favour toward them through Christ Jesus, and as a result they appreciate it to the full.

The Priesthood of All Believers

“But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9 NASB).

Peter reveals that we, as Christians, constitute a royal priesthood. He embellishes that description by identifying us in 1 Peter 1:5 as a “holy priesthood.” All believers constitute this priesthood—it is the Priesthood of All Believers. The function of our priesthood is to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light. What a brilliant proposition. Our mission in life is clear. We, as a priesthood, are to proclaim the excellence, the beauty, and the glory of God to all. This should daily fill us with hope, joy, love, faith, and zeal.

Our priesthood is one of enlightenment. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see

your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16 NASB).

Whatever relevance the concept of the priesthood of all believers may have to the modern world, it exercised an enormously potent power for change at the time of the Reformation. As a battle cry for the fathers of the Reformation, it played a key role in opening the door to the great liberties that we now enjoy. Perhaps we take these liberties for granted. A liberty so basic as the right to own a Bible did not exist in time past. Nor did the liberty to base Christian belief and practices solely on the Bible’s testimony. The privilege of exercising individual conscience toward God was denied.

The Christian world of five centuries ago was authoritarian and highly structured. It did not tolerate dissent. Nor did it recognise the conscience of the individual. This stands in marked contrast to the

Christian liberty that we enjoy today. We take for granted the rights of the individual, but the validity of that concept was not acknowledged prior to the Reformation.

Losing the Vision, Falling Asleep

The understanding of personal responsibility with regard to the priesthood of all believers grew vague as the early Church settled into the passage of time. Spiritual slumber overtook many and they fell asleep with regard to their mission and position as members of the priesthood of all believers. From our modern perspective, it is easy to see how the personal rights of Christian believers were abrogated. With the passage of time, from the days of the founding of our faith, the zeal and conviction of believers was diluted. Christianity eventually became the official state religion of the Roman Empire. Everyone had to belong to the church; it was not open to personal choice. So, the watering down of faith occurred as multitudes joined the Christian church out of compulsion, not desire. Subsequently, many attached themselves to a Church that had no zeal and little or no real faith. These forced converts soon outnumbered the core of true believers. As such, these non-spiritual or immature Christians let the more advanced ones do their thinking, believing, and praying for them. A great divide slowly developed between the class of people who soon were marked with the label “laity” and their spiritual rulers — the “clergy.”

With this development, the artificial gap between God and man was enlarged. Access to God for the common man was made difficult. Soon the clergy became intermediaries between their flocks and God. The gap was widened still further by introducing the concept that saints of time past were needed as additional intermediaries. Personal access to God was now made to appear an impossibility. This was unfortunate. It needed to be corrected.

The Rise of the Ruling Class

The more spiritually advanced believers ascended in influence and power as the ranks of congregants swelled. Their ascent fostered the nascent clergy class. The laity (the congregation) soon was relegated to being merely the “children” of the Church while the clergy considered themselves to BE the Church.

In the primitive Church, leaders (or bishops — *episkopos*, i.e. “overseers,” in the Greek) were elected on a regular basis; oft times annually. As these leaders gradually gained power, influence and control, the practice of annual elections gradually faded away. These leaders became bishops for life. This was a grave mistake because, with that development, the congregation’s sovereignty was lost. The clergy became ascendant and this had unfortunate results.

Edward Gibbon observed the history of this change in his classic work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. “A regard for the public tran-



Edward Gibbon

quility, which would so frequently have been interrupted by annual or by occasional elections, induced the primitive Christians to constitute an honorable and perpetual magistracy, and to choose one of the wisest and most holy among their presbyters to execute, during his life, the duties of their ecclesiastical governor. It was under these cir-

cumstances that the lofty title of Bishop began to raise itself above the humble appellation of Presbyter and while the latter remained the most natural distinction for the members of every Christian senate, the former was appropriated to the dignity of its new president.”

Among these bishops there was vying for power. Who would be the greatest among them? This question was settled over centuries of Christian history. Eventually one bishop stood supreme above all others. An “uber” father, he would become the father of the Church. He would wield ultimate authority. Doubtless, pure motives, seeking the common good of the Church, were behind this rise to power. The frailty of humanity manifested itself. The corrupting influence of power facilitated the rise of human reasoning and traditions of men over the authority of Scripture and the rights of all believers.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ provides an interesting perspective on the rise of the clergy class. Two churches are contrasted in the second chapter, Ephesus and Pergamum. The Ephesian church was praised, “Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” The church at Pergamum was rebuked, “So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate” (Revelation 2:6,15 NASB). What was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans? Various opinions have been given, but it seems to us that the best explanation comes from the very name of the Nicolaitans. In the original Greek the name means “victory over the people.” The church at Ephesus resisted efforts to empower a superior spiritual ruling class, Pergamum succumbed. The principle that the power and authority reside with the church — the congregation — must be held with integrity.

Power Struggles Versus Humility

The struggle for power is a story as old as the human family. The Bible tells us that it began when Satan deceived Eve. That old Serpent sought to usurp God’s earthly dominion to have it for his own. He would stop at nothing to get it. Through lies and murder he got what he wanted-albeit only temporarily. God would only permit him to have temporary success. Through the power of the cross of Christ the kingdom will be returned to the Heavenly Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

Neither are noble men immune to the intoxicating lure of power. The Apostles enjoyed great intimacy with our Lord Jesus. Recall the scene in Mark's Gospel when Jesus went to Capernaum with his beloved disciples. As on previous occasions they had argued with one another as to which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom. In this the weakness and frailty of their fallen humanity was made evident. They were trying to position themselves to take advantage of this fantastic new opportunity—a chief office in Jesus' administration. Imagine the power, prestige, and wealth that they soon would have as rulers sitting on twelve thrones!

Jesus gently corrected them, he showed them the flaw in their thinking. "They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, 'What were you discussing on the way?' But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest. Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all'" (Mark 9:33-35 NASB). This lesson is still applicable today. Any who would serve the Lord's people effectively must hold tenaciously to this principle. Any who would be great in God's eyes must become a humble servant. "For, God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5 NASB).

In his last night on earth, Jesus left us a precious legacy. On the solemn occasion of his last supper, he imparted a great lesson on humility. He, the one who had descended from heaven, stooped to wash the disciples' feet. "So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them'" (John 13:12-17 NASB).

It seems somewhat surprising that moments after this lesson, the same dispute arose amongst them. "And there arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' But it is not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant'" (Luke 22:24,25 NASB). We are comforted to know that Jesus is as patient with us as he was with them on that night.



Phillip Melancthon

The Wake-up Call

After centuries of escalating corruptions, Reformers such as Hus, Wycliffe, Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, and Calvin sounded an alarm in the Christian world. In essence they said, "Christians wake up! We have fallen asleep. We have lost sight of who we are in God's eyes. We are, all of us, all believers, a priesthood just as the Scriptures tell us." The impact of that concept was revolutionary. Christians did not need a priest to intervene for them. They themselves were priests! They did not need any earthly intermediary or any in heaven, save for Christ alone, to approach God for them. They were justified by faith and at peace with God! Sweet are the words of Apostle Paul, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1,2 NASB).

John emphatically pointed out our relationship with God in 1 John 1:3,4 (NASB), "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." Our joy is made full by personal fellowship with our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ.

Our Ministry

With the wonderful realization that we are a priesthood comes the sense of duty to fulfill that ministry. As noted earlier, our mission is to show forth God's praises. We have come to know of His great love. We are awed by His wisdom, justice, and power. By virtue of our intimacy with Him we know, more than any others in this world, of His mercy, loving-kindness, and patience. Who better than we to sing His praises? Paul provides direction in the performance of our priestly duties. He calls it "the Ministry of Reconciliation".

"Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 NASB The last verse of this section is muddled by the addition of the phrase "we beg you ... be reconciled to God." The word "you" does not occur in the original Greek manuscript. Verse 18 shows that we are already reconciled to God, so if we are not the ones who are being encouraged to reconcile with

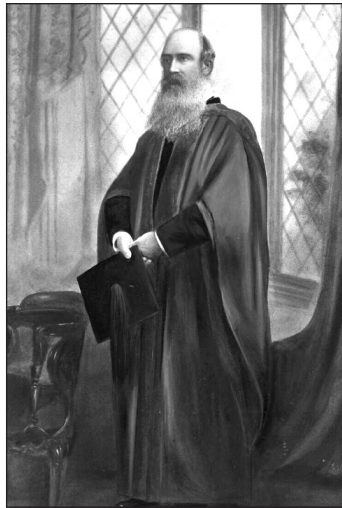
Him — who is? The answer is — all of mankind. We, as Christ’s ambassadors, beseech mankind on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God.

The Weymouth New Testament makes the meaning of these verses beautifully clear. “And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has appointed us to serve in the ministry of reconciliation. We are to tell how God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not charging men’s transgressions to their account, and that He has entrusted to us the Message of this reconciliation. On Christ’s behalf therefore we come as ambassadors, God, as it were, making entreaty through our lips: we, on Christ’s behalf, beseech men to be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Taking this perspective of our mission, as a priesthood of all believers, is very important and relevant to us. The world is increasingly secular, agnostic, or even atheistic. Many are turning their backs on God and Christianity because they have been taught erroneous ideas about them. They hear only of a wrathful, vindictive, vain, and unapproachable God. Also, the Christian faith has been politicised and viewed as narrow, bigoted, and judgmental. We know that these views are completely incorrect.

The world is hungry for hope. They need the qualities of mercy and love. We know that God excels in these characteristics above all others. God wants to reconcile with men. We have the right message and we have the mission. As a priesthood of all believers we can guide others toward peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. We spread the Gospel news as ambassadors of Christ and The Kingdom proclaiming, “Be reconciled to God. He is far nobler and better than the best of men. He desires you to return to him and wishes to bless you.”

Reconciliation implies peace. Being a peacemaker is a privilege that our Lord associated with a great reward. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9 NASB). Being a peacemaker is challenging, but it is also a powerful confirmation of our ministry. As a priesthood we must practice peace-making, even with our enemies. No — especially with our enemies. “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the



*Richard Francis Weymouth
1822-1902*

same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48 NASB).

If we desire to ultimately be sons of God, his priesthood throughout eternity, we must be peacemakers in the present. This is consistent with our profession that we have God’s spirit or wisdom. “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace” (James 3:17,18 ESV). May we, by God’s grace, sow seeds of peace that will yield the fruit of righteousness.

Further Evidence of Our Priestly Ministry

Hypocrisy is a charge commonly leveled at Christians. In many cases the accusation is appropriate. Unfortunately, our accusers do not understand that we do not profess to be perfect; we claim only to be forgiven. We make foolish mistakes and find ourselves doing things that we don’t intend. Paul confessed this frailty in the seventh chapter of Romans. Despite our weaknesses, we must walk discretely in the world. We must walk as Children of Light (Ephesians 5:8).

Selflessness is a characteristic of our priesthood. We must use the wisdom God has supplied that we may avert giving occasion to find fault with our ministry. “We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (2 Corinthians 6:3-10 NASB).

We claim no personal greatness. We recognize that God has primarily called those who are weak, foolish and base to be his people. Some of the strong, wise and noble are called, but not many. Thus, God has ensured that no human being may boast in his sight (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

In harmony with the humility of the priesthood of all believers, is their denial of self-sufficiency. “Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the

letter kills, but the Spirit gives life ... And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 3:5,6,18, 4:1,2 ESV). Denying self-sufficiency is looked upon as a weakness in this world, but we recognise it as a strength.

Order Within the Priesthood of All Believers

Though all believers constitute a priesthood, it is not a democracy resulting in chaos at church meetings. "But all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40 ESV). Guidelines were given to the early church to establish healthy order. These facilitate spiritual growth and cooperation among believers. Thus, some amongst the priesthood of all believers were selected by their various congregations to be overseers (bishops in the KJV).

The qualifications for such leaders were stringent but necessary for the integrity of the church. "This is a true saying, 'If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.' A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:2-7 KJV).

It is a matter of historical record that bishops were elected by the suffrage of the entire congregation

annually. Some Christian fellowships still follow this practice and find it a blessing.

Priests of God

In his salutary introduction to the Revelation of Jesus Christ, note that John addresses the book to the seven churches in Asia, not to the elders or a class of clergy, but to the body of believers in the seven churches. Adding his personal greetings to the congregants of the churches, John also bids them greetings "from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:5,6 KJV).

The original Greek gives a slightly different thought than the King James Version. "He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father — to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Revelation 1:6 NASB). We read further in Revelation, "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Revelation 5:10 NASB). The priesthood will reign upon earth for a thousand years! "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6 NASB).

There is to be a kingdom on earth. Jesus and his associated priesthood will reign over earth for a thousand years. Mankind will be blessed in a manner and to a degree that few could now imagine. That kingdom will be full of peace, enlightenment, love, joy, security, kindness, and justice. Its rulers will be Jesus and the Priesthood of All Believers. Their influence will be pervasive and persuasive. These, who humbled themselves and made service of others a lifelong commitment, will tenderly restore mankind to their Creator. This will be the pinnacle accomplishment of their ministry of reconciliation — the great work of the Priesthood of All Believers.

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of The Bible

One of the most valuable resources we have to assist us when studying the Bible is a concordance. The first concordance was completed for the Latin Vulgate in the year 1230 and was a basic alphabetical index. In 1535 the first English Concordance was published by Thomas Gybson, however it was only for the New Testament. Other concordances were published

in English since that time, however none more thorough or more well-known than *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of The Bible*, commonly known as *Strong's Concordance*.

James Strong was an American lay Methodist, of English and Dutch descent, born in New York City on August 14, 1822. He originally had a passion for medicine and set out to become a doctor. He studied

at Wesleyan University and graduated Valedictorian in 1844, however ill health that plagued him for much of his life meant he lacked the strength to work as a Doctor, so shortly after graduating he left the field of Medicine.

He worked in various roles after that including a teacher, a Major of Long Island, played various roles in the construction and management of the Flushing railroad, and studied biblical literature for which he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Wesleyan University and then became a college professor at New York's Troy University in 1858.

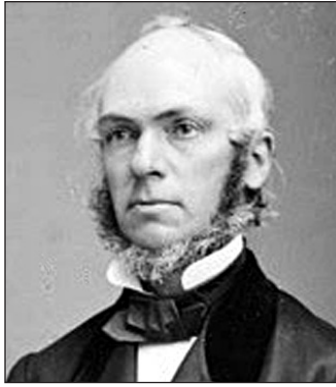
Strong was an advocate for the development of a school to formally train Methodist preachers in a time when many Methodists thought of such an institute as being blasphemous and many other Christian Organisations saw Methodist preachers as having little of value to contribute to theology. This led him to become the first full Professor of the Methodist Drew Theological Seminary in Madison New Jersey in 1868 where he remained working for around 25 years. The Seminary owes much of its success to him, as his publication with John McClintock, another Methodist who worked at Drew Theological Seminary, of *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature*, gained respect for the Methodist church and the seminary in the wider religious community.

It was during his period at the Seminary that he completed much of his work on the concordance at night in his library. Despite working late into the night every night he was still able to find the energy to captivate his students during his lectures, as he loved inspiring his students with his passion for and knowledge of the scriptures and was said to leave a lasting impression on everyone he taught.

Strong developed the idea of assigning a number to every single Hebrew and Greek word found in the King James version of the Bible no matter how small, rather than just alphabetizing the English words, and also gave the pronunciation and definition of these words. This involved 8674 Hebrew root words and 5523 Greek root words (although they are numbered 1-5624 because some numbers were never allocated a word).

Given this was unlike any concordance previously published, and because he felt it was important to go to the source rather than relying on the findings of others, this work was done without the use of any other concordance and was taken directly from the Bible. This was such an enormous task it is believed to have taken him and his staff 35 years to complete and was finally published in 1890.

Strong's goal was to create a Concordance that was so accurate and complete that it could be used by biblical scholars, yet so simple that it enabled everyone, no matter their level of education in



Professor James Strong

theology or lack thereof, for the first time to not only be able to find words in the Bible but also to compare them to other verses that the same root word appears in.

Over the years many have tried to criticise the concordance based on the fact that Strong was not a Hebrew or Greek scholar, however, despite their criticism, he was so thorough in his work that revisions of the concordance over the years have not been so much to correct it, but to adapt it to fit other

translations of the Bible.

As well as the publication of the concordance and Cyclopedia he had many other minor publications and was also on the committee for the English Revised Standard version of the Bible and the American Standard Version which commenced in 1871 and was completed in 1901 after his death in Round Lake, New York, on August 7, 1894.

His concordance was an invaluable tool in aiding this translation work as it helped bring to light errors in the translation of the King James Version of the Bible that supported the beliefs of The Catholic and Anglican Churches including the Trinity and Hell, for example the KJV's use of the word "LORD" was replaced many times with "Jehovah" in the ASV, "Godhead" was changed to "Divinity," "Hell" and the "bottomless pit" were changed to "Hades" and "the Abyss," respectively. For this reason, Strong's concordance is still strongly opposed to this day by many Trinitarians.

Despite the fact that it was only published in English, Strong's use of a numbering system has also aided the development of Concordances in other languages, such as Russian, as well as concordances for other translations of the Bible. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of The Bible* continues to be relevant today as it has also been used as the framework for producing many of the current online Concordances, as well as continuing to be sold in printed form and available on electronic Bibles.

His hard work and dedication in completing such a publication that enables all people to have a deep understanding of the meanings of the original words of the Holy Scriptures has no doubt played a role in shaping us as Bible Students.



John McClintock, October 27, 1814 to March 4, 1870

Cain and Abel

The story of Cain and Abel marks the beginning of death amongst mankind. With the fall in Eden we encountered the sin of man against God. Cain and Abel present the sin of man against man and the sorrow and suffering which follows. The incident is so familiar and so simple that much of its real significance is not appreciated.

Cain was Eve's first child. Cain means "acquired". Eve considered him to be the acquired promised seed. The birth of the first human child is in Genesis 4:1 "I have gotten a man child from the LORD" (NASB), said Eve reverently. She must have been familiar with the process of birth among the animals. However, upon the birth of her child she immediately gave credit to the Lord. Despite the tragedy of the fall, and alienation from God which resulted, the first human pair had retained some reverence and loyalty toward God. Her first impulse was to acknowledge the hand of the Almighty in the event. God already promised Eve that her seed would become the means of undoing the damage done in Eden, that he would "bruise the serpent's head," which means overthrowing sin and restoring the sinless condition. She saw in the birth of this child the first step to the fulfillment of that promise.

Their hopes must have run high, as the lad grew to manhood, he was joined by his younger brother Abel and sisters. The elder devolved his skills as a farmer in cultivating the soil, the younger, as a shepherd, raising sheep and goats. Abel means nourishes or feeder. They waited for the next move in the Divine purpose having no indication of the tragedy to unfold.

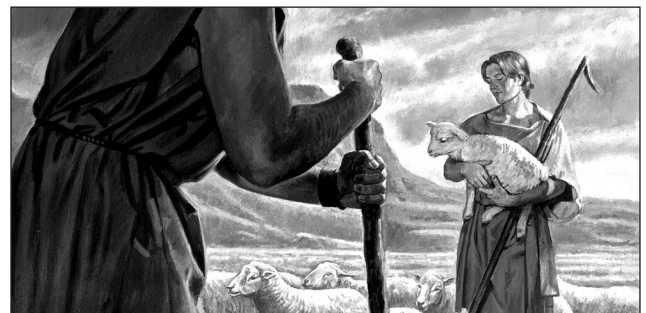
"In the course of time" indicates some time had elapsed after the fall, when Cain and Abel were grown men and on their own as adults. Genesis 4:3-5, "So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell."

Some suggest Abel offered slain lambs on the altar prefiguring the shed blood of Jesus Christ after the fashion of much later Levitical ceremonies. Therefore, Abel's offering was acceptable to God whereas Cain's offering of agricultural produce was not. This would suggest that Abel prophesied the death of Christ. However, on examining the facts, it is unlikely this is the reason for God not respecting Cain's sacrifice.

This is the first recorded instance where men brought an offering of the first fruits of their labour to God. To suggest that on such a significant occasion God should reject one and accept the other in the interests

of an academic illustration of theological philosophy, which neither of these could have understood in the slightest degree, is unreasonable. There is an important element in the text which disallows the idea completely. Abel brought "firstlings" of his flock, the Hebrew text has the word *beko-o-raw* (Strong's 1062), meaning female firstborn, of either sheep or goats. But female lambs were not admissible as blood sacrifices prefiguring Christ in the ceremonies of Israel — in The Passover or Day of Atonement. The Passover lamb had to be a **male of the first year**. If Abel was Divinely led to enact a prefigure of the later rituals, he would have been told to bring a one-year old **male**, not a first-born **female**. There was a place for firstborn females later in Israel's ceremonies. They were specified, not for sacrifice, but included with the first fruits of the ground — fruit and crops — as thank offerings to the Lord. Deuteronomy 12:6, 14:23 and Nehemiah 10:36 are instances where the word *beko-o-raw*, female firstlings, was used. Leviticus 17:26, Numbers 3:41, 28:17, and Deuteronomy 15:19 mention *bek-ore* (Strong's 1060), chief, male firstlings, treated similarly. The thank offering had to be the firstborn, whether male or female, animal or vegetable. This principle meant the firstborn of anything is the Lord's and should be given to him (Leviticus 13:2).

A further examination of the Hebrew text explains why Cain's offering was rejected. Dr Young's translation says that Abel brought "the female firstling of his flock, and of the fat of their portions." In other words, Abel showed that God should have the first and best of his flock, he chose the fattest and best of the firstborns as his contribution. Why he chose a female instead of male, thousands of years before the Mosaic Law provided for female offerings, is a point of interest. Abel must have considered them more appropriate, in the sense a female then was better than the male. Perhaps in the first family the female was considered the channel of life that came from God. That would possibly explain Eve's crediting the coming of Cain to God rather than her husband. It is also significant in the Biblical account that Eve, not Adam, named Seth, Genesis 4:25.



Cain was angry against his brother (Matthew 5:22).



Abel offered his best.

Cain did not bring the best of his produce; this is clearly shown by the Hebrew words used in the verses. The “first fruits” in the sense of the earliest to ripen, earliest crop is *bik-kor* (Strong’s 1061). The first fruits in the sense of the best produce is *ray-sheeth* (Strong’s 7525) — meaning the best, chief, e.g. in Leviticus 2:12, 23:10, 2 Chronicles 31:5. Both are used in the Old Testament referring to the offerings of first fruits in Israel. The term for fruit in general is *peri* (Strong’s 6529). This is the term used in Genesis 4:3 for Cain’s sacrifice. Cain did not bring the first fruits or his very best as did Abel. Instead he brought the fruit of his labours, but not the very best or choicest or the earliest, that is why his offering was rejected. He was careless in selecting his sacrifice. That was why we are told in Hebrews 11:4, “By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain.” The Almighty can only accept our very best. Sadly, Cain failed to give his very best.

Genesis 4:6 shows Cain lacked reverence for God and had a quick temper, “‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen’ the Almighty asked. ‘If you do well’ He said ‘will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you not do well’” — here came the warning “sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” Genesis 4:7. Here is the first intimation that man has a responsibility to strive against sin. Sin desired to have Cain, but Cain was to master the sin; he was to resist temptation and not give in to it. “But each one is tempted, when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin: and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (James 1:14,15). It is interesting that God gave Cain advice about his heart condition and told him he was in serious jeopardy. His very future depended on how he would act subsequently. God was stopping Cain and in a merciful way trying to expose his fault, giving him opportunity for repentance and reformation. Sin was an active reality, waiting to ensnare men; it was imperative to give heed and not be entrapped. God passed over Cain’s failure to offer his very best and stressed that of greater consequence was his unjustified wrath which could easily — and quickly did — lead to jealousy, violence and finally murder. The Lord exhorted Cain to take stock of his position and fight the dark thoughts that crowded into his mind and judgement before it was too late. Cain did not heed the warning.

Tragedy followed swiftly. In the ASV Genesis 4:8, Cain invited his brother into the “field,” the Hebrew word denoting cultivated, or irrigated land not pasture or wild land. It appears Abel was enticed away from their home into Cain’s area of labour as he did not want to be seen by other family members, he was sneaky. There in the field, Cain slew his brother. It may have been a premeditated act; or a sudden uncontrollable upsurge of jealousy. The two of them grew up together in the wonder of a world revealing ever new and exciting discoveries. It is unlikely Cain intended the death of his brother, but in the intensity of his resentment he struck a blow which proved fatal. The sequel of his animosity proved the reality of the Lord’s warning. Sin was already crouching at the door, he could overcome it if he would, but he must exert his will to do so, Cain, like his mother Eve, failed to do so.

His immediate reaction was fear. In Genesis 4:9, “Where is Abel thy brother?”, God’s question gave Cain a chance to confess. But Cain lied, showing no reverence at all. “I do not know” came the reply “Am I my brother’s keeper?” then the fearful condemnation; “What have you done? the voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground... when you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you, you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth”. The “ground” and “earth” from which Cain was to be a fugitive and vagabond is *erets*, meaning the earth as we use the term, the whole world, the earth as a planet. Cain was to be exiled from his home, family, and land, doomed to wander — as a “fugitive” fleeing as from an enemy or justice; as a ‘vagabond’ a wanderer, having no home — an exile.

Verse 13 reads, “My punishment is too great to bear!” The revised marginal alternative is “mine iniquity is greater than it may be forgiven” as a possible reconstruction of the Hebrew. From these words it appears Cain was hit hard in a sensitive spot. He was a tiller of the ground and was told now the ground would not respond. He had to leave his farm, his earthly possessions and home. As a vagabond, he lost the fellowship of his father and mother, brothers and sisters leaving him isolated. This was the second expulsion in human history, following Adam and Eve’s expulsion in the Garden of Eden. There is no indication in the account that Cain felt remorse or repentance. His concern appears to be only the consequence upon himself. He was to be cast out into the desolate earth, hidden from the presence of God, in danger of death at the hands of fellow men. In verse 14 “Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground,” he cried “and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth; and whosoever finds me will kill me.” Banishment from God’s presence implied withdrawal of Divine protection, from his family, leaving him with no shield against possible avengers.

Fear of the consequence of sin is no basis for acceptance with God. An upright life gains no credits in the book of the Almighty, if it is dictated only by

fear of the alternative. The one who gains his place in the Divine scheme of creation will gain it because they have completely given themselves in willing conformity to the Divine way, not because they fear what God will do to them if they do otherwise. They recognise they owe their life, and all that life means, to their Creator and want nothing better than to place themselves in that Creator's hands to be used as He wills.

The LORD said to Cain, "Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him." From Genesis 4:15 it appears vengeance belonged to God, Cain was to feel the results of the punishment and, hopefully, redeem his character.

Others could look at Cain with disdain but could not kill him, killing him would bring death to the slayer and trouble to the slayer's progeny. The lesson is that sin is contagious. Giving support to those not in the Lord's favour incurs responsibility.

Cain who had shown himself capable of destroying one life, might well do the same thing again. Therefore, God stepped in with his prohibition. In verse 15 the word "mark" in Hebrew *oth*, means a sign, set upon Cain. Not necessarily a physical disfigurement, but an indication of some kind that he must not be interfered with but left to go his way. Possibly the mark was visible, on his forehead, something that would be easily spotted by all.

In Genesis 4:16 we are told, Cain went out from the presence of the LORD. He departed taking his wife, "and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden." Hebrew *Nod* is the Sumerian land of Nadu, on the eastern side of the Persian Gulf (modern Iran). In Genesis 4:16, the footnote in the RSV says Nod means "wandering"; that is, Cain went into a territory where he wandered like a fugitive and a Bedouin.

Had Cain admitted his crime, given evidence of sincere contrition and placed himself in God's hands for judgement, the outcome would have been different. Sadly, he did not do so and went out into the wilderness unrepentant and resentful.

We know Seth was the third son of Adam and Eve because Eve spoke of another seed being appointed instead of Abel (Genesis 4:25). In Genesis 5:3 we are told Adam was 130 years old when Seth was born. The lineage through Seth appears in chapter 5 of Genesis. The Enoch of Cain's lineage is not the faithful Enoch of Jude 14, who came from Seth's line (Genesis 5:19-24).

When Adam was expelled with Eve from the Garden of Eden he went out into the unfinished earth. He planted a garden, grew crops and lived there with Eve in a specific place. The settled condition or area is likened to "the presence of the LORD." Cain went out from that "presence of the LORD," or from a more settled area where his parents resided. His leaving

was like being alienated from God. First, Adam was put out of the garden of Eden; now Cain was put out from a "conditional garden," as it were. When Adam and Eve were expelled, they were sent East. When Cain was forced to leave, he went even farther East. It appears eastward movement was figurative of losing more and more of the Lord's favour.

In Genesis 4:17 it appears that Cain already had a wife before his expulsion, as who would have married a disgraced murderer? But there were no children at the time as he did not "know" his wife until he had gone out from the presence of the Lord. Cain did not have children until he dwelt in the land of Nod. His wife would have been one of Adam's daughters. Cain, Abel, and Seth are the only sons named, but Adam "begat [other] sons and daughters" we are told in (Genesis 5:3,4). So, daughters were born before Seth, for Adam was 130 years old when Seth was born.

It appears Cain and his wife were a mirror reflection of the Adam and Eve picture. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, Cain and his wife were expelled from the presence of the Lord. In both cases the husband-wife relationship existed prior to the expulsion, the children existed afterwards in the imperfect or less perfect state.

Genesis 4:17 tells us Cain built a "city" and called it Enoch, named after his son, not himself. Although Cain was an outcast, he wanted the memory of his posterity to be established, and the possibility for his posterity to have a fresh start. His descendants to the eighth generation are recorded in verse 18, then there is total silence — he disappears. The man who was first born of the first family, the first link leading to the promised seed through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed.

He was the first fruit of the procreative power of God, implanted in those to whom He had entrusted the populating of and dominion and enjoyment of earth. But he failed to appreciate the goodness of God when he came to make the acknowledgement, He only brought the second best of his produce. Because of God's inevitable rejection of the second best he allowed resentment, jealousy, hatred to take possession of his soul and drive him to sin. A sin which was never repented of, so he was alienated from God and lost the honoured future he could have had. The lesson of Cain's tragedy is to place God first in life, giving of one's self unreservedly to Him for His purposes, and the very best of our abilities, talents and achievements to His service, is a sure defence against the "wiles of the devil." Satan cannot gain entry where God already reigns. Sin is crouching at the door, ready to spring — but in the power of God we gain the mastery. Micah knew the secret. "he has told you, O man, what is good, And what does the LORD require of you, But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

The Old Book

Autobiography of the Bible

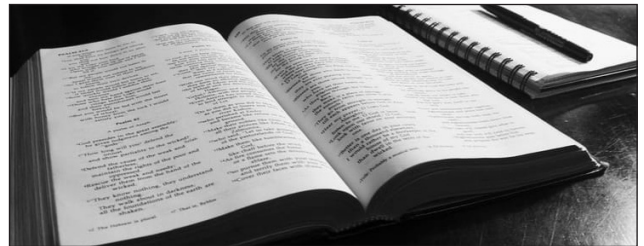
I am the oldest book in existence, having outlived the storms of thirty centuries. Men have endeavoured to banish me from the face of the earth; they have hidden, torn, and burnt me, and have done to death tens of thousands of my faithful witnesses. No other book has been more bitterly hated; no other book has been so dearly cherished; no other book has been so misrepresented and misunderstood; but to-day, while so many of my foes slumber in death, I still live on.

It is not for me to speak of the conflicting creeds laid to my charge, but on behalf of the one true purpose of my revered Author, I appeal to reason. Look at the stately trees of the forest; the living green of the meadows bespangled by a thousand lovely flowers; the singing birds that delight themselves amid the beauties of nature; the blue dome of heaven illuminated by the sun, moon, and stars that space out a universe too immense for man to fathom; and know that the Creator of these things has a wise and loving purpose equally great and beautiful on behalf of man (Isaiah 55:6).

There is revealed within my covers a plan so broad and a design so deep as to be beyond the power of human origin. My story centres around the Redeemer, who by the grace of God tasted death for everyone.

Based upon this atoning sacrifice all the dead will be raised, and the whole earth made glorious with life and happiness everywhere, without a trace of sorrow, pain, or death (Isaiah 11:9, 60:13, Revelation 21:1-7).

My message has blessed every follower of Jesus. It has inspired them to learn about God, encouraged them to zeal, comforted them in sorrow, and strengthened them in faith, till they have laid down their all in death, awaiting their grand reward. Like the crystal springs from the mountainside which flow on and on to refresh the luxuriant greenery on the plains below, so in the glad day now at hand the waters of truth will impart their life-giving blessing to the willing and obedient of mankind, who will forever, with one sweet accord, praise, love, and adore my beloved Author (Revelation 5:8,13).



The Best Book Ever to Read

The Pruning Process

“I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He takes away every branch in me which has no fruit, and every branch which has fruit he makes clean, so that it may have more fruit” (John 15:1-2 BBE).

The whole pruning process is the Heavenly Father’s way of separating us from the thoughts and things in our life that we have become too attached to, that are really getting in our way. By removing the parts that are hindering our journey on the narrow way it assists us in our spiritual growth. The result is spoken of by Christ, “Here is my Father’s glory, in that you give much fruit and so are my true disciples” (John 15:8 BBE).

“I AM THE VINE, YE ARE THE BRANCHES”

It is the branch that bears the fruit,
That feels the knife.
To prune it for a larger growth,
A fuller life.

Though every budding twig be lopped,
And every grace
Of swaying tendril, springing leaf,
Be lost a space.

O thou whose life of joy seems reft,
Of beauty shorn;
Whose aspirations lie in dust,
All bruised and torn,

Rejoice, though each desire, each dream,
Each hope of thine
Shall fall and fade; it is the hand
Of love Divine

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(ABN 23 734 654 922, Reg. No. A0022186J)

Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.
PO Box 402, Rosanna, Victoria, Australia 3084
Website: australianbiblestudents.org
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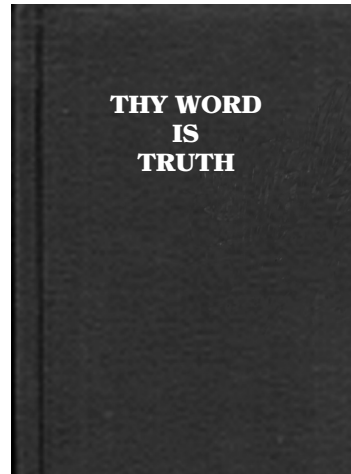
The Bible Teachings

On the Covenants, Mediator, Ransom, Sin Offering and Atonement.

This book was published by the Berean Bible Institute during the 1970’s and set out the teachings from the Bible on topics which so eluded many in the Christian world. The insert in this edition of the Peoples Paper covers the next part of this 274-page book. For Brethren who would like to read more of the content it is available through the Berean Bible Institute’s official webpage.

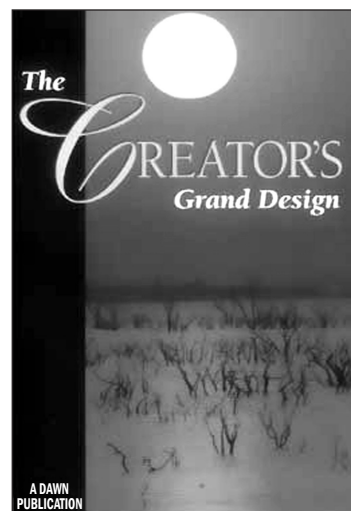
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Tuesday 7th April 2020 (14 Nisan) after 6 pm

For details on locations where the memorial will be held in Australia, email enquirybbi@gmail.com

For Isolated Brethren — If you are isolated or unable to attend, please contact the Berean Bible Institute for a Memorial Kit, provided at no charge.

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Organised by the Berean Bible Institute
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In Memory

Sr. Annie Dorothy Marlor

Sr. Annie attended the Bible Student Class in Adelaide with husband Br. Harry (deceased) for many years before moving to Brisbane and joining the brethren in Queensland.
22 July 1924 to 21 October 2019

The Bible Teachings (Part Five)

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Jewish Nation Held Together by God's Promise

"In thy Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

This promise held that nation together for all the centuries down to Christ — yea, it still holds them together as a peculiar people, separate from all the other nations of the world. St. Paul and the other Apostles refer to this repeatedly. St. Paul says, Our twelve tribes instantly (incessantly) serving God, hope to come to the fulfilment of this Abrahamic promise — the blessing of all the families of the earth through them (Acts 26:7).

Law Covenant Did Not Disannul Abrahamic Promise

As St. Paul points out, the Law Covenant was added to the Abrahamic Covenant so far as the nation of Israel was concerned to continue until the promised Seed should come. He is particular to add that the Law Covenant itself did not disannul or make invalid the original Covenant, which was of Grace and not of Law (Galatians 3:17). He was particular also that we should see that the law Covenant "made nothing perfect" — it accomplished no real reformation or restitution. It did, however, set forth in types and allegories some wonderful lessons illustrative of great Divine principles of truth and righteousness — lessons which were beneficial to the Jewish nation, natural Israel, and also to the Gospel Church, which constitutes spiritual Israel.

A Remnant Blessed Between Jacob and Christ

During the period from the death of Jacob to Christ, while the law made nothing perfect, a few of that nation, exercising faith above and beyond the Law Covenant, were blessed by the underlying Abrahamic Covenant. These the Apostle enumerates in Hebrews 11. They had this testimony, that they died in faith, and that thus "they pleased God," although they did not by obedience to the Law Covenant secure the blessing which it proposed. Those faithful ones will get through Christ what the Law Covenant could not give them, for, because of inherited weaknesses, they were unable to fulfil the requirements of the Law Covenant.

Impossible for Imperfect Man to Keep God's Perfect Law

Let us keep in mind that the Law Covenant was added to the Abrahamic Covenant because of transgression — to show to the Israelites and to all the impossibility of an imperfect man keeping the Divine Law, and also to manifest in due time our Lord Jesus, who, born under the Law Covenant, kept its provisions faithfully.

By so doing, says the Apostle, Christ "magnified the Law Covenant and made it honourable." Previously it might have been claimed that the Divine Law was too rigorous and that nobody could possibly keep it; that it would be impossible for a man to love God with all his heart, all his mind, all his being, all his strength, and his neighbour as himself. But when Jesus did this, and did more in sacrificing Himself, the just for the unjust, it demonstrated the fact that God had not given an impossible Law; it demonstrated that the fault lay with mankind; that they had lost the original perfection with which the Creator had endowed them.

Why Jesus Was Born Under Law Covenant

We read that our Lord was born under the Law Covenant "that He might redeem those who were under the Law" Covenant. So far as other peoples were concerned, He might have been of any other nation and redeemed Adam and the remainder of the world, but in order to preserve equitably to Israel the special blessing of God's Covenant with Abraham it was necessary that Christ should be of that nation, "born under the Law, that He might redeem those who were under the Law." That nation had been separated from the other nations of the world for the very purpose of giving the illustrations already referred to, and God would see to it that they should not be disadvantaged by reason of His having used them thus. The blessed opportunities offered them under the Law Covenant through the typical sacrifices, etc., lifted them above the other nations and gave them, as it were, a second trial for eternal life. In common with the remainder of mankind as children of Adam they had one trial and one condemnation through him; and then, under the Law Covenant arrangement and its mediator, Moses, another trial for eternal life was granted to that nation; but it was lost because none of them did keep or could fulfil the requirements of that Law Covenant. The day was saved for that nation as respects that Law Covenant, by which they were bound, by the fact that Christ became a Jew and by obedience to the law Covenant gained all of the rights which it held out.

Blessing of World Necessitated Jesus Giving Up Earthly Rights Secured Under the Law

The rights gained were earthly rights — human perfection, an Eden home, fellowship with God and the dominion of earth; as recited by the Prophet, "Dominion over the beasts of the field, the fishes of

the sea, and the fowls of the air.” Had Christ kept these rights, which were properly His through obedience to the Law, He could indeed have brought a great blessing to the Jews, instructing them along the lines of health and morale; and through Israel these blessings and instructions might have been imparted to all other nations. But as the race was under Divine sentence to death, it would not have been possible for Jesus to give mankind perfection of mind or body. The blessings of the Seed of Abraham in that event would have been very limited indeed and then only to such as would exercise faith and obedience similar to the faith and obedience which Abraham exercised.

Jesus' Reward for His Obedience

Instead of keeping the earthly rights which His special birth and obedience to the Law made possible to Him, Jesus, in harmony with the Father's program, sacrificed these earthly rights at once — as soon as He reached manhood's estate, 30 years. He gave up all earthly rights and interests and privileges. His consecration was complete; He symbolised it by a water immersion at Jordan. The Father accepted it, and forthwith gave Him the begetting of the holy spirit to a new nature. For the three — and one-half years of His earthly ministry our Lord persistently sacrificed His earthly life and every earthly interest, finishing the sacrifice at Calvary when He cried, “It is finished.” On the third day there after the Father raised Him from the dead to a newness of life — again on the spirit plane of being. This was the reward for His obedience to the Father's will in the sacrificing of His earthly rights and privileges as the perfect man.

Messiah Holds Earthly Rights as an Asset

So, then, as the glorified one in His resurrection, Messiah was a spirit being, “partaker of the Divine nature,” on high and had at His command all those earthly rights and privileges which He had sacrificed, which He laid down in death in obedience to the Father's will. He had these now as a possession, as an asset which He might dispense, which He might give to others.

Urged Not to forget that the Law Covenant Promised Only Earthly Life, Blessings and Dominion

Let us not lose the thread of the thought: The Law Covenant promised earthly life and earthly blessings and earthly dominion — those which Adam had lost. Whoever would keep the Law should have these. Christ Jesus, as the keeper of the Law, had the right to these and laid them down. And now, being exalted, it is these earthly blessings and earthly rights which He has to dispense — to the Jew, or to all mankind, or to such an elect or select number of mankind as He may please, and as will be in accord with the Father's program outlined in the scroll sealed with seven seals.

Why Antitypical Melchizedec Was Promised

When the Israelites, found that Moses could not give them eternal life, and that even under David and

Solomon they did not reach the pinnacle of power and influence in the world to bless mankind, they might well have been discouraged. Hence God, through the prophets, sent them further enlightenment to the effect that they could never accomplish the Divine purpose of blessing the world except as He would send them a Messiah, an Anointed One, a King and Priest after the order of Melchizedek. When Messiah should come as the great Priest, and the great King, He would be able to do for them under a New (Law) Covenant what Moses and Aaron had not been able to do for them under the old law Covenant.

God's Law Covenant to be Replaced

It was in connection with this promise of Messiah that God told His covenanted people that He would replace the Law Covenant under Messiah, the antitype of Moses. He said: “It shall come to pass, saith the Lord, after those days, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the (Law) Covenant which I made with them when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, but I will make a New Covenant with them, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and I will give them a heart of flesh and I will write my Law in their inward parts” (Jeremiah 31:31- 33).

Israel Looking for the Glorious Messiah

Israel was looking for this glorious Messiah greater than Moses, who would introduce to them and put them under a better, a New (law) Covenant, and under more favourable conditions by which they would more fully accomplish the Divine purposes in their own hearts, and be prepared, qualified, to introduce those blessings to all the families of the earth, as they had been expecting to do from the beginning.

Why Jews were permitted to Crucify Jesus

We can see a reason why the Lord kept secret from the Jews in general His identity; for, as the Apostle Peter says, “had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” They did it in ignorance (Acts 3:17). We can see it was necessary that Christ should die; that He should lay down His earthly rights and earthly life and receive of the Father the higher life, and a spiritual realm, in order that He might have the earthly blessings to give, to dispense to Israel and to the world. We can see that otherwise no blessings of a permanent and eternal, character would have been possible; hence our Lord explained to the disciples after His resurrection, “It was necessary that Christ should suffer and (then) enter into His glory.”

Jesus' First Work Not with the Jews

Now the question arises, what disposition will the risen and glorified Jesus make of these earthly rights which in His death He had secured by His sacrifice of them? The most reasonable, the most natural thought to us would be: Surely having consecrated the earthly rights He will confer these upon Natural Israel: He

will at once become King and Priest to that nation, and in harmony with their hopes cherished for more than sixteen centuries He will exalt Israel as a nation. He will open their eyes. As the prophets have declared, “They shall see out of obscurity”; and “They also that pierced Him shall mourn,” and He will “pour upon them the spirit of prayer and supplication” (Zechariah 12:10).

Jesus Cast Off Jews Instead of blessing Them with the New Covenant

But Jesus did nothing of the kind. Instead of so doing, He cast off the nation of Israel, saying, “Your house is Left unto you desolate.” He did not establish for them the New Covenant; He did not bless them at all. They have been the most outcast nation of the world for the nearly nineteen centuries since they crucified Him. No wonder the Apostle asks, “Has God cast away His people whom He foreknew?” — the people to whom He made the promises and covenants? — the people whom He encouraged in every way to believe that they were His special people and would be specially used by Him in carrying the blessings of the Divine law and instruction to all nations? Has God set aside all His promises?

The “Mystery” to be revealed — God Has Not Abandoned Original Plan

We shall see presently that God has not in any degree abandoned His original program as respects the nation of Israel — “the seed of Abraham” according to the flesh and according to the Law Covenant. Here comes in “a mystery,” as St. Paul explains. This Mystery he declares was hidden from previous ages and dispensations, and is now made manifest only to the saints, the holy ones taught of God. It is still a Mystery to Israel after the flesh. It is still a Mystery to the world of mankind in general; for the world knoweth us not, even as it knew not the Master. The world does not perceive that God is selecting a “Little Flock” to be with Christ, members of His mystical Body — members of the spiritual Seed of Abraham.

The Mystery Shall Be Finished

In His last symbolic message to the Church, the lion of Judah, who received the scroll of the Divine purpose, informs the saints, to whom it is “given to know the Mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven,” that the Mystery shall be finished; but not until the days of the voice or sounding of the seventh trumpet — in the end or close of this Gospel Age and the dawn of the Millennial Age. Whoever is interested may profitably search the Word respecting this Mystery class, its calling, its selection, its testing, its completion, its glorification; but only those who are begotten of the holy spirit will be able to understand in the sense of fully appreciating these “deep things of God” which “God has revealed unto us (the Mystery class) by His spirit, for the spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10).

The “Mystery” Class

This Mystery class is composed of such as have the faith of Abraham and the obedience of Abraham — beginning with our lord and continuing from Pentecost down to the close of this Gospel Age. It is upon these that Christ’s blessing of forgiveness, reconciliation, and earthly favours lost by Adam and redeemed by Himself were conferred.

Christ Has Something to Give Away

Call to mind that He has something to give away — earthly rights and privileges which were His by virtue of His keeping the law Covenant. Those were not spiritual rights and privileges which He secured through keeping the law, but earthly ones only. He got His spiritual and higher privileges and honours as a reward for the sacrifice of Himself. What He has to give to us therefore is not spiritual life and honours and dominion, but the earthly. These come to us in the nature of a bequest. The earthly life and the earthly rights which Jesus sacrificed are willed or bequeathed to all those of the faith and obedience of Abraham. But here comes another feature of this Mystery. It is not enough that we have the faith of Abraham and his loyalty to righteousness; an additional matter is necessary. All who would become sharers of this gift of Christ must now, in addition to faith and obedience to righteousness, take up their cross and follow Christ as the Captain of their salvation; they must walk in His footsteps in the narrow way of self-sacrifice, even unto death. Any who do not thus will and thus covenant cannot be His disciples now, whatever blessing they may obtain by His grace later on. He is now, during this Gospel Age, making a special selection of a special class, “elect, precious.” These He styles His Bride, members of His Body, the Royal Priesthood, His Jewels. These various names indicate His high appreciation of this specially called class.

Through the Spiritual to the Natural

Let us keep in memory the Apostle’s words that “God hath not cast off natural Israel whom He foreknew” and to whom pertained the promises, the giving of the law, etc.; He has merely turned them aside temporarily during this Gospel Age, that in the interim He may develop a spiritual Israel, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation, a Peculiar People, to be the Bride of Messiah, or otherwise His “Members.” This “Mystery” is working no disadvantage to the Jew, but really is a further step in the Divine program in fullest accord with the original Covenant made with Abraham. The Seed of Abraham was to be of two parts: (1) As the stars of heaven, and (2) As the sands of the seashore.

The Mystery class developed during this Gospel Age are the Spiritual Seed, symbolically pictured as the stars of heaven, while the natural seed of Abraham is yet to become as the sand of the seashore. The Apostle refers to both of these seeds (Romans 4:16) — “Not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which

is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.” The old Law Covenant brought not forth the seed of Abraham, but the New (Law) Covenant will bring forth many children — as the sands of the seashore. The only children of Abraham thus far developed are those who are the Seed of Abraham according to faith

All of Christ’s Blessing Goes to the “Mystery” Class

As we have already seen, all of Christ’s blessing goes to this faith class, the “mystery” class, according to a program which the world does not understand, but with certain conditions attached which obligate all who receive this blessing to become dead to earthly aims and hopes and ambitions, and thus as members of the Body of Christ to have fellowship in His sacrifice of the earthly things that they may have fellowship and share with Him in the heavenly part of the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. “If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him.” “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne” (2 Timothy 2:11, Revelation 3:21).

The Death of the Testator

The Apostle explains that no will or testament or bequest is of validity so long as the testator liveth. Whatever covenant or agreement may be had, it awaits a final sealing or completion by the death of the testator. The Apostle applies this to Christ. By His death Jesus passed on to us, the Church, the benefit of His merit; namely, the earthly rights or “justification” to all that was lost in Adam and redeemed by the precious merit of Christ’s sacrifice finished at Calvary. In accepting these earthly blessings, we, as His members, agreed to the terms: namely, that we also surrender our rights to these as servants of “ministers of the New (law) Covenant” — that these earthly blessings secured by our lord’s obedience and death should thus pass through us and still be the Redeemer’s asset to be given to Israel, under Israel’s New (law) Covenant.

Israel Still Outcast, Evidence Body of Christ Not Complete

The fact that Israel is still outcast from God’s favour is merely an evidence that the Body of Christ is not yet completely sacrificed, for bear in mind that the Covenant is of no validity until the death of the testator. The lord Jesus, the primary testator, has accepted believers, as “members of His Body,” and He is working in them by His holy spirit, to will and to do

the Father’s good pleasure — that they may lay down their lives in sacrifice, filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Messiah. As soon as the last member of the Church shall have died as a member of His Body, the New (law) Covenant with Israel will be sealed — sealed with the blood of the testator, the death of the testator, the death of the Christ, Head and Members.

The Mystic Class on Plane of Spiritual Glory

Meantime the resurrection change of the Church as the Body of Christ will have brought the Testator as a whole to the plane of glory, honour and immortality. On this plane the Christ, Jesus the Head, and the Church, His mystic Body, will be in antitype the great Prophet, the great Priest, the great King, the great Judge, the great Mediator between God and mankind in general. Then will come the time promised in the Scriptures when this Great One, this Glorified One, the Seed of Abraham on the spiritual plane, will begin the work of blessing all the families of the earth, under the conditions of the New (law) Covenant, to be made with Israel first.

Why Christ Passed His “Cup” Along

Our lord when discussing His sacrificial sufferings, referred to them as His “Cup.” In the last Supper, the memorial of His death, referring to this Cup symbolically, He said. “This is the blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins: drink ye all of it” (Matthew 26:27, 28). That Cup, which symbolised our lord’s death, our lord’s sacrifice of His earthly rights, was sufficient of itself to have sealed the New Covenant. He needed not to ask the Apostles, or us, or anybody, to become His disciples and to share His sufferings, to share His Cup, and to share the rewards of these — His glory, honour and immortality.

But He passed the Cup along, passed the merit to us; or, rather, passed the merit of His sacrifice through us, His disciples, His followers. He did this because it was a part of the Divine program; for, as St. Peter declares, “The God and Father of our lord Jesus Christ hath begotten us.” He who foreknew Jesus foreknew us also by Jesus. This was no change of the Divine program. It was surprising to us merely because it was a Mystery not previously made known — that we should be made fellow heirs with Christ in the sufferings of this present time and in the glory that shall follow.