



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

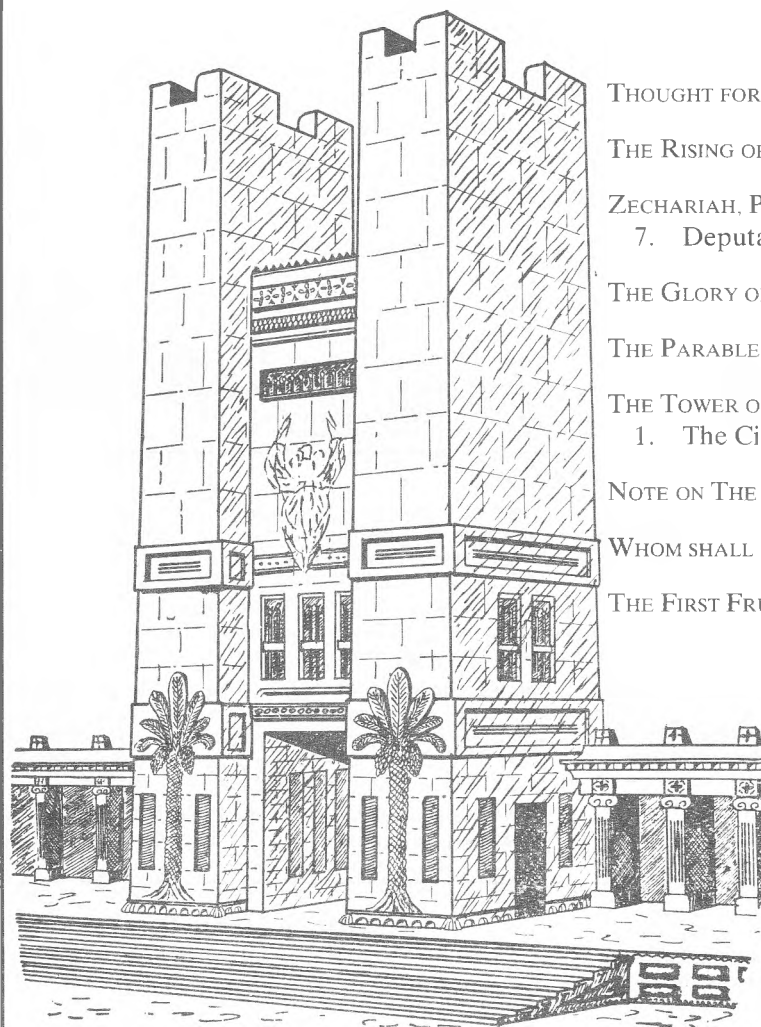
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Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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*This Journal is sent free  
of charge to all who are  
genuinely interested, on  
request renewable annually  
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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# Bible Study Monthly

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This journal is published for the promotion of Bible knowledge, maintaining the historical accuracy of the Scriptures and the validity of their miraculous and prophetic content viewed in the light of modern under-

standing. It stands for the pre-millennial Advent of our Lord and his reign of peace and justice on earth. It is supported entirely by the voluntary gifts of its readers and all such gifts are sincerely appreciated.

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## THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

*"The Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings"* (Mal. 4. 2).

The Old Testament closes on that note of supreme optimism and confidence. After all the failures and tragedies and shortcomings of the ages, with all of the sin and misery and death those have entailed, the great Sun will rise over the earth and bring healing under his outspreading wings. What better message for any New Year? *"The night is far spent, the day is at hand"*—earth's Millennial Day in which *"the nations shall come to thy light"* and men will at last cry out *"this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be*

*glad and rejoice in his salvation"*. God will arise in judgment, but it will be a judgment on all that has oppressed and enslaved humanity, and the world will be the better for its coming.

But as it was at the First Advent, so must it be at the Second. That is the very last word in the Old Testament; Elijah the Prophet will come to herald the imminent change. At the First Advent that Elijah was John the Baptist; he gave his testimony and heralded the Redeemer. In the dawn of the Second Advent Elijah must thus come again, this time in the persons of those who understand and expect and will herald the coming day as faithfully as did he. Where are they now?

## NOTICES

**B.F.U. New Address.** Attention is again directed to the new address of the B.F.U., to which correspondence should now be sent, as shown above; not to Hounslow as in the past.

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**New Features for 1994.** The series "Zechariah Prophet of the Restoration" will continue throughout 1994. A new series "The Tower of Babel" commences in this issue. This is substantially the series entitled "A City and a Tower" appearing in these columns a little over thirty years ago but revised to take account of discoveries made by investigators and researchers since that time.

\* \* \*

**Renewals.** All readers from whom we have not heard since July last should have had a pink renewal notice in either the September or the November issue and it will be appreciated if any who have not yet done so will signify their wishes without delay. We are anxious to continue the "Monthly" to all who are definitely interested whether or not they feel able to contribute to the cost, but we do not wish to incur the cost of continuing to send to anyone who is no longer interested.

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## NEW EDITIONS AND PUBLICATIONS.

**"In the Land of Beginning Again".** This is the third edition of this little collection of short stories picturing conditions in the

early Millennial Age, bringing to the surface some of the principles perhaps better pictured in narrative form than in sober prose. "Truth, embodied in a tale, can enter in at lowly doors" said Tennyson. This little 24-page booklet could be useful in some situations, vividly illustrating the methods by which our Lord may win to himself those whose hearts have hitherto been far from him.

**No. 44 The Reality of God.** **No. 45 The Destiny of Man.** These two new pamphlets are useful for passing to the honest enquirer who demands a reasonable presentation of the basis of the Christian faith before going on to the position where he can listen to the challenge of Christ.

All the above are available in small quantities on request for judicious distribution.

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## Gone from us

— ❁ —

Bro. Fred Guard (*Forest Gate*)

Sis. May Storey (*Gateshead*)

Sis. Mercy Watts (*Yeovil, late Oxford*)

— ❁ —

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## THE RISING OF THE MORNING

The coming of the dawn is a vivid symbol of the New Year, with all its promise of a new and better one. The troubles and failures of yesterday are pushed to the back of the mind and their place taken by plans and good hopes for the new day now commencing. Is there something to be built? Willing hands pick up tools and engage in their work. Is there a battle to be waged? Resolute minds lay plans and advance to the fray, and he who is wide awake and about early in the morning has the advantage; by the time the sun is up he has already made a good start. As it was in the days of the restoration of Israel from the exile in Babylon, when the returning pioneers had not only the rigours of the rebuilding to endure, but also the hostility of their enemies who sought to thwart their efforts, on which account they must perforce labour with builder's trowel in one hand and a sword in the other. As said the Jewish patriot Nehemiah when he recorded the story of those stirring times (Neh. 4, 21.) "*so we laboured in the work, and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning sun until the stars appeared.*"

So is the dawn of the year to the evangelist, the warrior for God and his plan. This is the end of the Age and the new Dawn is at hand. The world of man has groaned under its burden of sin and suffering for so many centuries past and the consequences of its own selfishness and mal-administration have now brought it to its end. Every sign witnesses that the night is nearly past and the Millennial day is dawning. But every warrior for Christ has now a stern duty to perform. "*I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple . . . saith the Lord*" (Mal. 3, 1). That word was fulfilled in the first instance in the coming of John the Baptist to herald the first Advent of Christ; in a more intense sense it is fulfilled a second time in a world-wide proclamation, similar to John's message, at our Lord's Second Advent, and in each case the proclamation is the same; "*The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*". And because that message, although welcome to many of earth's multitudes, is nevertheless unwelcome and obnoxious to those of earth whose interests lie in the perpetuation of this present order of things, and they will fight to the end to retard or restrain the entry of the promised new order, those warriors must build

with the one hand and fight with the other. The message must go forth in power, to build faith and hope in the hearts of those who sigh and long for an end to the misery that is on man now. The tools then are those elements of the Divine Plan now revealed in the Scriptures, telling of the presence now in the earth of the powers of Heaven overruling earth's affairs so that this world comes to its end at the pre-determined time, that understanding of the word of God which uncovers the vision of the world that shall be when the present Lord reveals himself to all mankind as earth's rightful King, and institutes the reign of righteousness which is to bring peace to the nations and security to all men. The sword is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, which will condemn and destroy every evil institution of man and establish a clean earth.

So this New Year upon which we are now embarking is but a miniature of that greater New Year which is now opening before the sons of men. Our ministry and service now is a miniature of that greater ministry and service upon which we will embark, when joined to our Lord from Heaven, to take up the greater task of reconciling "whosoever will" of all mankind to God. Ministers of reconciliation, the Apostle Paul calls us (2 Cor. 3, 18-20) and that is our office and mission both now and in the future. This year, and coming years, now; the entire thousand years of the Millennial Age, then; "The Kingdom of God is at hand," now; "whosoever will, let him come", then. And in the rising of the morning, while as yet only the first gleams of dawn are on the horizon, it is our mission to ply our tools and wield our swords as zealously and effectively as powers permit. All too soon will the Sun of Righteousness of Mal. 4, 3 have risen with his light flooding the world, and the time of our labours be over—even though our works continue (Rev. 14, 13). So each New Year becomes a time for renewed endeavour in the Christian commission.

Something of all this must have been in the mind of Solomon the poet-king of Israel when he penned the rhapsody we know as the canticles, the Song of Solomon. "*Lo*" he says, "*the winter is past, the rain is over and gone*" (Cant. 2, 11-13). The exquisite little cameo that follows fitly illustrates the events which characterise this present period which presages earth's greatest New Year, particularly as they relate to his own,

the church on earth "*waiting for his appearing*" and witnessing in the happenings of today evidences of his activities behind the scenes, "*binding the strong man*" (Matt. 12. 29) in order "*to spoil his house.*" And see how apt is the illustration. "*The flowers appear on the earth*"—man's winter, this world of sin and death, of sickness and misery, of injustice and violence, is past, or at least is passing off the scene, and the flowers of the Millennial Age which is to succeed it are appearing in the earth, the fair landscape of a world, a *new heavens and a new earth*" as Peter terms it "*wherein dwelleth righteousness*". The springtime is at hand and all is well.

"*The time of the singing of birds is come.*" Early dawn is the time of the well-known "dawn chorus" when the feathered creatures unite in heralding forth the new day. Springtime is when they are especially vocal as they set about the task of bringing into being new life. There is a subtle insinuation here not apparent in English versions. There are two Hebrew words for the act of singing usually so rendered, one indicating choral singing as such, irrespective of the nature of the song, the other meaning to sing praises. In this instance it is the latter word which is used. The time for singing praises has come. "*Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice, with the voice together shall they sing, for they shall see, eye to eye, the Lord returning to Zion*" (Isa. 52. 8). Those who know themselves to be the Lord's heralds have every reason to sing praises.

"*The voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land.*" What can this be but a symbol of the Holy Spirit actively in operation during this critical period in earth's history? In all the Scriptures the dove is the only living creature to which the Holy Spirit is likened, and this at the baptism of our Lord. So the voice of the dove is the voice of the Holy Spirit, teaching the faithful, as

### Marks of Ripeness

"What are the distinguishing marks of a ripe character? One mark is beauty. Ripe fruit has its own perfect beauty; as the fruit ripens, the sun tints it with surpassing loveliness, and the colours deepen till the beauty of the fruit is equal to the beauty of the blossom, and in some respects superior. There is in ripe Christians the beauty of realised sanctification, which the Word of God knows by the name of "beauty of holiness."

"Another mark of ripe fruit is tenderness. The young, green fruit is hard and stone-like. The

promised, concerning things to come. Luke relates a parable spoken by Jesus respecting the man who went on a journey, leaving his servants to watch diligently for his return (Luke 12. 37). When he did return, unexpectedly, he himself prepared a feast and himself came forth to serve them. What could that be but a feast of Divine truth, "*meat in due season*", particularly respecting the nature of the times immediately anterior to his full appearing to all mankind, and our own consequent responsibility to proclaim that knowledge by every means within our power to all men. The power of the Holy Spirit is heard in the land. "*The fig tree putteth forth her green figs*", a well-known symbol of Israel, the destined earthly instrument in the Lord's hand for world conversion. The fig tree in Israel has two crops; the first appears in the autumn but does not ripen until early spring. The second appears later in the summer. These early ones are called "paq", "green figs", and "putteth forth" is a word meaning to mature. Here is a picture of Israel being regathered in the dark winter of this Age to mature and be ready for her destined work in the morning of the next. "*Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee . . . and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising*" (Isa. 60. 1-3).

"*The vines are in blossom, they give forth their fragrance.*" Here is the culminating point. The vine, the true Church, at the point of bearing fruit! What can that be but the union with Christ in the First Resurrection, and the appearing with him in the glory of that stage of the Advent in which all the world is appraised and convinced of the fact. That is the end of the night and the coming of the day, the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. "*Watchman, what of the night?*" was the call (Isa. 25. 11). The answer came, "*the morning cometh.*"

mature Christian is noted for tenderness of spirit.

"Another mark of ripeness is sweetness. The unripe fruit is sour. As we grow in grace we are sure to grow in sympathy and love. We shall, as we ripen in grace, have greater sweetness toward our fellow-Christians. Bitter spirited Christians may know a great deal; those who are quick to censure may be very acute in judgment, but they are as yet immature in heart.

"Another and a very sure mark of ripeness is a loose hold of earth. Ripe fruit parts easily from the stem."  
(C. H. Spurgeon.)

## ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

### 7. Deputation from Bethel

Two years after the visions the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah, this time in the form of a message to his own generation. The Temple was approaching completion, only two more years and the edifice that had been commenced eighteen years earlier at the return from Babylon was finished and dedicated, and the worship of the God of Israel resumed in his own sanctuary. It was the imminent prospect of this long-looked for consummation which inspired the sending of the deputation from Bethel to Jerusalem and so gave occasion for the happenings that are recorded in chapters 7 and 8.

*"Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men to entreat the favour of the Lord . . ."* This is the R.S.V. rendering of ch. 7. 2 and it is the true one. The A.V. has mistaken the word and rendered Bethel "the house of God", its meaning in Hebrew, without realising that it was the town of Bethel in Samaria that was intended. The import of vs. 2 and 3 is that the Jews living in and around Bethel, for so long the centre of idolatrous worship in Israel before the Captivities and now in the Restoration the most important town in the north, had sent a deputation to Jerusalem with an important question. The leaders of the deputation were these two, Sharezer and Regem-melech, who despite their Babylonian names were certainly Jews. The question was whether the priests and prophets at Jerusalem considered it necessary still to observe the day of mourning associated with the burning and destruction of Solomon's Temple by Nebuchadnezzar on the tenth day of the fifth month some seventy years earlier, now that the new Temple was almost complete. One would have expected the answer to be almost self-evident; why weep for the destruction of God's sanctuary now that it was rebuilt? It almost seems the questioners were more concerned with ritual observance than realities; they had always observed this day as one of mourning and lamentation, *"these so many years"* they said, and if the ritual so demanded, were prepared to go on doing it even though the situation which called it into being no longer existed. At any rate, the Lord's reply transmitted through the prophet shewed that He was under no illusion. *"When ye fasted and mourned . . . those seventy years, did ye fast to me?"* He demanded. *"Should*

*ye not have heard the words which the Lord cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity . . ."* (ch. 7. 4-7). In a few short, sharp words the Lord told them that their mourning was only ceremonial, that they were not really weeping for the desolated Sanctuary and the despoil done to God's glory. They had not listened to the warnings of the prophets in the days of their prosperity, neither were they sincere in their lamentations over the years of adversity, for there was no real remorse or repentance in their hearts. So the first answer from the Lord was a plain and uncompromising intimation that they were not honest in their profession and therefore He was not interested whether they mourned in the fifth month or not.

This was, however, only a first answer. The Lord does not leave his children, even grievously erring children, without guidance and encouragement, and He had a great deal yet to say to these messengers from Bethel. So He expanded his words. As though it might be claimed that the words of the prophets had been forgotten and lost in the troublous times that had for several generations afflicted Israel the Lord gave them a brief resume. *"Execute true judgment, show mercy and compassion, oppress not the widow, the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor: and let none of you imagine evil against his brother"* (ch. 7. 9-10). This was the spirit of the Law, the principles by which, if Israel lived in them, everlasting peace and prosperity would be their portion. But they did not so live, so that at the last there had to be penned the sad, regretful words of 2 Chron. 36. 15-16 *"The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending: because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy"*. So the penalty of the broken Covenant came upon Israel and they were carried into captivity by their enemies. Therefore the words of the old Chronicler were repeated to the messengers from Bethel to Zechariah. *"They refused to hearken"* he said *"they stopped their ears that they should not hear. They made their hearts as an adamant stone"* (diamond) *"lest they should hear the law and the words which the Lord of*

*Hosts hath sent by the former prophets . . . therefore it is come to pass . . . I scattered them among all the nations whom they knew not . . . for they laid the pleasant land desolate"* (ch. 7. 11-14).

Then the Lord turned, and spoke to those messengers in a very different tone. Gone are the words of reproof for the shortcomings of their fathers and the broken covenant, gone the stern admonition as to their own insincerity and formalism, their own failure to mourn the destruction of the Temple in the spirit of remorse and repentance for the sins which led to that destruction. Chapter 8 strikes a different key, one of hope and confidence for the future, one in which blessing and not judgment is the predominant note. The message was primarily for the people of Zechariah's own day, outlining some of the glories which Israel was shortly to enjoy in her renewed national status, but going on into the far distant future when, in the Kingdom of God, Israel should attain her destiny. It is as though God had cast behind his back all thought of the failures and shortcomings and sins of his people, all the reproofs and the penalties and the rejections, and begun to tell them of his plans for their future in the time of their conversion and reformation.

*"I am returned unto Zion"* He said *"and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth"* (ch. 8. 3). This theme has of course recurred from time to time from the very beginning of Zechariah's prophecy and it refers very definitely to the restoration of Israel in her own land in his day and the flowering of national sovereignty which followed. *"Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built"* (ch. 8. 9). Those prophets were Haggai and Zechariah, the two spiritual leaders of the nation at this critical point in their history. But the Lord is nothing if not up to date. *"Before these days"* He says *"there was no hire for man or beast; no peace to him that went out or came in, for I set every one against his neighbour"* (ch. 8. 10). This is a little picture of the dark days before the Restoration, when the people went into captivity and the land lay desolate, and war and tumult was the order of the day. Now those days were past; they had been ordered of the Lord but now He had turned his face toward his people again. *"But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the*

*former days, saith the Lord. For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things . . . I will save you, and ye shall be a blessing . . . so again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah; fear ye not"* (ch. 8. 11-15). A crowning description of the peace and prosperity that was in store for Israel appears in vs. 4-5 *"There shall yet old men and women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof"*.

All this was fulfilled in the resurgence of the Jewish State during the centuries intervening between Zechariah and Christ. These words were uttered in the fourth year of Darius of Persia, 518 B.C. The Temple was completed and dedicated two years later. A considerable Jewish population had returned from Babylon during the preceding twenty years and much of Judea and Samaria was being re-colonised by Jews. During the times of Zechariah and Zerubbabel, and later on of Ezra and Nehemiah, and finally the prophet Malachi, a period of nearly a century, the people were relatively prosperous and enjoyed peace and safety. There were times of backsliding from their allegiance to God but they always returned. Another century of relative peace under Persian rule passed, and then came Alexander the Greek and the end of the Persian empire. But Alexander favoured the Jews and for more than yet another century Judea remained untroubled. Only when the development of the Syrian and Egyptian powers brought upon Judea the terrible oppression of Antiochus Epiphanes was the bright picture shadowed, and although after that there was a short lived period of less than a century during which Judea became completely independent, there began a sad series of wars and tumults which culminated in the annexation of Judea by Rome and the end of all national aspirations and all their glory. For some four hundred years they had enjoyed, in measure, the fulfilment of the promises of chapter 8 but it all came to an end because they did not continue to fulfil the conditions upon which that blessedness depended. The terms were clearly laid down. *"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: and let*

*none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord*" (ch. 8. 16-17). They did observe these injunctions at first, in the days of Zechariah, when the Temple was new, and the promises began to be fulfilled accordingly; but they slowly abandoned those high standards as time went on, and the promises progressively failed in consequence. The traditional days of national mourning, the fast of the fourth month, remembering the day that Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem; of the fifth, when the Temple was burnt; of the seventh when Gedaliah, the governor left behind by Nebuchadnezzar, was slain; and of the tenth, when the siege of the city began, all of these, said the Lord in ch. 8, vs 19 were now to be "*joy and gladness and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace*". So it was, for a time, but they did not continue in the love of truth and peace, so that once again the land and the city knew siege and battle and murder, and the joy and gladness vanished, and the people of the Lord failed to receive the promises, because they would not believe. Once more the fulfilment of the Divine promise had to be postponed because of continued unfitness on the part of those who were destined to be the Divine agents in the final outworking of that promise. Babylon had not been sufficient after all; Antiochus, the Herods, the Romans, all the oppressors of future days must yet come upon the scene to chasten this people that would not learn, and the full import of the promise be deferred.

The Lord knew that. The last four verses of this chapter enshrine his assurance that the time will surely come when this stiff-necked and hard hearted people will have profited aright by their experiences and been forged in the crucible of trouble into a vessel fitted for his use. "*It shall yet come to pass*" He says "*that there shall come people . . . saying, Let us go speedily to seek the favour of the Lord of Hosts . . . yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem. In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men out of all languages of the nations 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*" (ch. 8. 20-24). The numeral ten is used in the Bible for an indefinite number and too much emphasis should not be read into its use here. Thus we have the ten virgins and the ten talents in the parables of Jesus; ten women shall bake in the oven as a

symbol of scarcity (Lev. 26. 26); Israel proved the Lord "ten times" (Num. 14. 22) and Elkanah considered that he meant more to Hannah as a husband than ten sons could mean (1 Sam. 1. 8). So here we have an indication that people of all nations will come to the Jew for their blessing, "*in that day*", and this is precisely what Isaiah meant when he said that the mountain of the Lord's house would be established in the top of the mountains and "*all nations shall flow unto it*" (Isa. 2. 1). These few verses, from 19 to 23, lay down the order in which men will turn to the Lord "at his appearing and his kingdom". First comes Israel in the land, next Israel from the Dispersion, finally the Gentiles, the nations at large. Perhaps the Douay version gives the most intelligible rendering here. After saying that the various days of mourning, lamenting the destruction of the Jewish polity by Babylon, shall become "*joy and gladness and great solemnities*" the Lord continues "*only love ye truth and peace, until people come and dwell in many cities, and the inhabitants go one to another saying, Let us go and entreat the face of the Lord of hosts*" (ch. 8. 19.23). Here surely is depicted the growth of the Holy Nation in the territory of Israel, building the old wastes, raising up the former desolations, repairing the waste cities, the "desolations of many generations" (Isa. 60. 4) coming to realise as they do these things that the hand of the Lord is with them, and in the wonder of that discovery progressively casting off their former unbelief and coming to God in faith and trust. The "many peoples and strong nations" will come next and add their quota to the restoration of the ancient land and nation, until at last the whole world of men begins to take notice of this thing that is happening and to a constantly increasing degree begin to ally themselves with Israel and pay allegiance to Israel's God. "*It shall be said in that day*" says Isaiah again "*Lo this is our God; we have waited for him, and He will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation*" (Isa. 25.9).

But that wonderful climax will be after the scourge of "Jacobs Trouble" has come upon the Holy nation and purified it leaving it fine gold. The story of Ezekiel 38 and 39, when the host of "Gog and the land of Magog" descend upon the Holy Land and are met by the powers of Heaven, has first to be enacted. That is not mentioned here in Zech. Chapter 14. The Lord's message here in chapter 8 has to do entirely with

the final outcome. At the end of time, when all the captains and the kings have departed, the Lord will find humble and contrite hearts waiting for the inspiring and life-giving touch of his Holy Spirit. In the power and wonder of that great moment the new world will be born, and the old one irrevocably pass away. *"And the*

*nations shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising"* cried Isaiah, the man who saw more of that blessed day than any other prophet. *"Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion"* said his successor Obadiah *"and the kingdom shall be the Lord's"*. Not one of us can add anything to that. *(To be continued)*

### On Languages

Illustrating the facility with which new languages can develop, as they must have developed in the early days of Genesis when men began to spread abroad over the earth, it is an interesting fact that in 1893 a wild tribe of some thirty people was discovered in the Wentworth district of New South Wales, Australia, speaking a completely unknown dialect. It was found that this little community had sprung from one "blackfellow" (aboriginal Australian) and a few "gins" (native women) who had gone into hiding in this remote country thirty years previously. The natives who were with the white men who found this little tribe had considerable difficulty in making themselves understood or in understanding the wild men's speech, although they were of the same race. That separation of thirty years and the growing up of a new generation which had never had contact with the world around had sufficed to create what was virtually a new language, understood only by the thirty or so wild people who spoke it.

It was the scattering of men into remote parts of the earth that gave rise to differences in language; as they migrated into new territories and lost all touch with their former friends, so new words came into use, new methods of

speech, diverse grammatical structures, so that soon the speech of men of different tribes became mutually unintelligible. Each succeeding generation added its quota of new and changed terms; the process has continued from that day to this. A simple illustration demonstrates the fact. Wycliffe translated the Bible into English only five centuries ago but our language has changed so much since then that we, his countrymen, can read his translation only with difficulty and in some places it is almost unintelligible. Here is an example: *"Whether profecies schulen be voidid either langigis schulden ceese"*. That is one of the most well-known passages of the Bible—"whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease". Here is a sample from Richard Rolles's translation of the fourteenth century: *"Faine and glade genge, mare and lesse, for thou demes folke in euenesse"*. That sentence is English as it was spoken only six centuries ago, for *"O let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for thou shalt judge the people righteously"*. (Psa. 67. 4.). If Wycliffe and Rolles came back from the dead to-day they would have the same difficulty in reading our modern translations.

Surely it takes years of Christian experience and overcoming to be able to say from the heart that "All things come of Thee". There is no second cause to the true child of God, but rather the daily faith that every experience is ordered of the Father because He sees that it works out for our highest good, now and hereafter.

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There is an idea abroad among moral people that they should make their neighbour good. One person I have to make good—myself. But my duty to my neighbour is much more nearly expressed by saying that I have to make him happy—if I may.

*R. L. Stevenson*

We are, most of us, ambassadors for our Lord Jesus in this world, and we want to manifest his Name and his message and his saving power in such a way that, if it be possible—as one day in the future Age it will be possible—"all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of God".

Go forth into the busy world and love it, interest yourself in its life; mingle kindly with its joys and sorrows; try what you can do for men rather than what you can make them do for you, and you will know what it is to have men yours, better than if you were their king or master.

## THE GLORY OF THE CELESTIAL WORLD

The clearest insight into the nature of the celestial world that the Scriptures afford is that contained in chapter 15 of First Corinthians, the primary object of which is to make plain the doctrine of the resurrection. In this chapter St. Paul reveals how clearly he perceived the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly worlds, between human and spiritual nature. This is a distinction which is not always understood as it should be even today but it is an important one in the approach to a modern understanding of the Christian faith.

It may be well at the outset to take a look at the terms which the Apostle uses in this chapter—several words appertaining to the earthly world and several more to the heavenly. First of all stand the good old English words “earthly” and “heavenly” (vss. 47-49) the meaning of which is clear. Two worlds, two orders of being and of life, two spheres of habitation; the one in which we live, perceived by and known to us, the other beyond the scope of our senses, the place of Divine government and the home of an order of intelligent beings whom we call the angels. The second pair of terms is “terrestrial” and “celestial” (vs. 40) which are merely the Latin words for earthly and heavenly respectively. These words refer to the respective worlds or, to use an increasingly familiar term of today, the environments. The third pair is “natural” and “spiritual”, and these have reference more to the living organisms or creatures which inhabit these environments. “Natural” is the translation of a Greek word which refers to the physical or animal man; “spiritual”, by contrast, that which appertains to living beings in the celestial world or that aspect of man’s nature which is directed toward or sustained by the powers of the celestial world. Thus a natural or animal being belongs to the terrestrial world and a spiritual being to the celestial world. A further point to notice is that terrestrial creatures — whether men or animals — possess bodies built up from the materials of which the terrestrial creation is composed. Adam was “made of the dust of the ground”. Thus such creatures can only exist within the terrestrial sphere, which is why Paul says in this chapter (vs 50) that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Those who do attain the celestial sphere do so by a change of nature which invests them with new, celestial,

bodies adapted to the celestial environment. In this same connection it is to be realised that the whole of the observable universe, all the array of stars and planets known—and unknown—to man is part of the terrestrial world or order of things. Any beings who at any time may conceivably inhabit such planets are by definition terrestrial creatures. The celestial world with all its inhabitants is a different and distinct order of creation which cannot be related to the terrestrial order in a geographical sense, is not perceptible to the human five senses and not possible of detection by man-made instruments. It used to be said that the spiritual world was on a “different plane of being”; a more up-to-date and therefore perhaps more understandable definition might be that it is on a different wavelength.

Although the words “terrestrial” and “celestial” occur only in I Cor. 15 in the A.V., they probably offer the two best “technical terms”, so to speak, to describe these two distinct creations and orders of sentient life, extending the horizon from the primitive idea of this small earth with heaven only a few miles above as the whole extent of creation, which was the best the astronomers of the First Advent could offer and hence the then current belief, to the larger conception made possible by modern knowledge. This vast universe, with its billions upon billions of star-suns and planets, is the terrestrial world; all its living inhabitants, present or future, of whatever shape or form, are terrestrial creatures having “terrestrial bodies” (vs. 40). Outside all this, of nature, extent and characteristics unknown, is the celestial world, the inhabitants of which are celestial beings having “celestial bodies” (vs. 40). This is the basic principle upon which Paul bases the whole of his teaching in I Cor. 15.

Now the first vital element in this teaching is that the body which is laid aside and buried or otherwise disposed of at death is not the body of the resurrection life. “*Thou sowest not that body that shall be . . . but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him*” (vss. 37-38). This is to prepare the enquirer for what is to come, the declaration of distinction of worlds and corresponding bodies in the resurrection. Next, an everyday analogy; there is in this earth of ours a variety of creatures, men, beasts, fishes, birds, exhibiting an almost infinite pageant of differing

appearances, shapes, functions, habits and so on, each kind fulfilling some specific purpose in the overall earthly scheme of things, but all sharing one thing in common—all are specifically adapted to the environmental conditions of this earth and none of them could survive anywhere else. Even on the way to the moon the astronauts can only live by taking a little of the earth's environment with them in the form of space-suits or space ships within which earthly conditions are preserved. So, says Paul, there are terrestrial bodies, suited to and inhabiting the terrestrial order of things; similarly, he goes on to say, there are celestial bodies, suited to the celestial order of things, and in order to impress the fact that there is a similar variety of life in that sphere he says that there is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and others of stars differing from stars in glory. That is not to say that the celestial world is only an aggregation of suns and solar systems; rather he chooses the varied glories of the visible heavens to illustrate what cannot be described or visualised in human words, in contrast to the variety of terrestrial creatures which he can describe. The celestial has a glory of its own, and it differs from the glory of the terrestrial. From that we deduce two facts. The celestial is a real world; in its abundance of life it exhibits variety just as does our world. And there is another aspect. It is intrinsically superior to our world. Of those who after terrestrial death are resurrected to life in that world Paul says they are sown in weakness, raised in power; sown in corruption, raised in incorruption; sown an animal, terrestrial body, raised a spiritual, celestial body. The change of state implies not only a new life but a vastly enhanced life, a life manifested through a body, an organism, so to speak, which possesses powers and attributes by far exceeding anything which appertains to a human being upon earth (vss. 40-44). As if to emphasise this essential difference he goes on to say "*as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly*" (vs. 49).

Although at the start Paul set out to discuss the resurrection in general principle his thoughts have obviously been verging more and more to the special position of the Church in what Revelation calls the "First Resurrection" and now in vs. 51 and onward he is considering the position of those who are or have been Christ's at the time of his Coming. In Thessalonians he refers to believers who are "alive and remain" at

the Coming, and now here in vs 51 he says in effect that those who are thus living at that time must be "changed" in order to enter the celestial land. The Greek word means to transform, to exchange one thing for another, to cause one thing to cease and another to take its place. Taken in conjunction with all that has gone before in this chapter, and particularly his insistence that the terrestrial body ("flesh and blood") itself cannot pass into the kingdom, the implication of the word is clear. Our earthly bodies come to an end and are done away and we receive in exchange a new heavenly body having all the characteristics, attributes and powers necessary for life in the celestial.

What are those attributes and powers? Unless we understand and can visualise the detailed nature of the celestial world we cannot possibly say, and that we are unable to do. It is possible that Paul, in his experience recorded in 2 Cor. 12, was afforded a glimpse of that world or had some perception of it impressed on his mind (the expression "third heaven" of vs. 2 was the then current term for the abode of God and the angels) but if so he found it impossible to express his recollection in human language. That in itself would seem to indicate some fundamental difference. There is also the fact that according to both Old and New Testaments angelic visitants from that world have appeared to men. From the records of some of these visits it would seem that the celestial messenger, normally imperceptible to human senses and unaffected by terrestrial conditions, manifested himself in a terrestrial body apparently formed for the purpose from materials existing to hand, dissolved back into its constituent atoms when the need for its use had passed. Some such process could explain the "appearances" of Jesus after his Resurrection. A sober appraisal of the Gospels make clear that in most of these appearances He was not recognisable as the pre-crucifixion Jesus by dress or features and that is quite in accord with the fact that He was raised a celestial being of which his former terrestrial body—with or without wounds and nail prints—formed no part.

The celestial world, then, is so fundamentally different from the world we know that we could not understand or visualise it even if the Scriptures tried to describe it. A short passage from a series appearing in this journal some years ago is perhaps worth repeating in this connection. "It is not just that the trees are

greener and the streams are clearer and the gold is brighter and the music sweeter. It is described in the Scriptures by many such devices but only because that is the nearest we can get to comprehending it. The spiritual world must be a real world, as real to its citizens as is ours to us. The fact that it may not be found anywhere in the physical creation of which we are a part does not detract from its reality, nor, be it said, from a certain *similarity* which must subsist between that world and this. For this world is a copy of that. When God made man, He said '*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*'. In some very definite sense man's world is modelled after the likeness of that which God had before created for the celestials. At the very least, man is in the image of God and of the angels in his love of beautiful things and inspiring things; in his urge to create, to build, to accomplish; in his impulse to happiness, to joy, to laughter. There must be in that world, too, beautiful sights and inspiring sounds, things to create and build, purposes to accomplish, events that evoke happiness and joy and laughter. How inconceivable it is, when one comes to think of it, that God should make it possible for men to have laughter and merriment on earth if in all the long ages that preceded man's creation there had never been laughter and merriment in Heaven! The sights and sounds and surroundings of that world must assuredly be as real and substantial to its inhabitants as those of our world are to us, even although we may, with the aid of all that human science can give us, range throughout the whole wide domain of the starry heavens and never catch a glimpse of its splendour nor sense one note of its celestial harmonies. '*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*'. It is not just distance in space, measured in so many millions or quadrillions of miles, that bars us from reaching the golden gates. It is something much more fundamental, a barrier that can never be crossed except by those who experience the reality of the Apostle's words '*We shall be changed*'.

"What if that 'change' is a change to life on a

different 'wave-length', so to speak, as if one had switched from the B.B.C. to the I.T.V. programme on the television? That may be a difficult thing—it may even seem a ludicrous thing—to contemplate. But it may serve to indicate a possibility. It is a common experience in everyday life to switch on a television receiver and 'tune in' to a particular wave-length. The room is filled with music; a definite world of sight and sound is created and is perceptible to the eyes and ears of the observer. Almost everyone realises now that simultaneously with that programme other worlds of sight and sound, inaudible and unperceived, are pulsating through that room, not seen or heard only because the force that creates them is on a different wave-length. They are just as real, and in other rooms, on correctly tuned receivers, are yielding sight and sound just as evident. Each receiver can discern only that to which it is adapted and tuned.

"If the spiritual world can, by analogy, be pictured as something like that, and existing, not in some other part of the material universe, but as it were upon a different wave-length, then, imperfect as this analogy must be, it can at least serve to free us from the geographical limitation which has of necessity shaped men's thoughts in the past, and helped us to visualise that world as divorced from this, and yet in a sense superimposed upon it."

If, then, this is the nature of the celestial world, if life is to continue in that world in ever-widening vistas of experience, progressive increase in knowledge, greater and ever still greater achievement, and if all this is what Paul had in mind when he spoke of the "glory of the celestial", what wealth of meaning must reside in his words recorded elsewhere (2 Cor. 3. 18) "*We all, with open face beholding the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord*". From the glory of the terrestrial to the glory of the celestial; this is the prospect presented to those who in this Age have "come into Christ" and are following him to the end of the way.

The first gush of enthusiasm in the Lord's service, much as we may and do appreciate it, may be but the hasty production of the shallow soil of a heart which immediately receives the truth with gladness but, having no root in itself, endures

but for a time, and afterwards, when affliction and persecution arise, immediately is offended. (Mark 4. 16-17). Such characters cannot stand the fiery tests.

## THE PARABLE OF THE WINESKINS

Luke 5. 31-37

Matthew Levi the tax collector was a proud man and a happy one this day. This was not the first time he had entertained his fellow collectors and his other friends to a feast in his house, but it was unusual for his regular guests to find themselves seated in the same room with members of a totally dissimilar social class, the Scribes and the Pharisees. And they were rather intrigued by the purpose for which they had assembled. They were there to do honour to the new prophet who had arisen in Israel. Tax collectors usually had no time for prophets; they left that department of life to the men whose business it was, the priests and the doctors of the Law. The business of a tax-collector in Israel did not usually permit of much else than observing one's financial obligations to the Roman government in paying all accounts promptly, and taking care to extract enough from the unwilling taxpayers to keep the business out of the red, with a suitable profit left over to make it all worth while. A tax-collector had to be a practical man and must not concern himself too closely with religion.

Apparently, though, their highly respected colleague was not keeping to tradition. His business was sound enough, sufficiently so to maintain his known standard of entertainment and hospitality, yet most inexplicably he had avowed himself a follower of the Nazarene prophet, closed down his business, settled his account with the Roman Chancellor of the Exchequer, and invited his erstwhile business associates to this feast where they were to meet his new Master. It might not have been so bad had they found themselves seated at the table only with this new young visionary and his personal disciples. They were all fishermen and peasantry and there would be no feeling of constraint with them. The real trouble was that Matthew had also invited some of the respectable religious fraternity, who in business life customarily suffered much at the hands of these same tax collectors, and in any case heartily despised them as willing tools of Rome. Both groups had come with equal curiosity to see and hear this new prophet about whom so much was being said, but there was a coolness between the two parties which led the respectable ones at length to voice their irritation in a question to the guest of honour which exceeded all the bounds of breeding and good taste in

view of the fact that they were there as the guests of a tax-collector. "Why" they demanded of Jesus "do ye eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus regarded them gravely. He knew the sense of outrage that filled their hearts. For four hundred years past the Pharisees had preserved the ancient traditions of Israel and maintained that standard of rigid righteousness which had to be preserved if Israel was to remain separate and undefiled from Roman influence, and so be fit to receive Messiah when He should appear. The tax-collectors, having no regard for God or Moses, traitors to their own nation and its national destiny, made their bargains with Rome for the privilege of extracting what they could of taxation from their own countrymen. They were universally despised and hated. Yet Jesus and his disciples, ignoring all this, were content to accept their hospitality and treat them as though they stood on the same level in the sight of God as the Scribes and Pharisees themselves, when all Israel knew the latter to be the favoured ones in God's sight. Jesus looked into those eyes of outraged righteousness with his own eyes of infinite understanding, and smiled. He gave them his answer. It was a totally unexpected answer too. "*They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I come not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*"

This was a poser. Some faces were thoughtful, others angry and frustrated. They could not dispute the reply without denying their own claim to righteousness. Jesus had put them in a position from which they could not extricate themselves. They ate in silence whilst they digested the implication of his words.

Some of those at the table had been disciples of John the Baptist. They had much in common with the better minded of the Pharisees—it may be, were Pharisees themselves. Perhaps to tide over an awkward moment they put a question of their own; a little more sincerity in this one, and no suspicion of bad taste. "We, as John's disciples, are ascetics—so are the Pharisees; we and they, lead pious lives and keep aloof from the common man. Your disciples are not ascetics; they eat and drink in the same manner as all men and generally mix with all men irrespective of class or creed,

careless of possible defilement or contagion. Why?" That is a fair paraphrase of their question. Jesus looked at their earnest faces with eyes of quiet gravity. "If you go to the wedding of one of your number", he said, "you who are the friends of the bridegroom do not abstain from food and drink and merrymaking while you are in his presence and the feast is proceeding. You enjoy to the full all that is provided. It is later, when the feast is over and the bridegroom has departed, and you yourselves are back in your customary place, that you resume the self-denial and asceticism of your normal life." Perhaps there was a gentle reminder here that despite their claim of asceticism and fasting, they were in fact doing themselves very well indeed at that moment in a manner far removed from fasting. Luke says that Matthew had provided a "great feast" and that a "great company" sat down to it. Fasting or no fasting, these Scribes and Pharisees were disposing of Matthew's best viands and choicest wines at an appreciable rate and enjoying themselves hugely in the process. They had probably, for so many years, taken themselves so seriously that the absurdity of asking such a question in the present situation did not occur to them.

But Jesus saw the absurdity and in the silence which followed his second reply He channelled their thoughts into position for receiving the principle He wanted to inculcate, a principle which is just as important to us to-day as it was to them, for we often fall short in precisely the same respect. "No man" He said, "*putteth new wine into old bottles, else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottle will perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved. No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for he saith, the old is better*". His gaze must have fallen upon the wineskins stacked in the outer room, waiting their turn for use at the feast, and his hearers must have looked at them too and begun to sense a glimmer of the truth He was about to expound.

The most common receptacle for wines and oils in Jesus' day was a suitably dressed and prepared goatskin. The rich possessed store jars, large earthenware containers with a wide neck, but although these were ideal for dry goods such as grain or dried fruits they were not so useful for wine which needed to be kept closely sealed. A goatskin, open only at the neck, could be filled with wine and the opening tied up tightly. Thus contained, the wine could be equally

conveniently transported on donkey or camel back or hung up in the store room until required. One precaution was necessary. Until the wine was matured and old, the pressure inside the skin was likely to increase. With a new goatskin this was nothing to be concerned about; the skin itself was resilient and to a certain extent elastic, and would stretch and accommodate itself to the increased pressure. A skin which had already done appreciable service, however, would eventually reach the limit of its stretch, and if then used again for new wine would be liable to rupture and lose its contents. Such a skin would however be quite suitable for wine which had already matured. The allusion was one which would be readily understood by all those present at the feast, and those among them who were sincerely desirous of giving heed to Jesus' words would immediately start casting around in their minds for a clue to his object in giving such an illustration. What did Jesus mean. What was his object in speaking thus?

The Scribes and Pharisees there present were men who had spent the whole of their lives in the study of a systematic theology which was already completely documented and defined. Judaism comprised a rigid and dogmatic presentation of Divine Truth which, based upon the Mosaic Covenant and every revealed word of God recorded from ancient times, had been overlaid by a mass of Rabbinic interpretation and exposition. With all its faults, its shortcomings, and its insufficiency, it was, nevertheless, the Truth in which they had been brought up. It had sufficed for them. In that faith they had been born and in that faith they were prepared to die. It was old wine, and it was very comfortably contained in old bottles.

Now Jesus came with something new and revolutionary. True, He had said, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil*" (Matt. 5. 17) but in that process of fulfilment He must of necessity cast a new light upon many old and long-cherished beliefs. He must needs show himself as the reality of which much that had gone before was the shadow. He was very definitely going to remove "*the handwriting of ordinances, nailing it to his cross*" (Col. 2. 14) even although in so doing, He would in fact "*magnify the law and make it honourable*" (Isa. 42. 21). Some at least of those Pharisees were sincere men; they wanted to know and do the will of God; but how so to present the

unfolding purpose of God to their dubious minds as rightly to convince them of its truth? Jesus knew that He had come in humiliation to die as a malefactor on the Cross; they were expecting a victorious military leader who would expel the Romans and establish his throne in Jerusalem. Jesus knew that a long time must elapse before God's visible kingdom on earth would come; they expected it there and then. Jesus knew that Israel as a nation would reject him, and his call to discipleship would go out to all the nations to draw out a spiritual people for God's Name, a Church whose members would at last be exalted to be with him in the celestial sphere; they expected to see Israel exalted forever upon earth above all the Gentiles and thus to rule all the peoples everlastingly with an autocratic even though righteous rule. How were they going to be persuaded that a new light was now to be shed upon the Divine purpose and those who would be God's ministers must be ready to advance in the light?

The Master knew that, in the main, they would not. The introduction of the new wine of his teachings into the old bottles of Judaism would, in almost every case, wreck the bottles and waste the wine. The message He preached was received, in the main, by the younger and fresher minds who were themselves more resilient and less hidebound—fitting word—in the old traditions. Even though they must themselves become, in the course of time, as it were "old bottles", they were for the present fitting bottles for the Master's use. Some there were, old in years but new bottles in spirit. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Simeon, Anna, who did receive and retain the new wine without disaster. In every generation there are those to whom advancing years proves no handicap to progress in increasing light. There are always those who can weld the revelation of the present to the knowledge of the past and in that fusion perceive a clear vision of the out-working purpose of God. But in the main the old wine must remain in the old bottles and new bottles must be found for the new wine.

Perhaps all this is part of the tenderness and compassion of God for his servants. "*He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are but dust*". A faithful disciple has served his God to the limit of the light he had, throughout the span of a long life; why should his failing powers at the last be called upon to receive and assimilate conceptions and definitions of truth which, however superior to the older definitions

they may be in the light of more modern knowledge and understanding, might seem to him, in comparison with the things he was taught of old, the rankest heresy. It is not as though there is any finality to truth in this life, for the new wine of to-day becomes the old wine of to-morrow. He was a farsighted man who coined the oft quoted phrase "*the heresy of to-day is the orthodoxy of tomorrow*". And no single vessel can contain the whole of Divine truth; as soon seek to scoop up the entire ocean in one little panner.

Whenever Jesus talked like this He included a special word for the "hearing ear". This time was no exception. He left on record his own knowledge of the conflict which must take place in the minds of some before they can accept him and his claims and his message. "*No man,*" He said "*having drunk old wine straightway desireth new; for, he saith, the old is better.*" The determining word there, the one that implies so much, is "straightway". Many there are who come into contact with some striking advance in the progressive unfolding of the Divine purpose who will not have it at any price. "The old" they say "is better". Later on, when the force of the new presentation has begun to make itself felt, they look upon the new with a less unfriendly eye. Saul of Tarsus was one such. He would not accept the new wine straightway. He kicked, at first, against the ox-goad. But the New Testament abundantly manifests how completely the new wine of Christianity did fill that chosen vessel to the Lord, rigid and hard as it may originally have been in the unyielding mould of Judaism.

That is how the parable affects individuals, now as well as then. There is no doubt that Jesus meant it to have a dispensational application also. He knew that Israel would not accept his message, that the rulers would put him to death that the old order might remain. He was yet to pass upon them that irrevocable sentence "*The kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matt. 21. 43). He knew that new bottles, those disciples who in after ages, even to this present, would constitute the Christian Church, must be selected to receive and contain the new wine of his teachings and his mission. So it has been, and so it must be, for it is that same new wine which, so preserved in those new wineskins, is to be brought forth in the greatest feast of all, that all mankind may partake, at the end.

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

### 1. The City that defied God

Fifty miles south of Baghdad, on the railway that runs to Basra, there is a little wayside station, a station set in a wilderness having no sign of human habitation. A station so unimportant that the trains do not stop there except by special request. There are no station buildings; there is no station staff, no town or village busy with life and activity; only miles of broken brickwork, groups of palm trees, and a few jackals and lizards. The trains, northbound to Baghdad and southbound to Basra, hurry past the desolate platform so quickly that the interested traveller has barely time to read the one word, painted in Arabic and English upon a board about four feet long—“*Babylon*”!

How are the mighty fallen! That wooden platform with its painted sign marks the site of what was once the mightiest and most magnificent city on earth, a city that for size and wealth would have compared favourably with the greatest of cities to-day, a city which throughout a considerable portion of human history was the acknowledged queen of all nations. Merchant vessels from Africa, from India and even, it is thought, from far-off China, made their way up the great river, the river Euphrates, from the sea four hundred miles distant, bringing the produce and the riches of the four corners of the earth to her quays. Caravans of camels and asses, bearing the wealth of the interior lands of Asia and Arabia, travelled the trade routes which ran over desert and mountain, through valley and plain, to converge at last on the market squares of Babylon. Here were gathered the rich men and merchants of the earth, and all in the city shared in their prosperity. Sometimes native kings dwelt and ruled in her palaces; sometimes alien conquerors imposed foreign rule and sat upon the throne, but Babylon remained through all political changes the unquestioned commercial centre of the world. Her palaces and temples were the admiration and envy of all who came to see. Her public monuments, her architecture and her many works of art displayed the creative artistry, the mechanical skill, of the people who created this great city. For two thousand years she remained thus, arrogant in her proud title of the “lady of kingdoms” (Isa. 47. 5), flaunting herself before the admiring world as the achievement of men who had given themselves over frankly and avowedly

to the law of brute force, proclaiming abroad their determination to live their lives and build a nation that should endure for all time, without God, in defiance of God—and today there is nothing left of all the glory that was Babylon save a few masses of mouldering brickwork and a wayside station through which the trains pass without troubling to stop.

Some cities of antiquity there have been, such as Ur of the Chaldees, Damascus, Haran, Antioch and of course, Jerusalem, which have been the scenes of great manifestations of the Divine purpose, or noted for some important event in the history of the Divine Plan, but not so Babylon. In all its long history it never contributed to the building of the Kingdom of God, and never housed within its walls any who lived and worked for God except for that twenty years or so when the saintly Daniel served as Chief Minister to its famous king Nebuchadnezzar II. Babylon was famous for impiety and godlessness. It existed without God, and it disappeared at last, utterly, as will disappear utterly at the end all that is opposed to God and his righteousness. The history of Babylon is the history of evil, its rise, its seeming triumph, and its eventual utter overthrow.

The tragedy of Babylon was that in rejecting the true God its founders made themselves slaves to its false gods. In their pride and hardness of heart they made themselves gods in their own image and likeness, re-shaping that knowledge of God and his Plan which had been handed down to them, to suit their new godless world. There was religion and worship in their scheme of things. They did not dispute the existence of God but they did deny his claim to their lives' endeavours and their worship. “*The Gate of God*” was the name of their city in their own tongue, and at an earlier period “*the Place of Life*”, but it has never been either a place of life or a gate of God through all the long ages of its existence. It always made a place—an important place—for religion, but it was a religion of false gods, gods that deluded and blinded and intoxicated, gods that had no power to save and did not save. When the time for Babylon's fall was come, men found that her boasted gods were altogether powerless to avert her destruction.

The city of Babylon grew up around the

Tower of Babel. Long before the city became an important commercial centre it had been a small town sacred to the worship of the god Marduk, a group of houses surrounding the great temple which had been erected near the Tower. All that is known about those far-off days goes to bear out the historical accuracy of this simple narrative telling of men who said one to another "Go to, let us build a city, and a tower . . ." (Gen. 11. 4). The founding of Babylon is usually dated at the time of its first recorded king, Sumu-Abum, about one hundred years before the call of Abraham, but it is clear that the city was in fact much older. About the first definite version of the place in history is in the records of the renowned Semitic king Sargon, said to have been the first great military conqueror of antiquity, who lived, according to the most up-to-date conclusions, about three hundred years before Abraham. In Sargon's day the Tower of Babel was already standing, and he had taken some of the sacred earth from the holy enclosure in which the Tower stood wherewith to sanctify his capital city of Akkad, for which profanity, the chronicler tells us, Marduk the god of Babylon was angry and sought to slay him. It seems that Sargon averted his threatened fate by carrying out extensive rebuilding and renovating works on the Tower and its associated Temple, a circumstance which appears to indicate that the Tower of Babel was already old in the time of Sargon.

The investigations of German archaeologists under Prof. Koldewey at Babylon during the period 1910-1914 fixed the true site of the Tower. In the nineteenth century the ruins of Babylon had hardly been explored, and Bible commentators were in the habit of crediting the somewhat dubious honour to the celebrated "*Birs-Nimrud*" (Tower of Nimrod) at Borsippa, fourteen miles south-west of Babylon. The solitary upstanding remnant of vitrified brickwork which still stands above a mound of rubble, a hundred feet above the plain, was pointed to as visible evidence of Divine destruction by fire from heaven, judgment upon the impious rebels of a bygone age. But it is now known that the Birs-Nimrud was the Temple of the Babylonian god Nebo (mentioned in Isa. 46. 1), the building which was called by the Babylonians *E-zida* "The House of the Seven Planets", and that it is, historically speaking, a building of much more recent date than the one whose history is related in Gen. 11.

On the east bank of the Euphrates, at the centre of the city ruins, Koldewey found, buried under sixty feet of sand and earth, the ruins of the Temple which he recognised as the one that has been so fully described by Herodotus and other ancient writers who saw it before its destruction. To the north of the Temple, and within the enclosed area which has been called by modern excavators the "Vatican of Babylon", he found, below the reeds and muddy slush of an extensive marsh, all that now remains of the Tower. There is not much to see; some long lines of brickwork about four feet high, sixteen steps of a brick staircase at the south-western corner, the foundation lines of some thirty or so chambers which were used for religious purposes, and traces of the enclosing walls and gateways. But by comparing what has been found with the records of ancient writers there is no doubt that here is the building which the Genesis writer had in mind when he penned the story of the Tower of Babel. That giant structure which was to endure for all time as a monument to the people who wished to make themselves a name that they be not scattered upon the face of the earth is represented to-day by no more than a few lines of brickwork half hidden by masses of reeds and rushes. And the people who would fain have become immortal among all the nations of the earth, have with all their greatness and all their civilisation given place to a struggling population scratching out a meagre existence on the barren desert that once was the fertile and prolific "plain in the land of Shinar" of the ancient story.

The story of the Tower belongs to that somewhat mysterious period which spans the time between the flood and Abraham. It is probable that about twelve centuries elapsed between Noah coming out of the Ark and Abraham coming out of Ur of the Chaldees. Until quite recent times the Old Testament was the only available source for the history of those centuries and all that the Old Testament has to say about them is contained in the 10th and 11th chapters of Genesis. The city-building exploits of the ancient hero Nimrod and the building of the Tower of Babel by the immigrants into Sumer were the only two incidents recorded apart from the rather cryptic reference to the dividing of the earth in the days of Peleg. Nowadays all that is changed. The labours of archaeologists during the last sixty years have carried the history of the ancient East back to

within seven centuries of the Flood. But there is no place in those histories for the story of the Tower. Even so far back, the nations were already divided; the eloquent words which close the tenth chapter of Genesis "*and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the Flood*" had already become past history. The story of the Tower belongs to a time when the sons of Noah had not as yet quarrelled or divided, when war and battle was unknown in the earth, when the first of those Sumerian and Egyptian kings whose names adorn so many ancient inscriptions, and whose tombs are so often discovered and examined by explorers, had not yet reigned. It was a time when, so far as we know at present, the art of writing was unknown or had been forgotten in the stress of survival in the early post-Flood world—unless, as is just possible, a different writing material of a completely perishable nature was in use and no examples have survived. But unless this latter was indeed the case, records of past events were preserved only in the memories of men and handed down from father to son. Somewhere during that shadowy time the descendants of Noah separated and the peoples who afterward became the great nations of the Bible—Egyptians, Sumerians, Assyrians, Canaanites, Hebrews,—started their several separate existences. To that period the story of the Tower belongs. The unknown scribe who first penned the 11th chapter of Genesis related the story as it was known to him in his own day, some four or five centuries after it happened, and we who read his words may have assurance that the Holy Spirit overruled the form in which his narrative was cast in order that true details might be preserved and the story as it appears be true and accurate. Although only a couple of generations ago the idea that the nations of the Middle East—Semitic, Hamitic and Japhetic; Hebrew-Babylonian, Egyptian and Greek—originated from three sons of a man who had escaped a great

flood which drowned all the other inhabitants of that land was, under the influence of so-called "modern scholarship", ridiculed and rejected, present-day knowledge of these nations' early history and the correlation of their known chronologies has made the thesis perfectly logical and quite reasonably in accord with known facts. The histories of Egypt and Sumer can now be traced in considerable detail back to a time when both nations, although highly civilised and proficient in many of the arts and sciences, consisted only of quite small communities living in nothing bigger than villages thinly scattered over large areas. Behind that, the logic of modern discovery points to a people highly intellectual, artistically and mechanically skilled, small in number, among whom signs of war-like habits are absent, spreading out from some central point to populate the whole of the Middle East. That is exactly the picture the Book of Genesis presents.

The story of the Tower of Babel, then, can throw considerable light on a hitherto unknown but extremely important period in human history. According to the Bible presentation, God made a new start with mankind after the Flood. He had cleansed the earth of its wickedness and commenced again with a righteous family. The veil then drops for three or four centuries. When it begins to lift again and we perceive, obscurely, the descendants of that righteous family beginning to occupy the land, plant and build, we find the same old ugly habits of evil growing and flourishing again. The world had not really been finally cleansed; it was still a world of sin and death. Ambition, apostasy, pride, greed, disobedience; all these are found rising up amongst men and becoming instruments of policy and determinants of action.

What went wrong? Did God fail? The story of the Tower of Babel points to the answer.

*(To be continued)*

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If we go to be with our Lord Jesus and enter the presence of his Father with exceeding joy it is only that we may be present with him in the great work of restoring to righteousness all the families of the earth. That is why Jesus comes again. That is why the words of hope written aforetime for our comfort are not "*Till we go!*" but "*Till He come!*"

Oh what I owe to the file, to the hammer, to the furnace of my Lord Jesus, who hath now let me see how good the wheat of Christ is that goeth through His mill and His oven, to be made bread for His own table. Grace tried is glory in its infancy!

*(Samuel Rutherford).*

## A NOTE ON THE ADVENT

The coming of Christ is an event to be eagerly anticipated. Says the Psalmist, "*Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad . . . let the field be joyful, and all that is therein. Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord, for He cometh to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness and the people with his truth*" (Psa. 96. 11-13). An event which is depicted in such glowing terms can only be beneficial to those who experience it.

The general idea, inherited from the past, is that the Advent will be a sudden and unexpected event. The world will be going about its business, unsuspecting, when without warning Christ will appear in the sky with attendant angels, descending to earth, where He will immediately raise the dead from their graves and summon all, dead and living, before his throne for judgment. All this comes from the poetic imagery of the Bible, imagery which has to be used in order to convey the spiritual truths involved to people of many different mental outlooks in many different generations. In this Twentieth century it is necessary to interpret the Scriptures in the light of our present understanding of the purposes of God and the nature of both the other world and this world.

The revelation of Christ to the world at his Second Advent is a progressive one, embracing a great many significant events, some in this world and perceived by men, some in the other world and therefore not perceived by men. This fact was understood by some Christian thinkers so far back as the second decade of the 19th century, when the apparent imminence of the Advent began to be advocated. At a series of conferences organised by well-known British ministers and Church leaders from 1826 onward one of the theses, not universally accepted but finding definite support in many quarters, was that the Advent consists of two stages, a preliminary one in which the Lord would be present unknown to men in general for the purpose of gathering his Church to heavenly glory, followed by a second stage at which He would be revealed with his Church to the whole world. This view of the Advent, originating in England, was later taken up by some sections of the American Adventist movement and is now more fully developed. The modern view is that this

unseen phase of the Advent embraces the whole of this present century and that the returned Lord can be thought of as standing behind the scenes overruling and directing the course of world events so that the final disintegration of world power marking the actual end of the Age will come at the Divinely pre-ordained moment, when Christ will be revealed to all men in the glory of his Advent and take his place as earth's new universal ruler.

What is to be the nature of that revelation? How will men realise his coming and accept his rule when He thus appears? Is He to be manifested to the natural sight, or in the persons of some among men who are to be his representatives, or by the logic of events? We are of course dealing here with the impact of the spiritual world upon the material, the celestial upon the terrestrial, and so little is known about that celestial world. Modern knowledge makes it possible to think of that world and its occupants existing on a different wave-length, so to speak, so that whilst being a real world, a real environment constituting the home of real beings adapted to that environment, such beings and such environment are of necessity imperceptible to human senses. Our Lord after his resurrection did break through the barrier to manifest himself visibly to his followers, once as a gardener, again as a stranger, once to Thomas in his pre-crucifixion likeness—and yet on the other hand, to Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road in another-worldly glory so unendurable that Saul fell to the ground, temporarily blinded. It may be discreet to say that it is not possible to be dogmatic as to the means by which our Lord will be manifested to men at his revealing, only that it will be completely satisfactory and conclusive to the observers. And it may well be that the most telling evidence will be the increasingly obvious fact that the evil and disruptive forces and institutions of the world are being progressively curbed and eliminated by a power which men can neither understand nor withstand. There will not be wanting, at any time during this transition period between this world and the next, men and women who know what these things mean, have been expecting and awaiting them, and will proclaim their significance in no uncertain voice.

## WHOM SHALL HE TEACH KNOWLEDGE?

The pursuit of knowledge brings out all that is noblest and all that is most debased in human nature. Men have devoted their lives to the quest, and their labours, though oft-times bringing no material regard, have enriched the lives of their fellows. Yet in many instances that same search for truth, in whatever sphere it may be, has produced pedants, recluses, eccentrics; demonstrating time and again how inadequate is the capacity of man's mind in his present fallen condition to preserve that proper balance which will enable him to profit aright from the things which he learns. How many there are, specialists in some branch of learning, whose minds have become so centred around their absorbing passion that in every other phase of human life and experience they are helpless and ignorant?

This is the subtlety of knowledge, its appeal which calls to the mind to foresake all else and follow it into the trackless wilderness. The human mind seeks to learn, and every vista of an unknown land invites to fresh fields of exploration, let the end be what it may be. It is this urge in human nature to discover the "hidden things" which can be of such immeasurable value in the search for Truth, and yet this same urge if not restrained and controlled by the spirit of a sound mind can very easily be the means of losing our appreciation of spiritual teaching in a slavish devotion to the letter of the Word. And it is true that "*the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life*" (2 Cor. 3. 6). The people that for fourteen hundred years had been custodian of the Divine oracles and enjoyed a knowledge of God and his works shared by no other nation were, despite that knowledge, unready to receive Jesus when He came and even incapable of understanding the nature of his mission of which all their Prophets and holy men had spoken for centuries past.

Right at the outset we must realise that the appeal of knowledge is to the natural mind. The acquisition of facts and the deduction of conclusions from those facts becomes a mental exercise which is the more attractive in proportion as our intellect is naturally clear and keen. The interminable theological controversies of earlier centuries when Christian divines launched voluminous treatises upon a long-suffering community and brought all of the weight of argument and oratory against their opponents was very evidently no product of the

Holy Spirit's influence. Here was clearly the result of men seeking to apply the standards of this world in their handling of the Word of God, and small wonder it is that those controversies ended so often in rancour, persecution, banishment and not infrequently the shedding of blood. The work of the Spirit does not produce such fruits as these, notwithstanding the admitted sincerity of many of those who thus sought to establish the doctrines of the Church upon a sure foundation. The very fact of their having recourse to worldly standards demanded the use of worldly methods, and they in turn brought forth a harvest which could only be according to the things of this world.

In every Christian communion which has ever existed, the seeds of the same spirit have been present—and woe betide us, both as a community and as individuals, if we allow those seeds to blossom and bear fruit. The most terrible word which Jesus ever uttered to the Pharisees—"*The Kingdom of God is taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matt. 21. 43)—is written anew in letters of fire across the horizon whenever a Christian community veils its eyes from the glory of God and turns back to the standards of material reason and argument. A group of believers which has become the custodian of Divine revelation must hold that revelation in all spiritual understanding and by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. When because of weariness by the way, or the desire for novelty, or the self-seeking of men, the Spirit's guidance gives place to the fallacies of human argument, not only does all forward progress cease, but the Truth already held becomes dim, and finally the angels once again look down upon a city in which the light of a candle no more is seen, and the voice of the bridegroom and the bride is heard no more at all (Rev. 18. 23).

It cannot be denied, moreover, that in a community where spirituality is lacking, recourse to intellectual knowledge is invariably made to remedy the deficiency and hold the group together. Insistence upon the outward features of the Divine Plan to the exclusion of any spiritual understanding of them is a danger signal to the "Watchers". A dogmatic assertion of the formula of belief which must be accepted to gain salvation, with claims of Divine authority and threats of dire results to heretics, coupled

often with some feverish outward activity to keep both mind and hands occupied, so that no opportunity or occasion is given for "dwelling in the secret place of the Most High" is the sure sign of a church system from which the Spirit has departed. Appeals for loyalty to a past reformer or founder of the particular community is a confession of weakness which heralds the disintegration of that movement—an admission that the belief and work which once brought that community of people together has lost its power to retain them—a rejection of the promise made so long ago that the Holy Spirit would at all times "guide you into all truth" (John 16. 13).

But the Truth never loses its power. The "meat in due season" provided for the "household of faith" in their time of necessity remains as vital as ever. God, who reveals his Truth from time to time, by the ministry of his appointed pastors, in great times of illumination and revelation, does not suffer that work to be vitiated and nullified by reason of the hardness of men's hearts. In those seasons of quietude which lie between the appearance of men upon whom the Lord has put his Spirit, although the love of many may and does wax cold, yet the power of the Truth is as all-sufficient as ever, and those who have learned well the lesson that this wonderful knowledge of the Divine Plan which has made all the difference in their lives can be received and can be retained only by spiritual perception and by continuance in Christ's discipleship, will realise its abiding power in their lives. Their minds are buttressed against the assaults of the Evil One, and the hosts of wickedness of which Paul speaks in Eph. 6. 10-18. They can continue laying down their lives in the service of Christ, knowing of a surety that their labour is not in vain in the Lord. They, in a spiritual sense, stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, singing the new song which no others can learn.

Our growth in knowledge, therefore, must have as its background the wisdom from above, that wisdom which is first pure, then peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (Jas. 3. 17). There is much in these words which gives food for thought. Purity and peaceableness are essential characteristics of the wisdom which comes from above. The fruit of righteousness is "sown in peace of them that make peace" (Jas. 3. 18). It is impossible to ignore the stress which the

Scriptures lay upon this characteristic of peaceableness as an attribute of all that has to do with the development of the New Creation. "*Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work*" (Jas. 3. 16). Even though we live in an atmosphere of fightings within and fears without, and our calling is one which involves a daily conflict with opposing forces, it yet remains true that the inward guidance we receive from above and the outworking of that guidance in our daily lives is distinguished and branded by that peace of God which passing all understanding, is to garrison our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4.7 *Weymouth*). This wisdom is to be without partiality and without hypocrisy. How many of us can truthfully claim to be impartial in our dealings with our brother? Individual preferences and the influence of our own personal predilections for one or another divergent view or teaching oftentimes brings in a spirit of partiality which is totally foreign to the Spirit, and is the cause of schisms and divisions in the Body such as the Apostle Paul condemns in no uncertain manner in 1 Cor. 3. 1-14. One of the hardest lessons for any one of us to learn is that of impartiality in those things in which it is right for us to be impartial. Yet it is a lesson—perhaps the lesson above all others—which must be learned and learned well; for the first essential of one to whom is committed the task of judging fellow-beings is that of impartiality, and nothing less than this is to be our lot in the future Age, if faithful.

It is this recollection, that we, in accordance with the Divine will, are being trained and fitted for the stupendous work of showing humanity the way to perfection in the Millennial Age that brings home to us the importance of knowledge, the necessity of a definite and clear-cut understanding of the manner in which God has worked in the past, what he is doing in the present, and the glories which the future holds in reservation. To be co-labourers with him it is good that we should seek to know that which is ready to be revealed, for although it is perfectly true that our entire submission to him makes it possible for the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts and lives, it is only as we seek to come to an appreciation of the whys and wherefores of Divine dealings with men that we can stand before the Throne as did Isaiah, and when the question comes answer as he did, *Here am I, send me*".

The primary purpose of doctrinal teaching

then is as a servant to our consecration and to enable Christians to serve God intelligently in the place to which He has appointed them. It is not given to all to understand in every detail the arguments of Paul or the types and shadows of the Old Testament. There must always be many who will receive at the ministry of faithful under-shepherds the studied conclusions which their own mental powers cannot reason out for themselves. Indeed, were this not so, there would be no place in the Church for the pastors and teachers of 1 Cor. 12. 18, neither would it have been said of certain elders that "*they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account*" (Heb. 13. 17). The entire Church on earth is likened to a body which has many members, not all having the same office or even the same adaptability, but all, very definitely, having need one of another.

Knowledge then is necessary if we would serve our Lord Jesus acceptably as "his witnesses". Knowledge, attained not merely by the reading of books or listening to a favourite preacher or expositor, but that knowledge which can be attained only by reverent, prayerful study of the Scriptures and dispassionate discussions with others who also have the same ideal before them. In a rapidly changing world our knowledge of God's Plan and the outworking of his purposes must keep pace with the development of contemporary events and the problems which face the world today. It can be of no conceivable utility to remain rooted in the outlook of the nineteenth century when the generation to whom we witness is of the twentieth. It becomes vitally necessary, therefore, that in order to be effective ambassadors for Christ to this generation, we must, standing firmly in the light of Truth which has been revealed, so relate that Truth to the world in which we live that its full and satisfying explanation of every problem that confronts man today can be shown up with the visible impress of "Truth now due".

The purpose of God is to bring all men eventually to a full knowledge of his Truth; an entire Age has been set aside to accomplish this stupendous work of sealing every man with a heart appreciation of the Divine principles in creation and an intelligent understanding of God's attributes and character. The ultimate reason for the permission of evil is that mankind might learn, by the knowledge which is gained by experience, the bitter fruits and exceeding sinfulness of sin and the beneficent results

of righteousness. since this is the declared purpose of God for the human race in the days of the Kingdom, should it not be clear that we, who have tasted in advance of the powers of the Age to come (Heb. 6. 5), and who stand before men today as representatives and exponents of the new order of things shortly to be ushered in, must make progress in that same knowledge now. Hence our appreciation of the fact that we are Christ's ambassadors should make us diligent to learn and understand the writings of the Apostles and Prophets that we might be armed with knowledge.

By what road do we attain this desirable condition? There are many who have set out to learn the things that relate to God's Plan and in their search have come to diverse ends, but have not found what they sought. Some have been deceived by the specious arguments of men out to justify a theory, or are beguiled by the glitter of catchwords and trite phrases. So many there are who delude themselves into thinking that they are seeking heavenly wisdom, but in point of fact are delving into that other wisdom which is "*earthly, sensual,*" (James 3. 15). It is necessary that a clear understanding of the manner in which the knowledge of Divine Truth comes to us is kept before our mental vision.

Now the very first principle which must be considered in this connection is that Truth and the knowledge which sanctifies does not come upon the mind suddenly without previous preparation. The Holy Spirit in Old Testament days acted mechanically upon men's minds who "*spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit*" (Pet. 1. 21), but God does not deal thus with the House of Sons. For them it must be in very truth "*first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear*" (Mark 4.28). To each of us must first come the time that He "*begat us with the Word of Truth*" (James 1.18), when as babes in Christ we can imbibe but the milk of the Word. It is in the after days, when the early lessons have been learned, that the mind is prepared for a deeper and more definite understanding of Divine Truth. And are we not all witnesses that this process continues throughout life, and that individually it is true of each one of us that the "*path of the righteous is as the early morning light, which shineth more and more brightly until the height of noonday*" (Prov. 4. 18, Leeser)? There will be many crudities of thought and misapprehensions of the Divine character and purposes to be seen in a better light and thus

have greater power in our lives as time goes on. Happy are those disciples whose minds are flexible enough to allow this moulding of thought and understanding to continue throughout life under the hallowed direction of God's Holy Spirit.

This does not preclude the coming of a revelation of Truth, perhaps at the mouth of some human instrument in the Lord's hand, which dispels as in a moment doubts and perplexities which had troubled and distressed in the past. The point to remember is that such a sudden revelation can be efficacious only when the mind has been previously prepared and is ready to receive it. Nicodemus was shown the light, but he was not ready, and the light was darkness to him. But to Peter, prepared by long years of waiting and watching for "He that should come" there broke forth in an instant that cry which has echoed through the ages: "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God*". Knowledge and wisdom such as characterises the disciples of Christ must be a steady growth, seasoned to the assaults which will be made upon it and able to withstand all the machinations of the Evil One. The gourd which sheltered Jonah grew up in a night, but it also perished in a night, unable to withstand the shrivelling heat of the noonday sun. Rather let our knowledge grow as does the palm, reaching straight up to heaven and taking root in the deeper levels of the earth where alone can be found that water which is essential to its sustenance: slow of development, but able at length to withstand the fury of the elements and bear fruit which shall be for the life of mankind.

Thus has it always been that a great reformer has arisen only and always when a people are ready for the message. The Reformation came, not because Martin Luther alone saw the light, but because throughout the length and breadth of Christendom men and women were sighing and crying for release from the thralldom in which they were held; when he stood up to voice truths which had long been hidden, a myriad hearts responded because it was the message for which they had been waiting. So, later in the Age, when in the fulness of time a word went through Christendom which dissolved the grosser elements of mediaeval theology and opened a vista of glorious salvation for "whosoever will" of all men, a salvation which included and harmonised the earthly with the heavenly promises of Scripture, a wave of new life swept across the Christian world.

It must therefore be clearly seen that Truth comes by revelation, at the hand of chosen messengers, at crucial times in the history of the Church. It is in the fulness of time, as it were, "all men are in expectation", that the Divine Word comes illuminating Christian belief and doctrine with a radiance brighter than ever before, and pointing the way not only to aspects of Truth not previously understood, but also to the work which is to be done among God's people in consequence of that illumination. For with every fresh step in the Divine revelation comes a corresponding responsibility in the Divine service. Hence every great reform or advance in Christian thought is accompanied also by great outward activity and an increased stimulation in the proclamation of the things of God and his Kingdom.

But in between times, after one reformer has finished his work and his course, and ere the next one has arisen to carry the work of God a step farther, there must not be stagnation. The community which ceases to advance in Truth will shortly begin to recede. The multiplicity of denominations who today hold tenaciously to relics of teachings of the Dark Ages are witnesses to the failure of so many to live up to the spirit of their revered leaders. Although the message for the time may have been given, and its chief exponent be laid aside in death; although the impetus to spiritual life and knowledge afforded by that message may transcend all expectation, yet the community which has thus been carried on to a higher level of spiritual understanding must continue to progress into a full appreciation of that new view of Truth which is before it—else the coming of a further revelation of Truth finds them unprepared, unready, and like many of old, "*knowing not the time of their visitation*" (Luke 19. 44).

There is, then, much scope for careful, reverent study of the Scriptures and free discussion within the framework of revealed Truth. This study does not involve an endless wandering over the pages of the Book with no object in view save the discovery of novelties and new interpretations. Neither does it imply a discarding of belief already well settled and grounded, and built in to the Christian character. Rather does it denote an intense appreciation of the manner in which we have been led in the pathway of Truth and a determination to continue in that pathway until all our seeking and meditation and expectation is swallowed up in the glorious

reality which is the end of the way. It is not sufficient that we once heard the word of life—not sufficient that at some time in the past we accepted this outline of belief as representing the Divine Word to us. If we would keep the knowledge of such things fresh and vivid in our minds there must be continual study and discussion, a re-examination of the evidences, a reconsideration of possible objections, “*that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work*” (2 Tim. 3. 16. 17).

Then too there must be a practical application of the Christian principle of tolerance—a much abused word, perhaps more so than any other attribute of the true disciple’s character. For tolerance does not denote a spirit of “peace-at-any-price”, nor a slurring over of principles in order that quietude may prevail, nor an ignoring of true progress in the knowledge of the truth in order that the circle of associates may be widened. Tolerance is an admission that all who are Christ’s disciples are alike searchers for truth; that each must in some manner differ from his fellows in his capacity for perception of the Divine mysteries, or in the rapidity of his progress toward the light; that all are equally prone to make mistakes. Thus there will be developed a very real spirit of brotherhood which, while standing firmly for the principle of personal conviction in the perception and understanding of the Truth, is prepared to extend the same liberty to others who are recognised as fellow-heirs of the grace of God. The truest evidence of Christian tolerance is willingness to learn of others as well as to impart knowledge to them.

Thus may fellowship within the community be founded upon a basis of mutual esteem and respect, a basis upon which growth in knowledge and association in service can proceed unchecked. The voice of the shepherd can be heard in that hallowed atmosphere speaking to each one through every other one, and the knowledge of his Will, which alone can bless and sanctify our lives, will influence the heart of each and bind all together in a fellowship as enduring as it is Christlike. Nothing less than this can be a fulfilment of the Saviour’s prayer: *I will . . . that they may be one . . . as we are one*”. Nothing short of this, the Divine ideal, can possibly be becoming in us as his disciples.

While we yet tabernacle in the flesh, with all the limitations this material world imposes upon us, the understanding of truth we have will always be as the shadows of images. Paul realised that, although abounding in visions and revelations more than them all, he would only know “in part” until that which is perfect is come. So with us. In all our searching for knowledge and in all our progress towards a clearer and more definite understanding of heavenly things, we must ever keep in mind that our vision of these things will be formed and coloured according to our own mental capacity and the environment in which we live and have our being. It is only as we put on more and more of the mind of Christ that we are able so to view the Divine mysteries that we can truthfully say, like Job of old, “*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee*”.

## THE FIRSTFRUITS

*An Exhortation*

“*Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*” (Jas. 2. 18).

The word of God reveals that those who are “in Christ”, members of his mystical Body, his Temple, are “the firstfruits” of his Redemption, or, as Paul describes it, they are “*the Church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven*”.

Jesus Christ is himself “*the firstfruits of them that slept*” and “*the firstborn of every creature*”. (Col. 1. 15). The grave could not hold the Light of the World, the Prince of Glory, “*the image of the invisible God*”. His footstep followers, therefore, those true disciples who keep his Word and seek to do his Will, are the members

of the Body of which Christ is the Head. How essential it is to remember that Christ is the Head of the Body and Christ alone. “*For one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren*” were his own words.

Paul had to remind his followers of this, for they were beginning to think too much of other men. He, therefore, had to chide them about causing divisions and setting up one man against another, even telling them that whilst they did such things they were “*carnal, and walk as men*”, and exhorted them “*not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another*”. Let us, therefore, take heed that we look to Christ and him alone as our Master, and our Head.

Paul also showed that there would be some who would endeavour to discourage others from keeping so close to Jesus himself, and not following the traditions of men, but being guided solely by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, which Jesus promised would lead them into all truth. He, therefore, gives these foot-step followers the following admonition and encouragement:—

*“Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up, by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.”* (Col. 2.18.)

In a very powerful and revealing symbolism Paul warns his followers to be wary lest they give not God the honour due to him alone, from whom all wisdom comes. In his epistle to Timothy he showed that there would be many “striving for the mastery” who might forget that they could only conquer “in the strength of Jesus Christ” and he warned them that a man would not be crowned “*except he strive lawfully*” (2 Tim. 2. 5. 7).

*“Stand in his strength alone,  
The arm of flesh will fail you,  
Ye dare not trust your own.”*

So the old hymn warns us similarly.

Paul then shows to whom the victory and the glory and the honour alone belong, saying:—

*“The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.”*

Jesus said, “*I am the Vine and my Father is the husbandman*”, as in Israel of old the firstfruits were all brought to the Lord, so we, too, who have the “firstfruits of the Spirit” must bring the glory and the honour to him who alone gives the increase of that which He himself has given.

As we well know:—

*“Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning.”*

“Consider what I say” advised Paul, “and the Lord give thee understanding in all things”.

All, therefore, who are members of his Body—his true Church—are to look to him to bring them to victory “*That we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ*” (Eph. 1. 12).

“My glory will I not give to another” said God, and Jeremiah gives us the following wise admonition—

*“Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving kindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord”* (Jer. 9. 24).

Having taken heed, therefore, to this most essential warning, we have many gracious and glorious promises to these members of “the Church of the First born”, most gracious of all, surely being that in the resurrection Paul shows that every man shall rise “in his own order”. He then proceeds to show that this order is firstly, “Christ the firstfruits, afterwards they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor. 15. 23).

These are his elect, his own Body members, whose names are written in heaven. They have believed his Word and claimed his promises, and He has brought them safely to victory. Passed from death unto life, they shall not come into “condemnation” or “judgment” with the judgment of the world.

His power is limitless and his Body members are those of whom it is said “His servants shall serve him”, we may be sure that this “service” will be the joyful one of helping their fellow men who had “stumbled at that stumblingstone” for Paul assures us that “all Israel shall be saved”. His Body members are his statesmen in his Kingdom, of higher or lesser degree according to their position in the Body, of which they form part, and to them (oh joyful and blessed work), will be assigned the power and the wisdom of Christ in helping to bring the whole of “the ransomed race” to Christ Jesus, the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords.

Meantime, as Paul shows, even we who “*have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*”.

And when the “redemption” of their bodies shall have come, when “*He shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself*”, then will their work be a true “rest”, a “rest in work” for it will be unhindered, unhampered by the limitations of the flesh, and they shall have then entered “into the joy of their Lord”.

*Angels sing on: your faithful watches  
keeping,*

*Sing us sweet fragments of the songs above,  
Till morning’s joy shall end the night of  
weeping,*

*And life’s long shadows break in endless  
love.*



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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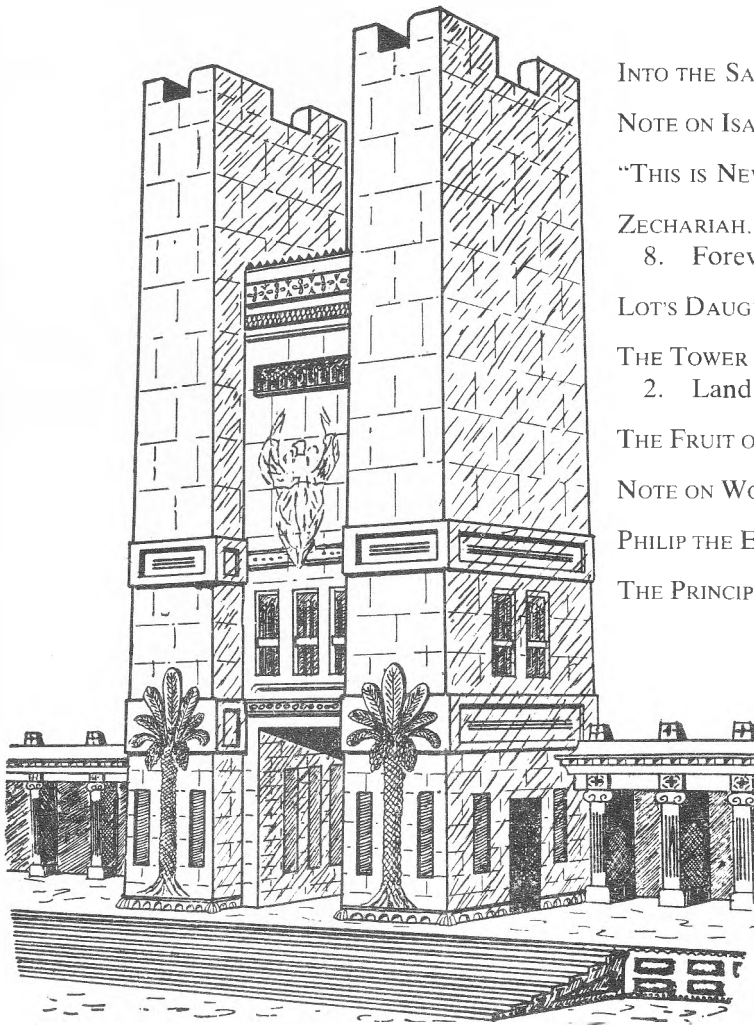
Published March 1st

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Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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## Gone from us



Sis. Daisy Taylor (late Shotton)



## INTO THE SANCTUARY OF GOD

*A plea for  
beauty in worship*

Our God loves things of beauty and dignity. He has ordained his creation to be majestic and awe inspiring; on this our earth He has devised Nature, fair and pleasing in her outward aspect, so that men may find pleasure and happiness in their allotted sphere. To men He has given attributes and powers which render them capable of appreciating the dignified and the sublime, and drawing inspiration and enlightenment from the solemn and the serious, as well as gaiety and happiness from the light and pleasant. Therefore we ought to say that in our worship and devotion we should surround ourselves with that which is beautiful and dignified, that the thoughts and prayers of our hearts may find suitable setting in the sights and sounds which our senses convey to us.

Lack of beauty and dignity in worship is a great loss. Fellowships accustomed to meet in halls and rooms oft-times inadequately or even quite inappropriately furnished for Christian devotion often do not realise how great is the loss. In reaction from formalism and ceremonial some go to the other extreme—quite a natural thing to do—and forget what a stimulus there is to prayer and praise when offered to the Father in surroundings that remind us of him.

Those ancient exemplars of ours, the “great cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12. 1), knew full well the value of beauty and dignity in their surroundings when they came together to worship. They were well taught by God himself by means of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, a simple, dignified, but beauteous structure that enshrined in its snowy curtains, its play of colour, the sheen of gold and silver and polished copper, this immortal truth that God loves beauty. It would have been so easy to make the Tabernacle plain and squat and ugly—instead it must have formed a wondrous sight set in its quiet beauty amid the rugged grandeur of Shiloh, and, in the earlier days, amidst the mountains and deserts of Sinai and the road of the wanderings.

Then when Israel’s first wildness had been tamed, and as a united nation they came together to worship their God, with what pride they must have viewed the edifice built by Solomon. Not the beauty of simplicity which they had seen in the Tabernacle, but the majesty and dignity of a House which should fitly be for the dwelling of the Most High. “*The Lord hath said that He would dwell in the thick darkness; but I have built an house of*

*habitation for thee, and a place for thy dwelling for ever*” (2 Chron. 6. 1).

In prophetic mood the sweet singer of Israel caught up the strain when he looked on the City of Peace, as yet uncrowned with its loveliest jewel, the Temple, and declaimed: “*Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the City of the Great King*”. (Psa. 48. 2). That is how it must have appeared to Jesus on those occasions when, rounding the bend in the road from Bethany, and looking down, before his eyes:—

*“Like a fair vision in the morning light*

*Lay the proud city of Jerusalem,*

*In all the beauty of its soaring towers,*

*And flashing domes, and marble palaces,*

*A diadem on Zion’s holy hill,*

*The glorious Temple in its splendour shone*

*With sheen of gold, and pinnacles of snow.”*

What wonder that the Psalmist felt constrained to cry out in exultation: “*Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion; and unto thee shall the vow be performed*” (Psa. 65. 1). That glorious city, and in later days its magnificent Temple, was the visible embodiment of Israel’s worship; pulses were quickened, and hearts beat faster, as men lifted up their eyes to the city wherein God had set his Name. And who shall say that some lives were not inspired and quickened to more devoted service, and some timid hearts were not encouraged to greater deeds of heroism and sacrifice, after the outward sight of Jerusalem the Holy had been translated into a vision that illuminated their inmost soul and remained with them for ever?

But Solomon knew that his beautiful Temple was only a shell, a casket, of no value except it held the precious jewel. That dead building must be the repository of a living faith and a centre of living worship. “*Will God in very deed dwell with men on earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built*” (Chron. 6. 18). So he prayed that his house might become a house of prayer. How clear it is that he expected his Temple to become an inspiration to sincere prayer and devotion for all Israel. Its gold and silver vessels and furnishings, sculptured palm trees and pomegranates, its tapestries and apartments, its ceremonial and ritual, all meant nothing, and less than nothing, except they were conducive to a deeper and more spiritual understanding of God, and to more reverent and soul-satisfying worship on the part of the people.

That was his desire.

That he had interpreted aright the needs of Israel is clear from the songs of David. Yearning after just such a place where God could be worshipped in spirit and in truth, the man after God's own heart had sung: "*I was glad when they said unto me 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'*" (Psa. 122. 1). He was glad! Have you ever felt that quickening of the pulse, that eager anticipation, as you enter the place where your fellows are gathered together to worship the Father in sincerity and reverence? I have sometimes found myself in a strange town where the surroundings seem alien and unfriendly, and have come upon a church, standing silent and serene, and felt a strange little surge of emotion, as though that building were the one place in all that town into which I had a right to enter; for it represented the things of God, and "*this is none other but the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven*" (Gen. 28. 17), and if perchance one should enter in and become at one with the atmosphere of the place—the quietness, the dignity of ancient things, the soft light stealing through stained glass windows, the great Bible on the reading desk—how easy to come into tune with those fervent words of three thousand years ago; "*How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts. My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God*" (Psa. 84. 1-2). That is the true spirit of worship—the intense, deep longing to be in the House of God and engaged in his business. That is our place, our home, and there it is that we shall find rest to our souls. The more that we can take to ourselves the restful spirit of a place of worship, the more shall we enter into communion with our Father.

Do we not well, therefore, to seek the promotion of this spirit of worship by every means within our power, and if our surroundings can be made more conducive to satisfying and restful worship, do we not well to use our Divinely given instinct for beauty and dignity to that end? When the inspired writer voiced those beautiful words in which he exhorted his hearers to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness there can be little doubt that the magnificent setting of the Temple was in his mind. "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name," he cries. "Bring an offering *and come into his courts*. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness; fear before him, all the earth" (Psa. 96. 8-9). Behold the stately progression of worship! Acknowledge God first,

the One Who is worthy of all praise and worship; then prepare the offering. With that offering in the hand, enter into the House of God, the place that is set apart to him for worship and devotion. In that setting, and in a spirit of reverence, and with a consciousness of sincerity of heart; trusting in the justification which is by faith: rejoicing in hope of his glory; in such holiness, within and around, "*come let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our maker*" (Psa. 95. 6); and in that solemn atmosphere we shall hear the voice that speaketh from Heaven as we have never heard it before.

Having then made our House of God, humble though it may be, as outwardly fitting and appropriate to our worship as circumstances may permit, let us come into it as though the Father himself waits there to receive us—as indeed He does. That grand old sixteenth-century Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe, to whom the world owes so much of astronomical knowledge, declared: "*I always put on my court robes when I enter my observatory, because when I study the stars I stand in the Court of the King of Kings.*" What a grandeur of simple dignity. Who shall say that the Father of all men did not take notice of that act of worship performed by a courtly old man who realised as David of old, that the sublime majesty of the heavens speaks indeed of the eternal presence of God. Grievous loss it is that in these more hurried and less dignified days even some ministers of God tend to forget the solemnity of the task they undertake week by week. Sixty years ago the Rev. Leslie Weatherhead in his book "*How can I find God?*" speaking of typical Sunday services he had known, said of the minister, "*one cannot help feeling that he would collect himself with greater care in order to enter the presence of his doctor.*" How often do we all fail after the same manner!

The finest example of the value of beauty and dignity in worship and of ritual and ceremonial in preparing the heart for personal communion with God is given us in the vision of Ezekiel's Temple. There we have depicted the worship of the Messianic Age, and although it may be urged that the descriptions in those last chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy are symbolic expressions of spiritual truths—as indeed they are—yet there can be none among us who do not form a mental image of a wonderful edifice with its River of Life flowing outwards to the Dead Sea, and the Trees of Life on the banks thereof, and look to

that as a kind of central feature of the new world that is to be. The Word tells us that all men will go up to Jerusalem to worship—a formal although spontaneous expression of love and loyalty to the Father of all; is it not reasonable to conclude that there is much in Ezekiel's vision that will become translated into literal reality, and that, "in days that are yet to be", away there in the heart of the Promised Land, in surroundings of incomparable grandeur and dignity, there will be worship that shall lift the hearts of the worshippers to true communion with God

the Father of all. There upon Zion's hill, resplendent in beauty and glory, may stand that majestic meeting place which shall visibly symbolise that the dwelling place of God is with men, and they shall have become his people, and He shall have become their God, and He himself shall have wiped away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither sorrow nor crying, nor any more pain, because the glorious Mediatorial work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ shall have made all things new.

### A Note on Isa. 52.11.

"Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord" (Isa. 52. 11).

The RSV has it "purify yourselves". The injunction was to the exiles returning from Babylon to their homeland, carrying with them the sacred vessels of the Temple to be reinstated in the new Temple they were going to build in Jerusalem. It was necessary that they be clean, upright in God's sight, for they were touching holy things. The simile has often been used in exhortations to purity in Christian living on the part of those who name the name of Christ. God does not use unclean instruments, so runs the theme; those who would serve him must be "purged from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9.14). "Every man that hath this hope purifieth himself" said John (1 Jno. 3.3).

It has often been suggested that, to the Christian, the "vessels" picture or represent the foundation truths or doctrines of the Faith, especially in a time of enlightenment such as the present end-of-the-Age period, rescued from a time of obscurity and ignorance when these truths were submerged and hidden in a kind of "Babylonish captivity", now revealed and placed in their proper setting before the "Household of Faith". The picture is an apt one, although there is a still greater extent of meaning that can be attached to the term. The word

rendered "vessel" is the Hebrew *kel*; this means, variously, vessel, instrument, jewel, weapon, armour or furniture, (signifying "adornment"), and is translated by all these words in the O.T. By extending the application of the text to all these terms every aspect of the Christian calling can be covered. We are to be clean, to be purified, not only in bearing and holding the truths of the Faith, the "vessels", but also the "jewels", which one might see in what the Apostle calls the "fruit of the spirit", the facets of Christian character which are developed in us as we follow Christ. So must we be in respect to the "adornment", that outward demeanour and conduct toward our fellows which stamps us as his followers. Likewise, too, in our use of the "instruments" we have, that which is put into our hands wherewith to engage in his service, the facilities and opportunities we have and the talents and possessions with which we serve him. Neither must we forget the Christian warfare, and the manner in which we adopt and make use of the "armour" and the "weapons" which St. Paul calls the "whole armour of God"; in our offensive warfare and defensive stand we must needs retain the purity, the cleansing, which must certainly be our possession if we are truly the sons of God.

The power which produced order out of chaos, the Voice which commanded light and rebuked the oceans, which put living creatures in every part of the globe, adapting them to their places, will at a fore-known hour rebuke evil. The tumults of man will cease and the earth will enjoy her rest. Because faith understands that

He made the earth for his own purposes, that He produced man from its various elements, that He has kept faith with the human race, it accepts with full assurance of faith that he will complete that purpose. "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord".

## “ THIS IS NEW ”

*The doctrinal background to the narrative of the Last Supper*

*“And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the apostles with him. And He said unto them, “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer . . .” (Luke 22. 14-15).*

It was with a deep sense of the tragic nature of this Passover feast that Jesus came with his little band of followers to this upper room. It was to be of a character quite different from any that He and they had attended before. The hour appointed for the consummation of his sacrifice had all but come, and He had come up to Jerusalem with that object in view. Furthermore, the hour of the powers of darkness had also arrived and He was to be given into their wicked hands. Heretofore none had been able to lay hands on him, as He said, “My hour is not yet come.” But now the situation was to be otherwise. Already the Prince of Darkness had made a breach into the little circle that had accompanied him to Jerusalem. Apparently disappointed in his Master, in that He had not seized the opportunity of his prophetic ride into Jerusalem to proclaim himself her king, Judas sought ways and means to force the hands of his Leader and Master. His cogitations over these ways and means laid his mind open to a suggestion from one who was watching the fast-developing situation with the most intense interest. “Why don’t you betray him to the authorities,” suggested the Evil One, “so that He has to use his power to free himself and so come into the open.”

The author of the plot was his great adversary, for *“the devil . . . put into the heart of Judas Iscariot . . . to betray him . . . (John 13.2).* Into the unsettled mind of the apostate Satan injected the traitorous thought, and because it was not thrown out forthwith, he also himself entered into the unhappy wretch, to take command. *“And Satan entered into Judas . . . and he went away and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might deliver him unto them. And they were glad and covenanted to give him money . . .” (Luke 22. 3-5).* Taking advantage then of the disaffection of one who could not understand the way of the Lord, Satan first intrudes into his mind an evil thought, then follows that with swift action by entering in himself, obsessing his victim, and taking command. At such an hour, and against such a target as the Son of God, Satan would not entrust the work of

treachery to any member of his evil staff. Fallen angelic princes might be well able to guide the destinies of nations and peoples throughout the earth (see Dan. 10. 3-20) but they were no match for this hour, and for this sinless victim. Only the mighty “Prince of the Power of the Air” was competent to seize and exploit an opportunity like this, only he, in his own person, could see it through.

Seated at the festal board, Jesus knew what had been done; *“as they were eating, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me” (Matt. 26. 21).* “Is it I Lord? was the question that ran round the company, until even the treacherous lips took it up. *“It is he to whom I shall give a sop.”* Then when Jesus had tendered the morsel to the treacherous soul, “Satan entered into him” again (John 13. 27). Even into the quiet retreat of that upper room the prince of evil had intruded himself, now to take full unbroken control of his dupe, till the victim he was seeking should be slain. That wicked act accomplished, he left Judas to exterminate himself in the flood of penitential misery that overwhelmed his soul.

After Judas had left the room, Jesus turned to Peter—Peter, the passionate, the impulsive, the ready-tongued!—to tell him that Satan wanted to get hold of him too, to shake him in the sifting-sieve, but . . . “for thee I have prayed”! There was no prayer for the deliberate betrayer, but there was a prayer, of deep solicitude, for the momentarily-overcome denier of the Lord.

Yet, freighted as this occasion was with such tragic things, the faithful Son had come to this hour with “great desire”! There was no shirking or hesitation in his attitude. He had come to this hour to be the “grain of wheat” sown into the soil of his Father’s field, there to die, that men might live because of him. And so, even in this room, not the weakness of “this” or the wickedness of “that,” could rob him of his solemn desire to take with them, for the last time until the Kingdom of God should be come, the emblem appropriate to that sacred feast.

Having partaken of the foods provided in the old time-hallowed way, Jesus took a piece of bread, then, after blessing it, passed it to the company, saying as He did so, “Take, eat, this is My body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of Me.” This was a counterpart, but on a higher plane, to that “eating” upon

which they had all been engaged that night. He was to be the true, the real, the intended Paschal Lamb for the whole House of Israel, by means of which the Kingdom of God would come.

After that distribution He took the Cup and blessed it, and as He passed it to the little group his mind went forward to an entirely different line of thought. "*This Cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you*" (Luke 22. 20). Matthew adds another thought; "*This is My blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins*" (Matt. 26. 28).

Now, the Paschal Feast was not the occasion for the remission of sins in Israel. The feast associated with their cleansing from sin came much later in the year. The Atonement Day, with its sacrifices and its renewal of the Covenant (Heb. 9. 16-21) was connected with the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) which fell, not in the first month, but in the seventh, year by year, continually. It may seem strange to us that Jesus' mind should run so far forward from that Paschal Feast, with its precise remembrance, to another Feast with such dis-similar associations, did we not know that in that first year of Israelitish history the deliverance from the Egyptian yoke and the inauguration of the Covenant at Mount Sinai were but the beginning and ending of their great redemption experience. The smiting of the first-born was the last blow needed to compel the Egyptians to "let My people go". Through the Red Sea and the desert wastes to the foot of Sinai the deliverer led them on, and there, the redemption begun by his glittering sword was consummated by his trumpet voice. The "passing-over" was a means to a greater end. That "end" was the Covenant-making with its undertakings on each side. Jehovah consented to be their God; they consented to be his people.

But, in after years, that Covenant needed to be purified by blood, and be renewed year by year on their Atonement day (Heb. 9. 18-21). Jesus' words over the Cup are in full keeping with this thought, though on a higher plane. He wanted to teach his loved ones a deep truth in this matter of the Cup.

It was not the custom in Israel for the Covenant blood to be drunk by any one. It was always used for sprinkling: some of it, by the Priest in the Most Holy Place as a covering for sin; and some of it by the Mediator, later in the day, at the rededication service of the people as they renewed their Covenant with their God

(Num. 29. 7-11). When, in due time, Jesus' blood comes to be used as the blood of the New Covenant it will not be drunk. It will be sprinkled or presented by himself as the great High Priest in the anti-typical Most Holy Place, on behalf of those whom God has invited to make a New Covenant with him (Jer. 31. 31; Heb. 8. 8-12), in place of that old Covenant which failed through the weakness of the flesh—that is, with the House of Israel and the House of Judah. The blood of the New Covenant is intended for Israel's cleansing and for ratifying her New Covenant, even though shed so long ago. But until then it is accounted to flow in those who have drunk at that Cup throughout, and will remain in them until in the Age to come it is efficacious for Israel's cleansing, when, after their banishment and subsequent regathering to this land, they will have become ready to covenant a New Covenant with their God.

Looking back to that historic night in Egypt we can see that Heaven's last visitation affected one member of each household in a manner altogether different from the rest. Though in a way, all the household were under the blood, only the first-born was in danger of the first-born's fate. Had there been no blood on the lintel of that house, the destroying sword would have entered within, and the fate that was to befall the Egyptian would have befallen the first-born of Israel too. The life of the slain lamb was the price required for the sparing of the first-born's life; and yet, though thus preserved from the agonies of death, that very passing-over separated him away from his family unto the Lord. Spared thus from being cut-off from his family, yet in that night, he was truly separated from the old family home-life to belong exclusively to the Lord.

In later days, Moses reminded Israel that God had said "*all the first-born are mine; on the day that I smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the first-born in Israel, both man and beast; mine they shall be; I am the Lord*" (Num. 3. 13). The record of this demand is first set out in Exod. 13. 2—a demand made on "*the self-same day that the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts*" (Ex. 12. 51). Here then, during that fateful night, God separated out a first fruits of the nation to be his own possession, many days before He brought the remainder unto himself at Sinai. Though in the meantime between Egypt and Sinai all the nation's first-borns were

exchanged for all the males of Levi (see Num. 3. 11-13), yet the principle of separation remained the same, and when the whole community of the nation came to the holy mount, Levi was separated (in the first-born's stead) unto the Lord to be a special channel of the Lord (as a first born, Exod. 4. 22), out of all the peoples of the earth, had had its own first-born (or a tribe in lieu thereof) separated out from its own ranks, so that through its services their nation's standing and Covenant might be renewed from year to year.

This is exactly in accord with the principle involved in the words of the Lord to his disciples in the upper room. His mind had gone far forward to the establishment of the Covenant conditions between his Father and the regathered hosts of Israel, and to the part therein that He himself must play. But that much-to-be-desired event lay far ahead on the stream of time. It was as if some far-sighted son of Israel could have looked forward to Sinai from some point of the night when the Passover feast was in progress, in his Egyptian hut, and could have said to the first-born of the family that there was something specially important for him in this night's happenings, with regard to the Covenant that then lay so many days ahead.

Jesus was talking to the first nucleus of the first-born class of this Gospel Age. Others have entered into this same privilege (and though of Gentile birth, yet, by faith have gained joint-inheritance in Abraham's seed) and may drink from the Paschal Cup as did those first members of the class. It is still the blood of the New Covenant which they drink; of the Millennial Covenant, but till that time is come it is to be taken as the bond of union between him, whose blood it was and those in whose bodies it, by drinking, has come to be.

Let no one stumble at this conclusion or this privilege, nor interweave or jumble other lines of truth into this. It is our heritage in the truth to separate out things that differ, and see things each in its own light. Jesus's words stand out sharp and clear. First, there is the breaking of the bread in true Paschal form—and Jesus, the true Paschal Lamb, is the One on whom we feed during the darkness of this long Gospel night (1 Cor. 5. 7). And secondly, there is the drinking of the life-blood of the Covenant of the future Day, to be in us the bond that ties us to our Lord in that great work, till the death He has died has claimed us too (Rom. 6. 3-5). Concerning these two things the words of Jesus are clear and precise: each line of thought is definite and well emphasised, and thereby He invites us not only to share together the broken loaf of his sinless body, but also to take and hold within ourselves the precious blood—more precious than all the world's finest gold—until He asks us to yield it up again so that therewith He may accomplish his Covenant purposes. The flight of time brings nearer, with every passing year, that auspicious event: but even so, not yet is the long Passover night at an end. The great antitypical visitation of the last of the ten plagues upon the oppressors of his Israel people still lies ahead of us. Till the great deliverance is brought to pass it is still appropriate to take the broken bread and drink the out-poured blood, knowing, the while, that the great consummation is fully assured by his death.

Once more, by the grace of God, it will be our privilege to gather at the table of the Lord, and take again the tokens of his great sacrifice. Let all who see this occasion to be a privilege—a sacred solemn feast before the Lord—look well to themselves that they eat and drink not unworthily.

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### The Way to the Kingdom

“If only humankind currently on earth would realise it, it is already within their grasp to help to bring to fruition and to enjoy God's planned Kingdom on earth. First and foremost we have to comply with his fundamental laws. God does not issue the edict “Unless you do what I ask you, you shall not have this desirable world.” No, it is rather this; “I have made this world in

such a way that it will only work if you conform to essential, unalterable laws. I have given you the gift of free will. If you do not, or if you persistently refuse to work in accordance with these laws, the harmony in the world will automatically collapse and there will be no full life and no real happiness on earth”.

*(From a sermon at English Presbyterian Church, Pwlllethi).*

## ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

### 8. Foreview of History

The six final chapters of Zechariah's prophecy are so markedly different in style and contents from the earlier ones that it is evident they constitute a separate book, or at least a separate part. The difference in style is accounted for by concluding that Zechariah composed these chapters in his old age, some fifty years later than the earlier visions, in the days of Nehemiah when it was becoming evident that a long span of history must run its course before the long-looked for day should dawn. Hence these chapters, nine to fourteen, comprise a vivid—and so far as they have already become history, a remarkably accurate—foreview of the outworking of God's purposes with Israel and with all men, from a time following the close of Zechariah's ministry to the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth. In these six chapters there is a contrast drawn between the political power of the great kings of this world and the overriding power of the Lord Christ: the one is pictured in all the pomp and panoply of human greed and brute force, the other in the selflessness, the devotion and moral power of the Good Shepherd. The conflict between the two continues and accelerates to the final clash and, as in so many of the prophetic Scriptures, in the stress of the conflict many lose faith and apostasise, but a remnant are steadfast and win through at the end. The doctrine of the "Remnant" is very prominent in this second part of Zechariah's prophecy.

The first eight verses of chapter 9 picture the events surrounding the transfer of dominion from Persia to Greece, the silver of Daniel's image to the copper. The remarkable correspondence between the details in these verses and the incidents attendant on Alexander the Great's invasion of Asia in 332 B.C. has been realised by practically every commentator of note and the application is reasonably conclusive. Hadrach (the Hatarika of Assyrian inscriptions) Damascus and Hamath (modern Hama) were leading districts and cities of Syria: Alexander's first move was to subdue Syria and capture Damascus, which he did without difficulty. Hence verse 1 "*The word of the Lord is against the land of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus*" (RSV) "*and Hamath also which borders thereon*". His next move was against Tyre and Sidon, twin commercial cities of

Phoenicia; Tyre held out for seven months but fell in 332. Verses 2 and 3 speak of this and add the information that Tyre had built herself a "*stronghold*" but the Lord would smite her power "*in the sea*" and she would be consumed by fire. This is a remarkable statement, for at the time of Alexander the Tyrians had abandoned their seaside city and built a new one on a small island just off the coast which they had fortified and surrounded with a wall a hundred and fifty feet high. They considered themselves impregnable. Alexander built a causeway across the intervening water and so captured the city. Having thus secured his position he drove southward towards Egypt through the land of the Philistines, capturing Gaza and executing its king, destroying Ashkelon completely, and making Ashdod and Ekron tributary. All of this is stated plainly in verses 5-6 "*Ashkelon shall see it, and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish, Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded. The king shall perish from Gaza, Ashkelon shall be uninhabited; a mongrel people shall dwell in Ashdod; and I will make an end of the pride of Philistia*" (RSV). Up to this point the Scriptural narrative corresponds in every detail with the progress of Alexander and his Greeks in that momentous year 332. Now in verse 7 the Lord says that there shall no longer be a Philistine nation; it will be absorbed into Judah. The expression "*he that remaineth*" refers to the remnant of the Philistines who survived Alexander's invasion; that remnant shall "*be for our God*"; the word rendered "governor" means a family chief or tribal leader; "*Ekron shall be as Jebus*" (not "as a Jebusite"). All these expressions indicate the complete coalescence of the Philistines into the Jewish nation, just as the Jebusites were coalesced in the time of David. This is what happened. The Philistines as a national entity drop out of history after the time of Alexander; what was left of them became indistinguishable from Jews and their land became part of Judea.

This was not the end. Verse 8 declares the Divine intention "*I will encamp about my house because of the army, because of him that returneth: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more*". The army here referred to is the Greek army. Alexander had sent a message to Jerusalem demanding the submission of the

Jews, Jaddua, the High Priest, principal citizen of the nation, had refused on the ground that he had sworn allegiance to Persia. Immediately after the fall of Gaza therefore, Alexander marched to Jerusalem to take vengeance. The outcome is recorded by the historian Flavius Josephus. Unable to offer armed resistance, the High Priest, instructed by Heaven, arrayed himself in the splendid robes of his office as Head of the Levitical priesthood and went out to meet the conqueror, followed by the priests and citizens in white. To the astonishment of his own officers, Alexander, instead of giving orders to attack, went forward alone, made obeisance to the sacred Name embazoned on the High Priest's mitre, and then saluted Jaddua with every appearance of respect and friendliness. His principal general, Parmenio, ventured to ask the reason for this unexpected behaviour, whereupon Alexander explained that when originally contemplating the invasion of Asia he had seen in a dream a person attired in this same regalia who had assured him that he should embark upon his project and that it would be crowned with success by the defeat of Persia. Never having seen or heard of such a man before, he was convinced that this was the one who had appeared to him in his dream of years past. So saying, he walked with the High Priest into the city and was conducted to the Temple, where Jaddua showed him the prophecies of Daniel which declared that a Greek would overthrow Persia. Thus was Judea saved from the fate that had overtaken Syria, Phoenicia and Philistia, even as verse 8 states in a few telling words.

It has, of course, been suggested by some authorities that Josephus was romancing a little when he recounted this story but there is really reasonable circumstantial evidence for its truth. It is a fact that after Alexander's visit to Jerusalem he conferred favours upon the Jews that were not conferred upon any other of his conquered nations. Something must have happened to avert the horrors of massacre and pillage which had been the invader's intention for Judea as for the other lands he subdued, and to change him into a beneficent patron instead. In any case, the terms of verse 8 were met: God had averted the threat of the army. With that the picture in Zechariah comes to an end. In history Alexander went on his way, besieged and took Babylon, overthrew the Persian dominion, continued in India, and finally met his death, but

of all that no notice is taken here. Zechariah recorded sufficient to indicate the first outstanding event to concern Judea in times yet to come—the transfer of dominion from Persia to Greece, another step in the progress of the Divine Plan, eventually to culminate in the Kingdom of God.

The prophet now skips some three centuries and lights upon the days of the First Advent. He sees another King presenting himself to Israel for acceptance, not coming as did Alexander with all the pomp and pageantry of military power to establish his rule by force, but in peace to establish a rule founded upon love and persuasion. *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion"* he cries in verse 9 *"Thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, upon a colt the foal of an ass"*. It may be as is sometimes stated, that the traditional manner in which the kings of Israel entered upon their office was to ride into Jerusalem upon a white ass, although there is no specific instance of such a custom in the Old Testament. Asses were more common than horses in the earlier years of Israel's national existence, but by the time of David and onward horses were used for ceremonial purposes. Riding upon an ass might well be intended more as a symbol of humility—"lowly, riding upon an ass". The remarkable correspondence between this verse and the action of Jesus just before his arrest justifies its application and therefore the ensuing passage to the First Advent and the reactions of Israel at that time. Verse 10 defines the peacefulness of his reign and its ultimate conquest—the warhorse, the battle-bow shall be cut off; *"he shall speak peace to the nations, and his dominion shall be from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth"*—universal. This was the promise brought to the men of that day when He presented himself to them. *"By the blood of thy covenant"* said the Lord *"I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water"* (verse 11). This is addressed to that generation and the first impulse perhaps is to apply these words to the Mosaic Covenant, sealed at Mount Sinai fourteen centuries previously with the blood of sacrificed animals and now due to come to an end with the institution of something better on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ. But the Mosaic Covenant effected no release of prisoners, either at the First Advent or at any other time. It was in fact the failure of that Covenant to effect any real

deliverance for Israel which paved the way for God's promise of a New Covenant that would achieve success where the old one had failed. Now although the real work of that New Covenant, the writing of God's laws in the hearts of men and their wholesale turning to him in repentance and dedication, is the work of the coming Millennial Age, it is true that Jesus referred to his coming death as "*the blood of the New Covenant, shed for many for the remission of sins*" (Matt. 26. 28) and that by virtue of this same sacrificial death there is deliverance here and now, and has been since Pentecost, for all, whether Jew or Gentile, who believe. It may well be therefore that verse 11 is a reference to this fact, and that the "blood of the Covenant" there mentioned is a symbol of the death of Christ, the "Ransom for all". Those who did accept him at his First Advent are the prisoners who were delivered from the empty well or reservoir (this is the meaning of "pit" here) of the old system of Judaism.

*"Turn you to the stronghold, ye prisoners of hope: even today do I declare that I will render double unto thee, when I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man"* (chap. 9. 12-13). This is the only instance in the Old Testament where the word "hope" has the definite article: the expression is properly "prisoners of the hope", St. Paul was a "prisoner of the hope". "*For the hope of Israel am I bound with this chain*" said he to the Jews of Rome (Acts 28. 20); "*Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise*" when before Agrippa (Acts 26. 6). These "prisoners of the hope" were the men of Israel at the First Advent, subject to alien powers but in their bondage directed to the stronghold of God's promise and the hope that one day their servitude would end and their mission as God's ambassadors to the nations be realised. Hence the promise that God

would render to them "double"—not "*shenayim*" which means a double portion, but "*mishneh*" which means the second part, the complement of what has gone before. In the past they had endured sorrow and adversity, but in the future they would experience joy and prosperity. Isaiah voiced the same principle when he said "*For your shame ye shall have double; . . . everlasting joy shall be unto them*" (Isa. 61. 7). And with this stirring exhortation the prophecy leaves the First Advent behind and passes unrestrained into the mighty deeds of the Kingdom in power, the days of the Second Advent and the Millennial reign. Verse 13 marks the transition. "*When I have bent Judah for me . . .*" and so on. The time of the promised "double" is governed by that "when". A day is to come when God takes Israel—a restored and purified Israel—as his instrument. Using a military metaphor, He likens Judah to his bow, Ephraim the arrows, the sons of Greece to the armed might of this world, and the sons of Zion to the Holy Nation. But the Lord himself is the leader and his power is irresistible. Verses 14-17 declare that the Lord shall be seen among his people, implying full acceptance in faith and loyalty; His arrows go as lightning, his whirlwinds devastate the enemy. He defends his people, and the victory is so overwhelming that their rejoicing is as that of a feast of wine and their praises to God as though they had brought so many sacrifices to his altar that the bowls were brimming over with blood and flooding the horns (A.V. "corners") of the altar—a vivid metaphor taken from the ancient Levitical ritual. So the Lord their God will save them and Israel will be as the precious stones ornamenting the diadem upon his head or an ensign, a display lifted up for all to see. "*For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty*" cries the prophet. "*Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids*" (vs.17).

*(To be continued)*

Not a single sheep will be wanting, they shall all be safely folded by Divine love. "I will make them to pass the second time under my rod." This refers to the oriental manner of counting the sheep—they had to pass out of the fold under the rod. And God made the sheep pass under

the rod in his covenant in the past eternity with his Son—they were all carefully numbered. He will make them pass under the rod again in the eternity to come, and not one shall be missing—the two numbers will perfectly correspond.

*Dr. Cynddylan Jones.*

## LOT'S DAUGHTERS

The incident, related in Gen. 19. 30-38, whereby the two daughters of Lot became the mothers of children by their own father has been used by many a commentator and in many a homily to illustrate the depravity and corruption of that far-off day but the strictures all too often do not take into account vital differences between that day and ours. The standards and conventions of four thousand years ago were not as those of to-day and some of the reasons that similar conduct is now rightly regarded as reprehensible did not then apply.

The story is set in the shadow of the catastrophic overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. The patriarch Lot, with his two young daughters, had been saved from the holocaust and taken refuge in a cave on the high mountain which stands at the south-east corner of the Dead Sea. From their refuge, five thousand feet above the plain, they could see the devastated area below them and realised that all life had been obliterated. They had at first found shelter in the little town of Zoar some sixteen miles from Sodom but, the record tells us, they "feared to dwell in Zoar", perhaps because the Canaanite inhabitants were not too friendly or perhaps they feared that Zoar in its turn would be involved and destroyed; the conflagration probably went on for weeks and spread over a wide area. So they were eking out a sparse and primitive existence on this uninhabited mountain-top. It was here that the two girls, despairing of finding husbands, resorted to this desperate expedient in order to ensure posterity to their father. "*Our father is old*" said one to the other "*and there is not a man in the earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth*", This need not necessarily mean that they thought all human life had been destroyed from the earth; the word for "earth" here can be limited in its meaning to the land around them and from their elevated position they could see some seventy miles to the horizon which would take in much of the land of Canaan where Abraham dwelt; they would perceive that the highlands of Judah were still green and fertile. More likely they saw no avenue of escape from their mountain fastness across the desolated plain below and felt that they were permanently

cut off from the rest of the world.

The daughters justified their action by necessity, but the entire episode is better understood when it is remembered that at that early stage in the history of the race marriage was customary within much closer relationships than is considered either ethically or biologically sound now. The progressive physical degeneration which has continued from the beginning had not sapped human vitality to the extent it has now. Men and women lived longer and were more virile. In Old Testament history we find that Abraham and Nahor his brother both married their nieces; nearly a thousand years later a possible marriage between David's son Amnon and his half-sister Tamar was considered quite proper (2 Sam. 13. 13) although this was in fact forbidden by the Mosaic Law. Another and earlier Tamar saw nothing improper in bearing a child to her father-in-law Judah in order to maintain the family line (Gen. 38). Outside Old Testament records, it was a frequent occurrence for kings of nations to marry their own sisters with the object of keeping the line of descent in one family. Every one of the eleven Pharaohs of the famous Egyptian 18th dynasty, under some of whom the Oppression and Exodus of Israel took place, took their own sisters, daughters or half-sisters to wife, one even marrying two of his own daughters. Abhorrent as the idea might be to modern minds, therefore, it has to be admitted that Lot's daughters were not so far removed from the general thought of their times and the solution they found to their problem should be viewed accordingly.

The two children became ancestors of nations which multiplied to inhabit the territory east of the Dead Sea, the Moabites and the Ammonites. Both nations were thorns in the side of Israel in after days. One noteworthy fact is that Ruth, an ancestress of Christ, was a Moabitess. Had it not been for the action taken by the two daughters in that cave on the Canaanitish mountain above the ruined cities, one of the most appealing characters in the whole of Bible history would not have lived, and the Book of Ruth would never have been written.

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True prayer is the process by which we learn to know God and to realize what He wants to be to us, and to take possession of the wondrous

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inheritance of riches and power which are ours in Jesus Christ and which He is waiting to help us work out in our experience.

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

### 2. Land of Shinar

*"And the whole earth was of one language, and one speech, and it came to pass as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there."* (Gen. 11. 1-2).

Simple words, as though recording a minor episode in the history of a small wandering tribe, and yet they denote nothing less momentous than the first concerted move of the first few descendants of the survivors of the Flood to establish themselves in a suitable territory and begin to build a communal life. They came from the place where the Ark had landed, found a suitable place where they could build their houses and grow their crops, and settle down. It was an unknown time after they had done so that the impulse to build the Tower came to them.

There is no indication of the time scale involved in this. The narrative gives no dates, only that it was the next happening of any consequence after Noah and his family emerged from the Ark. Any conclusions in this field must be necessarily speculative; yet there are a number of indisputable points which, put together, can enable the drawing of some sort of picture.

First and foremost, this enterprise of building a great tower *"whose top shall reach unto heaven"* must obviously require a goodly number of workers. The clay had to be dug, moulded into bricks, baked in huge ovens built for the purpose, the bitumen with which the bricks were cemented together (the slime of ch. 11. 2) extracted from the wells bored for the purpose, foundations laid and preparation of the ground, and finally the erection of a building which, according to the historians who saw it nearly three thousand years later, measured six hundred feet each way by six hundred high. In the third century B.C. Alexander the Great at his conquest of Babylon determined to rebuild the ruined Tower; it took ten thousand men two months to transport the brickwork masses three-quarters of a mile to a point where they remain to the present day.

Commencing with three couples at the time of leaving the Ark, it must have been several generations before the little community was numerous enough to embark on this project. With men living at that time terms of five hundred years the child-bearing period was considerably longer than is customary to-day, perhaps up to a couple of hundred years, though

such evidence as there is indicates much longer between the births. There is one Scripture allusion which may point to a much more rapid increase in those first few centuries than became normal afterwards. Speaking to Noah and his sons just after the Flood, the Lord said to them *"And you, be ye fruitful and multiply. Bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein."* (Gen. 9. 7). That was a more intense expression than he used to Adam at the beginning, *"be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth"* (Gen. 1. 28). But this injunction to the sons of Noah is singularly like the expression used of Israel when in Egypt. *"The children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty"* (Exod. 1. 7). In that case, which is generally held to have been Divinely ordained, thirty-five couples between them produced a progeny which four centuries later, when they came out of Egypt, boasted six hundred and fifty thousand men of above twenty years of age. Forty years later when they entered the Promised Land the number was still the same: the phenomenal rate of increase had ceased. Obviously Divine Power was at work here for a purpose. In like manner it could well be that for a few centuries after the Flood the same thing happened. A brief calculation can show that at the rate of increase of Israel in Egypt the three sons of Noah could have grown to a couple of thousand or more in the first three centuries and this would have provided an adequate labour force for the project.

In the quite different field in the science of climatology there is an incidental support for this conclusion. The date of the Flood (according to the Hebrew Bible of the First Advent and the Greek Septuagint), was in the region of 3300 B.C. The leading British climatologist of the early 20th century, C. E. P. Brooks, in his *"Climate Through The Ages"* (1948) has shown that at about 3000 B.C. the previously genial and warm nature of the earth's climate experienced a sudden change to a cold and wet period with intense volcanic activity which endured for the next four hundred years, having a drastic effect on animal and vegetable life. That first three hundred years might well have been the span of time after which men became apprehensive, as Genesis says they did become apprehensive, that unless they organised themselves into a community they might well become scattered

in the face of the earth.

Apart from the analogy of Israel in Egypt, the Scriptures are silent upon these conclusions. There is another deduction which is more definitely founded upon Scripture. Gen. 10. 11-12, states that Asshur the son of Shem left the land of Shinar (Babylon) going north to build the city Nineveh and other cities which later became important cities of the land of Assyria ("Assyria" is the Greek form of the Hebrew Asshur). This must have been at or after the separation following the abortive attempt to build the Tower. Arphaxed, Shem's firstborn, was born two years after the Flood; Asshur was a younger brother who could have been born perhaps fifty years later and set out on his mission to build Nineveh well after attaining man's estate. That could well have been about three centuries after the Flood, and Asshur one of those who separated.

About three centuries after Noah and his sons emerged from the Ark, then, it is possible that the land which later became known as Babylonia saw the arrival of a concourse of a thousand or more people looking for a new home. Where had they come from and what was their object?

Certainly not from the celebrated Mount Ararat on the frontier between Turkey and Russia. That would have involved an arduous four hundred mile journey over high and inhospitable mountains; and even if that had been the case they would not have gone another three hundred to the site of Babylon once they were on the fertile plain. In fact they would not have gone that way at all. From "Mount Ararat" the obvious fertile country to look for was in the north within sight of the mountain itself and the travellers would have finished up in what are now the Russian provinces of Azerbaijan and Armenia. And in any case "Mount Ararat" received its name—and the legend—only in the early centuries of the Christian Era, when a colony of monks near Mount Djudi in Kurdistan, displaced by the advancing hosts of Islam, found a new home in southern Russia and picked on a handy mountain near their new home as the site of the Ark's landing. They ignored the fact that prior to leaving their old home they had insisted that Mount Djudi was the place, (as it still is in the Koran), and for many centuries until at least the 19th a Jewish synagogue, a Christian church and a Moslem mosque stood on the mountain to commemorate the fact. But the legend associating Mount Djudi with the Ark goes back only until the 8th century

BC when the Israelites of the Ten Tribe captivity were settled in this area by the Assyrians. Still earlier Assyrian and Sumerian records gave the honour to "Mount Nisir" (nowadays read "Nimush"), in the mountainous district east of Babylon but omitted to explain exactly where that was. Sir Max Mallovián, one of the leading Assyriologists of the present century, insisted that the mountain indicated by these legends was somewhere in the extreme south of the land, and his surmise was vindicated when in 1965 certain Sumerian epics concerning a hitherto unknown and unsuspected city-state high up in the Zagros mountains to the east of Babylon were deciphered and the ancient land of Aratta with its mountain jutting into the Babylonian plain became known to the world. *Har-Aratta*, the mountain of Aratta, became Ar-arat, and this was the mountain recorded by the writer of Genesis 9 something like three thousand years before Agri Dagh in northern Turkey began to be called Ararat.

It is possible that Noah and his family remained in the vicinity of the mountain, now called Kuh-i-Anaran on maps, on the frontier between Iran and Iraq about a hundred and fifty miles east of Babylon, for at least the first generation, living at first "off the land" and then beginning to resume the arts of agriculture and stock-keeping. It must have been a century or more before they began to move northward along the mountains in search of a more congenial environment. Northward it had to be, for at the time immediately after the Flood the present Persian Gulf extended far to the north, beyond the position of the present city of Baghdad, and has receded slowly through the centuries leaving to-day in that area only the marshlands of southern Iraq. But about a hundred miles north of Mount Anaran, where the river Diyala debouches from the mountains and joins the river Tigris, there is a wide well-watered valley where crops can be grown and villages built. Eighty miles high up in the head waters of that river such prehistoric villages were discovered in 1948 and a three year investigation at places named Qalal Jarmo and Karim Shahir resulted in the conclusion that these were the oldest settlements of man in the Middle East. Said the excavators ("*Prehistoric investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan*," Braidwood & Howe, 1966) "*The Kurdistan foothills are the original source of the earliest village farming in the world*". "*Nowhere else in the world were the wild wheats and barley, the wild sheep, goats, pigs, cattle and horses,*

to be found together in a natural environment. This meant an entirely new way of life for all mankind." In much more recent years the development of large scale irrigation works at the junction of the rivers Diyala and the Tigris by the Iraqis has revealed more of such villages. Those villages excavated by Braidwood and Howe were in every case limited to twenty to twenty five houses and each house had six or seven rooms which would point to large families. The villagers' life was simple but civilised and knowledgeable. There were no signs of pottery; domestic vessels were made of wood but perfectly turned out as if on a lathe. The finest specimen of a wooden egg cup known came from a house there and was made by a man at a time when Noah was still alive.

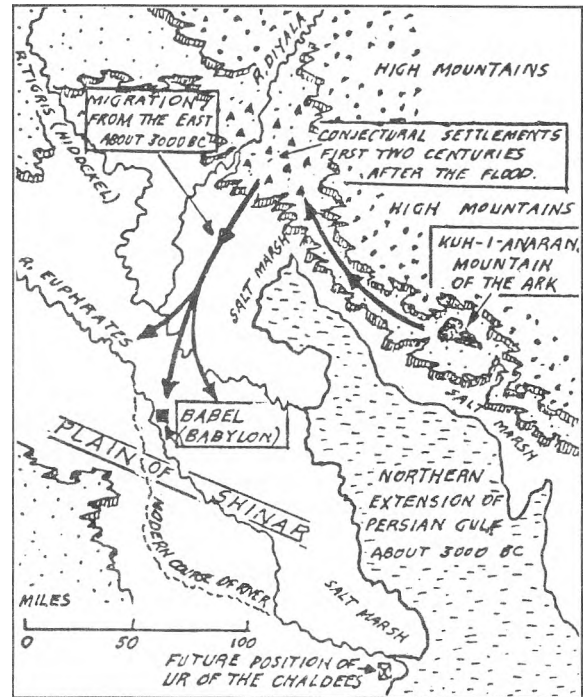
So, it may be, a century or so after leaving the Ark the pioneers with their growing families must have left the mountains and begun to build their villages and raise their children in turn in this inviting valley. But another generation came along and once again living space became an issue. The equable climate, conducive to a high birth rate, and the fact that no-one died—for they all lived some four to five hundred years in those days—meant that space for more and more villages and land for more and more crops became an issue.

So the explorers went out and came back to report that on the other side of the sea, to the south-east of their valley, there was a spacious and fertile plain where the wild wheat and barley and the wild fruit trees grew in profusion, and there was room for their descendants for many generations to come. Probably some of the older ones stayed where they were, but the bulk of them, younger and more adventurous, set out. The settlements in the Diyala river area which have been investigated in the last few years give evidence of having been inhabited for many centuries so some could have remained behind. The majority pushed on, skirting the shallow sea for another hundred miles until they arrived at a locality which was just about due west from the mountain on which their progenitors had stepped forth from the Ark.

The earliest people known to history as occupiers of that land are the Sumerians, the native name of that land being Sumir. "Shinar" in the Old Testament is the Hebrew transliteration of Sumir. The meaning of the word "Sumir" in the native language is "land of the faithful God". These men and women were worshippers of the God of Heaven, the Most High God, the God of their forefather Noah. Paganism and the

worship of many gods did not arise for another five hundred years. Until sixty or so years ago there were several theories as to where these first settlers in the plains of Iraq came from, but there is general agreement now among all authorities that the Sumerians originally came from the Iranian mountains in the east. Genesis said this right at the first; "as they journeyed from the east."

The plain was fertile and well watered, more so than the mountain region from which they had come, but it lacked many of the adjuncts to



Travels of Noah's descendants from the Ark to Babel.

daily life to which they had become accustomed in the mountains. Up there they could quarry stone and they had learned in time to make stone bowls and utensils; here in the plain there was no stone, only clay, and so they learned to make utensils of clay baked into pottery, tablets for writing, and bricks for building. That is why in the narrative of the Tower of Babel the historians say "bricks had they for stone, and slime" (bitumen) "for mortar."

Thus, perhaps three centuries after the Flood, and three thousand years before Christ, there occurred the first great crisis in the affairs of the new world, the separation which sent the sons of men wandering in all directions to people the earth, the crisis which is recorded in Genesis as the building of the Tower of Babel.

(To be continued)

## THE FRUIT OF UNFAILING LOVE

*"I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruit of his harvest . . ."* (Jer. 2. 2-3 RSV).

In picture language, Jeremiah is able to speak for one moment of the faithful and obedient bride of Exodus 19.8. When the covenant was made at the foot of the mountain, Israel was the virgin bride of her God. Before they even left the sanctuary of Sinai, they had broken their bond with the Lord in the worst possible form. They worshipped an idol.

The history of Israel is a record of disobedience and weakness. There are wonderful times of repentance and victory when God was able to work through his people. These were all too brief and too rare. From the day they left Egypt, Israel was frequently rebellious. Hosea speaks painfully of this in chapter 11. vv 1-2 (RSV). *"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me . . ."* Hosea's prophecy is based on his own experience: the relationship between God and his people is reflected in the broken marriage of Hosea and Gomer. The prophet changes the picture in chapter 11. Israel is shown as the little child who is being brought up by a tender father. But the pointed lesson of the prophet's words has not changed. That lesson comes to us afresh in the New Testament in Jesus' parable of the "Prodigal Son". It is the theme of the whole Word of God; it is the record of a Father's unfailing love. There is a Hebrew word used in the Old Testament which is difficult to translate into one English word. It occurs about 250 times and is usually translated in the Authorised Version by the word 'mercy' and occasionally by 'kindness'. But these words do not fully convey the idea which describes God's attitude to his people. It is a quality of character which is not often expressed in human behaviour. Yet it is part of the very nature of God and He longs to see it developed in the lives of his people.

The Revised Standard Version is very helpful because it almost always translates the Hebrew word '*chesed*' as 'steadfast love'. This is much nearer to the real meaning of the Hebrew and is useful because we can readily identify the Hebrew idea when we come across it in the Old Testament. The word originally meant

'keenness' or 'eagerness'. Although it has related words in Arabic, these were never developed in the same way as '*chesed*' was in the Hebrew.

The word is linked to the idea of covenant and may be described as 'covenant love'. It is a word which can relate to human friendship and is so used in 1 Samuel 20. 14 concerning David and Jonathan. Their friendship became a classic in history. It was no ordinary friendship. They might have been bitter rivals for the throne. Whether or not they pondered the situation of Jonathan dying and leaving a family at the mercy of the new king we do not know. They made a covenant with each other which would ensure the safety of their descendants. It was normal for the triumphant new royal family to destroy all possible rivals from the dynasty which had been ousted. Saul's family were liquidated except for Jonathan's son Mephibosheth.

The words of the covenant are recorded in 1 Sam. 20. 4 *"If I am still alive, show me the loyal love (chesed) of the Lord that I may die, and do not cut off your loyalty from my house for ever."* (RSV). Relationships between members of the nation of Israel involved the covenant which they made with their God. To break the covenant between each other was to break the covenant with God.

David was faithful to the covenant with Jonathan. He searched for a descendant of Jonathan (2 Sam. 9. 3). In 2 Sam. 21. 7 we are told that *"the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul's son Jonathan because of the oath of the Lord which was between them . . ."* In 2 Sam. 10. 1-2 there is another interesting use of '*chesed*' which is mutually expressed between David and the neighbouring Ammonite king. David was willing to extend that covenant friendship to the royal son. When Hanun failed to reciprocate the good will he broke the covenant and the enmity was then very bitter. As with the Gibeonites, it was not unknown for a covenant to exist between the people of Israel and their Gentile neighbours. No ill would come of it providing Israel remained faithful to the Lord.

The writings of David also provide us with further insights into the use of 'covenant love' and this is particularly so in Psalm 25. Using the Revised Standard Version it will be noted that 'steadfast love' appears in verses 6, 7 and 10.

The whole of the psalm is dealing with the covenant, graphically describing the friendship of God with his people.

There is further revelation of God's relationship to his people in Psalm 89, which opens with the words "*I will sing of thy steadfast love, O Lord, forever . . .*" Israel believed what God had said and felt secure that a descendant of David would always sit on David's throne whatever they did. They imitated the worship and destructive behaviour of the surrounding nations. God therefore allowed Israel to feel the discipline of their enemies' oppression, because of his faithful love. They went into exile. God could survive without Israel. They could not survive without him. God had made a covenant with Israel and for his part it would be kept. Israel was brought back to the land of the Promise.

At their return from Exile the Law and its interpretations took God's place. Israel believed that to keep the law was all that was needed to express their loyal love for God. They went to fanatical lengths to keep that law. But their attitude killed the Lord of glory. The 'facts' of the covenant became more important than the relationship itself. The 'marriage lines' became more important than the subsequent marriage. Except for such great men of God as Jeremiah, Israel did not cherish that relationship — they did not know God.

Perhaps the most important part of the definition of '*chesed*' is the faithfulness of God's love. That is unbreakable. Human love can be very emotional and express itself in physical terms. It can appear to be strong and beautiful. Yet it is well described in Hosea 6. 4 as being like the morning cloud and the early dew. It rapidly evaporates. Two verses further on we have the passage which Jesus quoted, recorded in Matt. 9. 13. God did not want formal ritual but

the everlasting love of his people; for himself and for each other. "*I desired steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*" God's love for Israel was unbreakable. Israel might be unfaithful to the covenant but God could not. In spite of all they did, God remained faithful to them and some of them remained faithful to him.

This 'covenant love' exists within the framework of the relationship between God and his people now, the followers of the Lord Jesus. It is part of the more comprehensive word 'grace'. Although 'grace' has a more extensive meaning than 'chesed' it contains the same idea of everlasting faithful love.

It is possible for the Church of God to suffer from the same illusion as Israel of old. They placed the ritual of sacrifice and the minute keeping of the Law before their great and loving God himself. So with many who claim to follow Jesus. The understanding of God's Word, the revelation of his purposes, has become more important than the close bond between themselves and their God. Such an attitude wrecks the real relationship with God and is unfruitful however pious and knowledgeable Christians appear to be.

The surety of our covenant is with God. No matter what experience a Christian passes through, he can be absolutely sure that God will be faithful. He will never leave us nor forsake us. His love is really strong and beautiful. And He will express that love most fully in the moments of greatest pain and trial. Our relationship with God must rise above everything in our lives and it must remain firm and strong. We can put it at risk. From God's side of the partnership He will always be the solid rock on which we can utterly depend.

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### Note on Matt. 10. 8

*"Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons."* (Matt. 10. 8).

This is a point not generally noticed, that the twelve disciples had power to raise the dead. One wonders if they ever used it. There is no record of any of them having done so before Pentecost. St. Peter raised Dorcas to life afterwards (Acts 10) but this is the only recorded

instance. (Eutychus, who fell out of the window when Paul was preaching at Troas, was not dead. Paul revived him but this was not a raising of the dead). It may well have been that many more people in Judea and Galilee experienced a revival of life after death at the hands of Jesus and perhaps his disciples than those whose names the Gospel records have preserved.

### Note on World Pollution

*"Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land"* (Isa. 5. 8. RSV).

The ravaging of the countryside in the interests of urbanisation appeared to be going on even so far back as the days of Isaiah, but most certainly not on the scale that it is to-day. It was recently declared that in Great Britain alone 50,000 acres of good agricultural land are disappearing each year under roads, houses, factories and so on. A few farmers protest but nobody takes any notice; if anyone is more than usually vocal the objections are met by that inane cliché "you can't stand in the way of progress". Progress to what? In this case, most certainly to disaster, for the very life of man depends upon that which the ground brings forth and as the area available for food production diminishes so does the difficulty and cost of providing for the growing population increase. That lost 50,000 acres, intensively worked, would provide food enough to sustain at least half a million people and enough oxygen to meet the breathing needs of nearly as many. Of little use, either, to say that there are plenty of open spaces elsewhere in the world to furnish all the food and oxygen we are likely to need; food coming from overseas has to be paid for and there is already alarm being voiced that the world's oxygen resources are being depleted so fast by the modern rate of fuel consumption and by other industrial processes that there is a very real danger we may suffocate even before we starve. About thirty years ago a learned Society listened to a thesis which showed that at the present rate of depletion this lamentable crisis is calculated to occur in or about AD 2025, which is now not so far distant. Almost every part of the world is in the way of becoming heavily industrialised, and, with the modern craze for indulgent and wasteful luxury living, the process

of despoiling Nature irrespective of Nature's importance in the life cycle of man seems set to go on and intensify everywhere.

There is a very general failure on the part of the world's leading men, political and commercial, to realise how very delicately balanced is the maintenance of human life upon earth. What is called the "balance of Nature" is adjusted to suit the needs of the human race. If the earth's distance from the sun was only 10% less than it is the whole of the American continent except Canada and Patagonia would be uninhabitable, and so would Africa, India and most of China. Only 20% of the present inhabited area would support life. If on the other hand, it was 10% greater, then Canada, Alaska, Siberia and most of Europe would be too cold for life. The intensity of full sunlight suitable for plant growth and tolerable to men must be not less than 10 and not more than 20 units; what we get is about 15, just mid-way. To produce the right amount of air, maintain the best ratio between land and sea area, and afford a force of gravity which allows for normal activity, labour and movement, the earth must be between 6,200 and 10,000 miles in diameter; it is actually 8,000 miles, just midway. These limits were fixed by the Creator for the orderly life of mankind and so was the balance of materials and products which the earth affords. It may well turn out that when man turns away from that which Nature provides and tries to manufacture his own synthetic way of life he is in process of committing slow racial suicide. Nylon replaces cotton only because there is money in it. Synthetic rubber made from oil replaces the juice of the rubber tree for the same reason. One day, maybe, we will have to get back to Nature. It may not be without reason that Isaiah foresees a time when man will not only build his own house and live in it, but also plant his own vineyard and eat the fruit of that.

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"Whatsoever things are true, . . . think on these things." It is more painful to think about these things than to think about what we know, about what is old in our experience, because immediately we begin to think God's thoughts after him we have to bring concentration to bear, and that takes time and discipline.

(Oswald Chambers).

"Great havoc is said to have been occasioned in Eden when man's first sinful parents knew that they were naked, but almost greater havoc seems to have been occasioned right through history through the devil drawing the attention of the righteous to the fact that they were clothed with righteousness.

(Rev. Paul Gliddon).

## PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

He first appears in those early days of the first Christian community when the believers had "all things common" but were beginning to find that sincerity of purpose in their sharing was not enough; a certain amount of system and order was necessary if anomalies were to be avoided and all who were in need to have their needs equitably met. So a working party of seven was appointed to oversee and administer this aspect of the community's activities. Men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit, is the definition in Acts 6 relating to these men. Philip was one of them, probably a young man in his twenties, zealous and energetic, highly esteemed by the brethren, and with considerable potential evangelistic ability. Whether or not he had been a follower during the lifetime of Jesus is not known, but the balance of probability is against. There had been a massive gathering of converts to the original little band of Resurrection days, and although that momentous event was still not more than a year or so in the past, by far the majority of the believers had joined since then, and it is a virtual certainty that there were men of ability among such who would speedily be marked out for special service. Thus did Philip enter upon his life of service for Christ. An active member of a virile and rapidly growing Church, he found plenty to do. *"And the word of God increased and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith"* (Acts 8. 7) is how Luke's record describes the situation. The Sanhedrin, following the advice of Gamaliel (Acts 5. 34-40) had abandoned their endeavours to stifle the new movement; for a little while the gospel of Jesus the Risen One could be proclaimed without let or hindrance, and converts were being gathered in by the thousand. It must have seemed to those ardent young workers that they were going to progress unmolested from triumph to triumph until they had fulfilled the commission the Lord had given them, and carried the message of his Kingdom to the ends of the earth.

Then the tide turned. Christianity was getting altogether too popular and the more orthodox of the Jews became restive. The while it could be considered merely a sect of Judaism it could perhaps be tolerated, but it was becoming obvious now that it was not going to be a sect, it was taking on the form of a new faith, one that

would challenge Judaism and perhaps destroy it. So Philip's colleague Stephen, the leader of the seven, was apprehended on a trumped-up charge, arraigned before the Sanhedrin, and put to death—the first Christian in history to die for his faith. That aroused the persecuting ardour of Saul the Pharisee, afterwards himself to espouse the faith and in his turn meet the death of a martyr; at the moment, however, his intervention sparked off the first wave of organised persecution of the Christian church and the halcyon days of care-free fellowship in the faith were gone, never to return.

The believers in Jerusalem did one of two things; they either went underground, or they scattered away from the city. It is evident that one of Philip's temperament would not long endure a passive role "underground"; he elected instead to go away, to a place where his evangelistic fervour might find an outlet. What better choice than Samaria, only a few miles north of Jerusalem, still in the Roman province of Judea but free from the power of the priests and the Sanhedrin, for "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (John 4. 9). *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them"* (Acts 8. 4-8). His ministry met with instant success, and something of the enthusiastic scenes which for the past year or so had been seen in Jerusalem now began to be re-enacted in Samaria. In fact, there was much that was reminiscent of the ministry of Jesus, for at the instance of Philip the lame and the paralysed were healed and demons cast out. It would seem that what Peter and John had done immediately after Pentecost in Jerusalem Philip was now doing in Samaria; the people wholeheartedly *"believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ"* and demonstrated the sincerity and fulness of their conversion by undergoing baptism. There was even a false Messiah, a man named Simon—known in later tradition as Simon Magus around whom many legends have gathered—who himself abandoned the claims by which he had long deceived the Samaritans, became a convert and was baptised. How long this revival led by Philip lasted there is no means of knowing, but that it was a most effective one and constituted the

second significant development in the history of the Church there is no doubt.

There was one important missing element; despite their sincerity of conversion and their baptism, the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon them, and in this they were in the same position as the Apostles and the rest of the hundred and twenty original believers had been prior to the Day of Pentecost. It seems as if some outwardly perceptible demonstration had to be the portion of these Samaritans as it had been with their predecessors. The account in Acts 8 relates that when the Apostles at Jerusalem were apprised of the results accruing from Philip's work they despatched Peter & John, who, having arrived and seen the position for themselves, engaged in prayer for the conferment of the Holy Spirit upon the converts, laid their hands upon them in the traditional manner, "*and they received the Holy Spirit*" (ch. 8. 17). It looks as if there was a visible manifestation of much the same nature as that which characterised the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and for the same reason, to convince these very immature converts of the reality of the experience. There is no indication when this took place and in fact the visit of Peter and John might have been a considerable time afterwards and perhaps even after Philip had left Samaria to execute his next commission.

That commission had to do with the Ethiopian eunuch. An angel of the Lord (not "the" angel as in the A.V.) appeared to the evangelist and told him to take a journey towards Gaza along the high road which ran south from Judea into Egypt. It is evident that by now he had returned to Jerusalem from Samaria since this was his starting point. No indication of the purpose of his journey was given; he was merely to set out along the road and head southwards. It was thus that he met the Ethiopian eunuch, somewhere on the desert road near Gaza. An important man in his own country, steward of the palace of his queen, a man of "great authority" as Luke puts it, he had come to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple and now was on his way home in his chariot—incidentally this is the only mention of a wheeled vehicle in the New Testament. He was evidently a Jew of the Dispersion; probably his family had lived in Ethiopia for several generations, and like Jews everywhere had come to occupy positions of influence and trust. The Ethiopia here referred to was not the present country of that name but a land on the upper Nile more or less in the vicinity of the present

Assouan Dam, adjoining the southern frontier of Egypt and often involved politically with Egypt. Ancient historians say that for a period it was ruled by a line of woman monarchs known as the *Kandaka*, a title like Pharaoh or Cæsar, the "Candace" of Acts 8. This eunuch was an educated as well as God-fearing man, and now as he reclined at ease in his probably sumptuous chariot with servants to attend to the driving and to his needs, he was spending the hours of a certainly wearisome journey by reading from a scroll of the prophecy of Isaiah.

This gave Philip his opportunity. Trudging along by the wayside, he either heard the eunuch's voice as the chariot overtook him or else perceived the nature of the parchment he was reading. At once his evangelistic instinct came to the top and in a flash he knew why he had been sent on this mission. "*Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot*" (ch. 8. 29). With the freedom of approach so customary in the East he called out to the eunuch asking if he understood what he was reading. "How can I, except some man should guide me?" was the response. High official though he was, he manifested true humility in being prepared thus to accept guidance from an unknown wayside traveller; he invited Philip to join him in the chariot and showed him what he had been reading.

No better passage for the evangelist's purpose could have presented itself. The eunuch had been perusing Isaiah's 53rd chapter and pondering within himself as to its meaning. "Of whom speaketh the prophet this" he queried, "of himself, or of some other man"? Beginning at the same Scripture, Philip "preached unto him Jesus", It takes little imagination to visualise the nature of that discourse, the fervour in the evangelist's voice, the rapt attention of the other man. In that day the eunuch became conscious of a new revelation, an understanding of the Scriptures he had never known before, a meaning in life he had not dreamed existed. In that moment he found Christ, and became Christ's man. That he was a man of positive convictions and accustomed to quick decisions is shown by the immediate sequel; as they progressed on their journey the charioteer encountered one of the many rapid streams which cross the road on their way to the sea, and immediately the Ethiopian saw the possibility. "*See here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised?*" Verse 37 of this chapter in which Philip is quoted

as responding "*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*" is missing in the oldest manuscripts, including Sinaitic, Vatican and Alexandrian, appearing only in 8th century MSS, from which it is surmised that this verse was inserted by some zealous sectaries anxious to regularise the eunuch's baptism on the basis of good Church doctrine, but it is quoted in the writings of Irenæus (AD 178) and Cyprian (AD 250) so that it may well have appeared in the earliest versions and later lost. In any case, Philip must have said something like this in response to the plea; the eunuch was duly baptised, "*and he went on his way rejoicing.*" Nothing more is known of him but there can be no doubt that he returned to his own country a missionary for Christ and must have had much to do with the establishment and growth of the Church in his land.

The instrument of his salvation was already away on the next assignment. A rather strange word; "*and when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more . . . but Philip was found at Azotus; and passing through he preached in all the cities until he came to Cæsarea*". The words "caught away" are from *harpazo*, which in the N.T. generally has the meaning of being suddenly and violently snatched away (as in 1 Thess. 4. 17 "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds") although the basic principle is that of being taken by force. Agreeably to normal N.T. usage, the expression here could mean that Philip was miraculously and instantaneously translated by Divine power to Azotus (Ashdod) which could have been ten or fifteen miles distant, and there would be nothing incredible in this at a time when "miracles" of all kinds were commonplace. It would however be quite consistent with the phrase to take it to mean that under the influence of the Holy Spirit Philip was seized with an overpowering impulse to make his way at once to Azotus and so found himself there with no clear idea of how he came to be there or why he had come. In either case, he was now in Azotus and immediately began to preach Christ, continuing thus from town to town along the sea-coast until eventually he came to Cæsarea, fifty miles north of Azotus,

and the political capital from which the Roman governors ruled Judea. Here he seems to have settled. Nothing more is known of him until twenty-five years later when Paul and his party, en route to Jerusalem for the last time, stayed in his house for a period. There seems little doubt though that during those years he must have travelled up and down the coastal towns of Judea, always an active evangelist, preaching the faith and establishing converts, with Cæsarea his permanent headquarters.

The last glimpse we have of Philip is on the occasion of Paul's visit. Luke was one of the party and he must have acquired a great deal of his material for the early part of "Acts" from the evangelist; it is Luke too who gives him this title, here in Acts 21. 8. Luke also tells us that Philip now had four daughters "which did prophesy"; this must mean that they also, though still in their twenties, were preachers of the word and evidently associated with their father in his ministry. Something of the evangelist's fiery zeal and inexhaustible capacity for hard work must have reappeared in his family.

There the Scriptures leave Philip the evangelist, still in active service. Greek tradition has it that he eventually became Bishop of Tralles, not far from Ephesus in Roman Asia, but Latin tradition insists that he died at Cæsarea. The latter is more likely to be correct. Philip was not possessed of the urge, like Paul, to scour seas and mountains in far distant lands to preach Christ to the nations; he found abundant scope for his missionary zeal in the highlands and the valleys and the coastlands of Judea, perhaps never in all his life going more than fifty miles from the city where first he had accepted Christ and entered the fellowship of the Church and served awhile as one of the first seven deacons. The importance of his life's work is indicated by the title awarded him by Paul and Luke; the work of an evangelist in Paul's list of the Divine helps in Eph. 4. 11 comes next in order after apostles and prophets but before pastors and teachers. He is one of the only two—Timothy being the other—to whom the title is given in the New Testament. Perhaps that is a measure of the effectiveness of the life's ministry of this zealous and warm-hearted young soldier of Jesus Christ.

## THE PRINCIPLES OF DIVINE DELIVERANCE

*"Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distress . . . ."*

The noble strains of the 107th Psalm come very readily to the mind as soon as one thinks of Divine intervention. That song of praise is a wonderful rhapsody, with the goodness of God for its theme and the story of faithless Israel as its background. Time after time they left him and went their way, but just as soon as they manifested sincere repentance and cried unto him for succour, his ear was open to their plea and He reached down from Heaven to save them.

It is in the history of Israel that we discern the principles upon which God acts, the stories of stalwart heroes of faith, and too, of men whose faith was not so deeply rooted but who called upon God when the experiences of life had taught the needed lesson. There is much in the way of material to be explored in the course of our investigation.

It is sometimes suggested that the purpose of Armageddon is to reduce mankind to a condition of utter despair in which they will be ready to accept proffered help from Heaven to restore order and tranquillity upon earth, and that, in the final phase of this time of trouble, Israel, regathered in unbelief, hard pressed by the nations of the world, will be miraculously delivered by direct intervention of God; that this miracle will open their eyes and will produce an immediate national conversion. There is another factor that should be taken into account—stated here as a general principle, it is that *God can only deliver when there is faith and belief*. Before Israel can be physically delivered, they must be nationally converted.

The key scriptures are Rom. 10. 21 and Heb. 3. 18-19. *"All day long,"* declares God, *"all day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people."* Paul is quoting from the 65th chapter of Isaiah, a chapter in which the prophet shows how impossible it is for God to deal with a people who deliberately turn away. The writer to the Hebrews, in his mournful recapitulation of the shortcomings of Israel, declared sadly *"We see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."* (Heb. 3. 19). As one reads the stirring story of speedy entrance to the land of milk and honey, and how quickly the veil of unbelief blotted out the fair vision of Canaan, one senses something of the tragedy which overtook this people who

failed to realise that the first essential to the receiving of Divine bounty is—faith!

Right at the outset this principle was laid down. Israel in the wilderness stood in need of deliverance from the native tribes of Canaan. God promised them that they would have no need to fight; He himself would cast out those nations, *if Israel would manifest faith and act accordingly* (Exod. 23. 20-28). The long story of war and fighting which characterised Israel's history both before and after they gained access to the Promised Land is a sorry commentary upon the high hopes with which they set forward after the signal overthrow of the Egyptians in the Red Sea. They "stood still" to "see the salvation of God" on that occasion (Exod. 14. 10-31), they had faith to cross Jordan at the time appointed, when the river was held back (Josh. 3. 9-17), and "by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days" (Heb. 12, 30). Nevertheless the people generally were always hovering on the edge of unbelief (see Num. 14. 10 and compare with verse 31), and apart from these three incidents they were normally in a condition of doubt at best and frank rebellion at worst; their hearts were not right before God and so He could not give them that free and open passage into the land which would have been possible had they taken him at his word.

The next striking illustration is that provided by the story of the Judges. For several centuries after their settlement in Canaan, the children of Israel were ruled by "judges," national heroes who came to the fore in times of crisis and became the means of deliverance. Upon each such occasion the misery and calamity of Israel is said to have been due to their apostasy from God, and at each time, *except one*, we are told that when they realised their undone state, and *cried unto the Lord*, deliverance came; but not before they had thus demonstrated their repentance. Quite soon after their entrance into the land, it is said that *"the children of Israel did evil . . . therefore the anger of the Lord was hot . . . and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia . . . and when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer . . . Othniel . . ."* (Jud. 3. 5-11). So the land had rest forty years. *"and the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord . . . (and) served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. "But when the*

*children of Israel cried unto the Lord*, the Lord raised them up a deliverer. Ehud . . ." (Jud. 3. 22-30). This time the land had rest fourscore years, but again the sad tale was repeated, and after Israel's repentance and once more crying to the Lord, Deborah and Barak were raised up (Jud. 4. 1-26); and after Barak there was Gideon (Jud. 6. 7 & 8); and after Gideon came the time of Jephthah, when Israel "cried unto the Lord, saying, we have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim" (Jud. 10. 10); and after Jephthah the most renowned of all the Judges, Samson.

With Samson there was a difference. It was not said of him, as it was said of all others, that Israel cried unto the Lord, and He raised a deliverer. Israel had groaned under the yoke of the Philistines forty years (Jud. 13. 1), but there is no indication that there was any true repentance or that they had come before God in faith for promised help in time of need. So it is not surprising, perhaps, that Samson, for all his boasted prowess, utterly failed to deliver Israel. He judged Israel twenty years (Jud. 15. 20), but during all that time the Philistine yoke lay heavy on Israel, and at Samson's death Israel was still in bondage. Samson had not wrought any deliverance. Surely this is significant. The five judges who went forward on a basis of national repentance brought deliverance. The sixth, in some respects the mightiest of them all, failed to achieve any release; and this was the occasion when the people had failed to "cry unto the Lord."

There are several incidents in the later history of Israel which throw further light upon the operation of this principle. In the days of Samuel the Ark of the Covenant, rashly taken into battle against the Philistines, had been lost to the enemy (1 Sam. 4. 17), and after its recovery, in chastened repentant mood, the people of Israel "gathered together to Mizpeh . . . and said there, 'We have sinned against the Lord'" (1 Sam. 7. 6). It was in this condition of mind that they heard of the renewed aggression of their enemies, and were afraid, and called upon Samuel "Cease not to cry unto the Lord of God for us, that he will save us out of the hands of the Philistines" (vs.8). Their newborn, fledgling faith was honoured, and the story tells how the Lord thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines and discomfited them.

Centuries later the same problem confronted Jehoshaphat king of Judah. The story recounted

in the 20th chapter of 2 Chronicles is eloquent as it describes the complete faith of Judah and Judah's king. "*Ye shall not need to fight in this battle. Stand still, and see the salvation of your God.*" Judah was saved without the necessity of striking a single blow in their own defence. Perhaps some recollection of this story stirred in the mind of king Hezekiah as he went up to the Temple and spread Sennacherib's ultimatum before the Lord—because it was the Lord's business and He was quite able to defend his own people (Isa. chap. 37). Once again a right faith attitude triumphed and the city and people were saved, *because they believed.*

There is one very striking case of personal deliverance recorded in the Old Testament. It is that of Jonah. Whilst in a rebellious frame of mind, deliberately refusing to carry out the Divine commission, he became involved in what seemed to be the prelude to certain death. There was no apparent escape from his terrible plight. Deliverance came at length, but only *after* he had repented and cried to the Lord. Hear his own words "When my soul fainted within me *I remembered the Lord; and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple . . . I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.*" (Jonah 2, 7-9).

*"And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon dry land."*

It is worthy of note that at times of dispensational changes in the development of the Divine Plan, there have been further instances of the fact that belief and faith are necessary to salvation. At the time of the Flood, when the "world that was" came to an end, deliverance was dependent upon this attitude of heart. Noah was a preacher of righteousness to a world of ungodly men (2 Pet. 2. 5). Quite evidently his message was not believed, there was no repentance and calling upon God, and the day of opportunity passed. The return from the Babylonian captivity was marked by a similar call to repentance, heeded by the few and ignored by the many, and only those who believed undertook the journey and were delivered. "Thus saith the Lord, 'After seventy years be accomplished at Babylon 'I will visit you . . . then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you . . . and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive'" (Jer. 29. 10-14). The inference here is quite definite that restoration is conditional upon

repentance, and Ezra 1. 5 and 3. 1, tell how sincere was the new found faith of the returned captives.

That return from Babylonian captivity was a great event in the chosen people's history—but there is a greater one yet to come, still conditional upon the same requirement—prior conversion. Paul alludes to it when he says of Israel in the latter days "And they also, *if they abide not still in unbelief*, shall be grafted in, for God is able to graff them in again" (Rom. 11. 23). As with the Church of this Gospel Age, so with that earthly people which will be gathered for God's service at the end of the Age. After all, this is but the principle expounded by Peter at Pentecost when he called upon his countrymen to "*repent . . . and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out*" (Acts 3. 19) and by Paul when he said "*If thou shalt confess . . . and shalt believe . . . thou shalt be saved, for . . . with the mouth confession is made unto salvation*" (Rom. 10. 9-10).

This is why Jesus declared "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3. 14-15). It was belief, faith, that enabled the dying Israelite in the wilderness to look up to the brazen serpent, held aloft in the sight of all men, and feel new life coursing through his veins as his gaze lighted upon that glittering symbol. So he that would taste of God's deliverance must first believe and "cry unto the Lord" in faith.

Perhaps this explains why Jesus could do no mighty work in his native district. The people there needed his ministrations just as much as in other parts. His desire and willingness to minister his healing power to them could not have been less than elsewhere. Yet we read "He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief" (Mark 6. 5-6). There is only one thing proof against the power of Jesus—unbelief.

Unbelief—unbelief—unbelief. Forever standing as a barrier which must be broken down before there can be deliverance. Mankind in the next Age must believe before they can even make a start upon the way that leads to deliverance—for the mere fact of awakening from death is not deliverance at all; it is but a revivifying and a taking up of human experience at the point where it was left. So the mere gathering of a chosen people into the land of Promise at the

Time of the End can achieve nothing in the plans of God unless that people be truly converted and devoted to him, that in them and through them He may reveal his power to all nations. It was that kind of regathering that Jeremiah saw when he said "*They shall come with weeping, and with supplication will I lead them,*" (Jer. 31 9). Zechariah speaks of a great mourning "in that day," as the "mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon" (Zech. 12. 9-11). This mourning of the End Time is over One slain, One Who was pierced, and is an indication of repentance and remorse, and an acceptance of the One Who had been rejected.

The Divine Law respecting this matter was laid down for all time when the Lord spoke with Moses on the Mount. Faithfully did Moses transmit his Lord's words. The 26th chapter of Leviticus tells plainly of the blessings that are contingent upon faith, blessings which include deliverance from enemies. It tells also of the woes that come as the result of unbelief, woes that include captivity in the land of the enemy. All through that chapter no hint is given that deliverance can be secured on any other basis than prior faith.

At the first Advent Jewry demonstrated the opposition position. They stood in sore need of deliverance; they ardently desired deliverance; but they were still a faithless and unbelieving generation, and the deliverance they could have had passed them by. "*How often,*" cried Jesus, *would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings—and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.*" (Matt. 23. 28). "The days shall come," He said, "when thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee . . . and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee . . . *because* thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19. 43-44). That time of distress which closed the Jewish Age was a figure of the greater Time of Trouble which closes the Gospel Age. Just as those believers who formed the nucleus of the Christian Church were saved out of the destruction and captivity which befell Jerusalem and its people in A.D. 70, so the "people of faith" at this end of the Age will experience Divine deliverance from their trouble and stand forth revealed as the earthly people who are to carry Divine law to the nations. "For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, *to save them that believe*" (1 Cor. 1. 21).



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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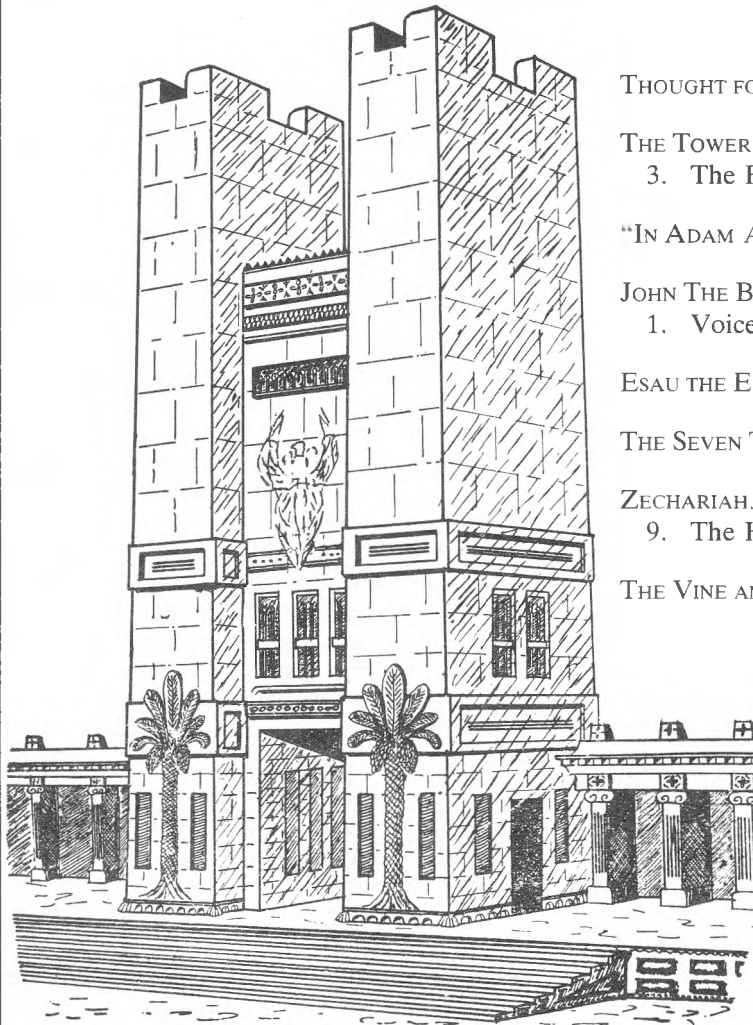
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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

*“Command your children to observe, to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you: because it is your life”* (Deut. 32. 47).

It is an amazing thing that many who attach importance to an accurate understanding of the laws which govern the particular science or trade which is to be their life's occupation consider the study of Christian doctrine unimportant and its relevance to the Christian life negligible. A student will go through University or a budding doctor walk the hospitals with the object of thoroughly understanding the underlying principles of his chosen vocation but many a youthful Christian—and older ones too—will dismiss real study of the basic doctrines of the Faith as an out-dated survival of old-time piety and contend quite blissfully that so long as he believes in Jesus and enjoys a hymn-singing session he is going to be all right. Of course he is not; Moses knew that when he exhorted Israel, almost with his dying breath, in the words of this text. *“Understand the law”* he thundered *“because it is your life”*. So it must be with us; the purpose of God in creation, the avenue through which He will eventually bring all the repentant to himself, the nature and scope of Divine

judgment on sin, the reason why Christ must needs die to make human salvation possible, the object and utility of the permission of evil, all this and much more must be impressed upon our minds if we are going to be of any use in this Age or the next as ambassadors for Christ. There are far too many who do not consider it important what they believe upon such subjects so long as they love the Lord and fellowship with others of like mind, and so they go on through life in an atmosphere of good fellowship and happy faces without giving much heed to the fact that we are surrounded by a despairing world which is rapidly going to pieces and can only be saved by these same good purposes of God. If the Divine intention for us is that we shall stand around the celestial Throne in white robes playing harps or blowing trumpets to all eternity that kind of apprenticeship might be sufficient for the purpose, but that is not his intention. We have in the future life to bring the message of salvation to a great many who have never as yet heard it and we have to get ready for that duty now; without knowledge we shall never do it. Observe, do, this law; because it is your life!

#### A note for Belfast readers

We are advised by the Dick Saunders “Way of Life Ministry” of Hailsham, East Sussex, that a reader of the “Monthly” is sending them what is evidently their own personal copy, enclosed in our original envelope, addressed “Freepost” and without affixing postage stamps. Neither they nor we have any clue to the sender, except that the second postmark is Belfast, and since the “Way of Life Ministry” does not operate a Freepost system they have to pay double postage on receipt. This is our only way of asking this reader to desist from this practice. We are able to send the “Monthly” free of charge as is our usual custom to the “Way of Life” friends as and when they desire it, and it is not right to involve them in paying extra in this manner and serves no useful purpose. It is possible that the unknown sender does not realise that the Post Office Freepost system

may only be used when the relevant body has so arranged it for their own purposes — it is not proper for anyone to avoid paying postage by merely adding “Freepost” to the address. Our friends will be greatly obliged if the sender will cease from doing this and so avoid this minor interruption to their normal Christian work.

### Gone from us



Sis Ada Poole (London)



*“Till the day break, and the shadows flee away.”*

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

### 3. The Building of the Tower

*“And they said ‘Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and slime (bitumen) had they for mortar. And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” (Gen. 11. 3–4).*

A broad, level stretch of greensward dotted about with date palms and bordered on its western side by the smoothly flowing waters of the Euphrates. That was the spot upon which the builders decided for the execution of their design. Untouched as yet by the hand of man, undefiled by buildings and unblemished by cultivation or irrigation, it was virgin ground, a fitting site for the city they would build as the centre and the rallying point of the society they would now set up. Here they would settle, in this delightful plain where the sun shone warmly all day and the blue waters of the ever-flowing rivers brought forth vast yields of rich golden grain and delicious summer fruits. Here they would become a mighty people, ruling from a city which should become the centre and leader of the world that should be, for they surely must have realised that inevitably, as mankind increased, the human race would spread farther and farther out as successive generations increased and colonised the earth.

Was there another motive, one that might be a little more creditable, although, as things turned out, a mistaken one? This tower which they commenced to build was the first of many which afterwards sprang up in the land. Every city and town of any size had one and the ruins of many survive to-day — that of Ur of the Chaldees is the best preserved and the most famous. The native name for these erections was “ziggurat” and that is the name by which they are known to-day. The meaning of “ziggurat” in the Sumerian language, the language of the builders, is “mountain peak”, and it is clear that they were intended to represent, in each place of building, the “Mount of the East”, the sacred mountain on which, according to their legends, the Ark had rested and from which their ancestors had come. Each ziggurat was crowned with a temple pointing towards the sacred mountain so that the priests and worshippers could face in that direction much as the Jews faced towards Jerusalem and the Muslims to Mecca. Now if

this was so, since at that early time there was no paganism, and all men worshipped only one God, the Most High God—this has been established by archeological exploration during the last half century—as had their progenitor Noah, one purpose of the building could have been to constitute a centre for world worship, again like the Temple at Jerusalem much later on.

Recent researches by Iraqi archaeologists into those early times has led to the discovery that Babel, the Gate of the Gods, was originally in the singular, “the Gate of God”. This is significant: only when polytheism developed some five centuries later did men change the name to include the gods of their own creating. Later on they built a temple hard by the Tower—the one in which the golden vessels of the Temple at Jerusalem were deposited in the days of Daniel—and the name of that temple, which it still bore in the time of Daniel, was *E-sagila*, “temple of the great God”.

It has been observed in recent years that the orientation of the Tower of Babel is such that the sanctuary on its summit pointed directly to the Mount of the East, and that the same is true of the ziggurat of the ancient city of Nippur (Calneh of Gen. 10) sixty miles from Babylon. Babylon became the holy city of the sons of Shem and Nippur of the sons of Ham. The picture is that of a human community which knew only one God, the God of Noah.

And therein lay the snare. This was the beginning of a process which would, and did, eventually lead them away from God. “*Let us make us a name*” they said. They would become a mighty people, arrogating the right to rule and control all men everywhere. “*This they began to do*” said the Lord. “*and now nothing will be restrained from them which they begin to do*”. So he nipped the project in the bud.

God’s command to the sons of Noah after the Flood was “*be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth . . . bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.*” God had made a covenant with them, one that was to be for the benefit of their seed after them. (Gen. 9. 9). Quite evidently men were conscious of certain obligations toward God, and particularly that they were to spread over the face of the earth in order that it be adequately populated and brought into subjection. It is a strange thing that

just as the first man failed to carry out his commission to subdue the earth and chose instead the way of selfishness, so did these. Rather than separate in obedience to God's command they elected to remain together and trust in their own strength and prowess to hold their own.

This mutual exhortation "*let us make brick*" seems as though they were embarking on something new, a state of life they had not hitherto practiced. If at this point several centuries had elapsed since the Flood, it is highly probable that the human community had long since progressed beyond "living off the land", getting their subsistence from the wild products of the fields and forests, and were beginning to rear sheep and cattle on the one hand and growing crops on the other. It is almost certain that the journey from the mountain of the Ark to the Plain of Shinar was accomplished in a series of stages, successive generations moving on from time to time to more spacious and more congenial territories, eventually getting free of the mountains and emerging upon this fertile plain which offered so much more in the spheres of living space and crop-growing potential. It may also have indicated a realisation that here was a land which would allow them to cease their wandering and settle down for quite a few generations to come. The expression "*let us build us a city*" would seem to indicate something like this. They would be a settled community with a permanent home. Nomad peoples have no use for bricks and building materials. They live in tents and move easily from place to place following their flocks and herds wherever fresh pasturage may be found. An agricultural people, on the contrary, tends to live in permanent dwellings, and with such communities it is not long before towns and cities make their appearance. It was so with Cain and Abel; Abel was a keeper of flocks and Cain a tiller of the ground; and it was Cain who built the first city. Here again history repeated itself in a remarkable manner. The sons of Shem for a number of generations after the Flood were keepers of flocks and covered all Syria and Arabia with their encampments; to this day many of their descendants follow the same calling. The sons of Ham on the other hand, remained as tillers of the soil, developed a highly organised agricultural communal life, built great cities, and became famous for their artistic and industrial skill. It is hard to resist the thought that the

family of Ham must have been the leading influence in this proposal to build a city and a tower and such conclusion is reinforced by the fact that after the disruption that followed the attempt, the families of Shem and Japheth left the plain of Shinar; the family of Ham remained and populated the land.

It is not likely that the old tradition claiming the Old Testament hero Nimrod as the leader of the project has any foundation. Josephus in his history (*Ant. 1. 4. 2*) does so state and his assertion has been repeated by every commentator up to half a century ago. Gen. 10 declares that Nimrod's "*Kingdom was the beginning of Babel, Erech, Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar*" (not "the beginning of his kingdom was" . . . as in the A.V., although the inference is the same); it was another three centuries before these cities had their rise. It is very possible though that when the Tower was eventually built and completed, as it certainly was at an unknown time after its original overthrow as related in Genesis, that Nimrod could have been involved, and this would then coincide with the known times of the rise of these cities, all of which have had their sites excavated in modern times. This could easily be the source of Josephus' reference. The rather scornful remark, probably by a later copyist or translator, that the name meant "confusion", because the Lord there confounded their language, was based upon the Hebrew word "*balbal*" which does mean confusion but Babel was named fifteen centuries before there was any Hebrew language and in the native language the word "Bab-el" meant the "Gate of God" and was an expression of reverence of the Most High God and nothing else. It is true that Babylonian legends of the 20th century B.C. do credit their god Marduk with having built the Tower but by that time the Biblical Nimrod had been dead for five hundred years and had in the meantime become a god and the principal god of Babylon.

For many centuries the bricks of the ancient Babylonian cities have been used by the people of later generations for new buildings. It is said that the present city of Baghdad is almost entirely built of bricks taken from the old ruins, and that the names of Babylonian and Assyrian kings well known to Bible readers and students of history are continually met with, stamped on the bricks of which private houses in Baghdad are built. So thoroughly did those grandsons and great-grandsons of Noah burn their bricks that

there is no reasonable doubt many exist to-day built into the structure of modern buildings. Babylon has been a brick quarry for generations, and such is the excellence of the bricks that are still dug from the ruins that early in the 20th century the market price of bricks from the ruins of Babylon stood at a considerably higher price than modern bricks manufactured in Iraq.

Now about this city and tower which they so rashly essayed to build. First of all, the Hebrew text does not justify the translator's italics, "whose top *may reach* unto heaven." The expression only means a tower whose top should reach into the heavens, that is to say, a tower to be celebrated for its extreme height, a height so great that it would seem as if it penetrated into the upper skies. If the records of the Greek travellers who saw the Tower are correct, the builders certainly achieved their ambition. It is possible that the height of their edifice was not equalled by man until the building of modern "sky-scrapers" in New York.

It is impossible to determine just what the Tower looked like when it was built. There are several descriptions in the writings of classical authors who either saw it for themselves in the fifth century B.C., or who copied the descriptions of those who had, but these describe the Tower as it appeared in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and onward. Since, however, the Babylonians had a rooted objection to altering the structures of their sacred edifices, contenting themselves with repairing, rebuilding and embellishing them as king succeeded king, it may well be that the original Tower presented much the same general appearance as that seen and described by Herodotus in 440 B.C. but without the elaborate retinue of subsidiary temples to lesser gods, apartments for priests, gateways and colonnades, which distinguished it in later days two thousand years after its inception.

The Greek historian Herodotus, Strabo, the Greek geographer of the time of Christ; and Diodorus Siculus, a Greek writer of fifty years earlier, are among the principal sources of information, although of these Herodotus was the only one who actually saw the Tower. There is also a clay tablet known as the Seleucid Tablet, dating from 229 B.C., discovered by George Smith about 1875, lost, re-discovered in a private collection and tentatively deciphered in 1913, deposited in the Louvre at Paris and more correctly deciphered in 1950. This tablet

purports to give details of the construction and measurements of the Tower as it existed in late Babylonian times—in the days of Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus. It does not agree on all points with the descriptions of Herodotus and Strabo, and in any case was written after the Tower itself had fallen into ruins, but it remains a guide. The combined testimony of these witnesses conclusively established the identity of the ruins explored by Koldewey in 1912 with the building of which Genesis 11 relates the origin.

In the days of Nebuchadnezzar the Tower occupied the centre of a large paved courtyard, measuring a third of a mile each way. The western wall of the courtyard was washed by the river Euphrates; its other walls faced upon three of the main roads of the city. Twelve gates gave access to this spacious area, gates which had portals and side chambers very much of the design described by the Prophet Ezekiel in the vision of his Temple (see Ezek. 40). There was another respect also in which this ancient building bore resemblance to Ezekiel's Temple. Lining three sides of the courtyard there were a great number of small "chambers", or dwellings, similar to those described by Ezekiel as surrounding the Outer Court of the Temple. Something like forty or fifty of these dwellings—or, rather, of their foundations—have been excavated; the signs are that there may have been several hundred in all. It is surmised that here dwelt the priests who served in the ritual and religious services associated with the building.

The Tower itself stood on an elevated platform six-hundred feet square and was built, like all the "ziggurats" of Babylonia, in a series of stepped stages or terraces, each stage smaller than the one below. The first stage was three hundred feet square, and was ascended by means of three wide stairways on the south side. The successive stages, each ascended by stairways, diminished in size until the topmost, the seventh, was reached. Upon the top of this last stage there stood a sanctuary to Marduk (Bel), the god of Babylon, built entirely of gold, which caught and reflected the sun's rays to the sight-seers standing far below. The height of the edifice is to some extent a debated question; according to Strabo and Herodotus it was one stade—six hundred or more feet—in height. The many references to the Tower in Babylonian literature—"to reach unto heaven" "to rival heaven" and so on, indicated that it must have

been by far the tallest building in the city, and since it is probable that the outer walls were of the order of three hundred feet high it follows that the Tower must have exceeded that figure by an appreciable amount. The Seleucid Tablet, on the other hand, whilst imperfect in its presentation, appears to indicate the height as about three hundred feet. Of all the authorities Herodotus is the only one who saw the Tower with his own eyes; Strabo, four centuries later, probably took his information from Herodotus. Although a great deal of weight has been attached to the testimony of the Seleucid Tablet, it does possess internal inconsistencies and omissions which render it somewhat suspect where it conflicts with other evidence. On balance the data available seems to favour the six hundred feet height rather than the alternative; in either case the building was gigantic even by modern standards.

The whole of this building was constructed of brick. Koldewey found that the central core, a mass of nearly two hundred feet square at ground level, was sun-dried brick, and the outer casing, fifty feet thick all round, was of hard burnt brick—the oldest baked bricks in the world. Thus is the Scripture record confirmed to the smallest detail; “let us make brick, and *burn them thoroughly*” (thoroughly). The Seleucid Tablet indicates that the lowermost stage, one hundred and ten feet high, was ornamented by gigantic buttresses reaching up the sides; in 1914 excavations on the north side of the Tower revealed the foundations of twelve of these buttresses. Tower sides and stairways alike would most certainly have been embellished with enamelled bricks of various colours, and sculptures of the gods of Babylon and mythological monsters; although no traces of these remain, similar ones have been found in other ruins in Babylon.

This great structure was called by the Babylonians “*E-temenanki*”, “The House of the Foundation of Heaven and Earth”, its foundation, they believed, was rooted in *sheol*, the underworld, and its top was the place of contact and communion with heaven, the habitation of the gods. Thus set, they believed it could never be overthrown nor destroyed, but would endure to all eternity. The inscriptions of successive

kings, even so late as in the days of the prophet Daniel and after, repeat this belief time and time again, a striking testimony to the prevalence of that first object with which the Tower was built, as recorded in the Scriptures, “whose top shall reach unto heaven”.

Thus did the Tower stand, century after century, in all its ornate splendour, the meeting place between man and his gods. To the south of the structure in later days stood its associated Temple, known as *E-sagila*, a magnificent building with four gateways each flanked by two gleaming bronze *sirrusu*, the mythological serpent-creatures which to the Babylonians were symbols of life, and a central shrine in which was a golden image of Marduk, weighing, according to Herodotus, nearly four tons. Once in every year Marduk was taken for an outing. Seated in his royal conveyance, and accompanied by his son, the god Nebo, who had been specially conducted from his own temple (the now ruined Birs-Nimrud at Borsippa fourteen miles away), he was conveyed along the Royal Road past the East Gate of E-temenanki, to the royal palaces and the gate sacred to the goddess Ishtar (Venus). Having paid his respects to this very important lady, he went on to the Euphrates where the state barge was in waiting, and having been duly installed in the same, travelled by river to the West Gate of E-temenanki, where he landed and proceeded to his own special lodging, a shrine standing on the west side of the Tower. Here he remained for eleven days while ceremonies were performed in his honour, and at the end of that time he was carried back by the way he had come. It was this ritual conveyance of Babylon’s gods from place to place that was referred to so scornfully by Isaiah when he said “*They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him, and set him in his place, and he standeth; from his place shall he not remove; yea, one shall cry unto him, yet shall he not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.*” (Isa. 46. 7).

So, watching their works, and listening to their words, and knowing the thoughts and intents of their hearts, when the time was ripe the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded.

(To be continued)

Who finds God in his love finds everything. He seeks but one, it is true; but that one is of universal content. Oh rare compendium of

wealth miraculous! Why run we after variety? Let us hasten to lay hold of him, who being held, holds all.

—Origen

## “IN ADAM ALL DIE”

*A study concerning sin*

The “doctrine of original sin” is discounted in many quarters today partly because of the apparent injustice of condemning the whole human race for something done by one man many thousands of years ago, but principally, it must be feared, because it is becoming fashionable to think of “sin” as an aspect of the incomplete development of man at the present stage of evolution, a defect which will be remedied as evolution proceeds. The idea that man once existed in a state of perfection without sin, that sin is an intrusion into God’s creation and will be removed through the means that God has provided, is dismissed as visionary and impractical. Nevertheless the Bible position is just that and it is not possible to view the history of God’s dealings with man in proper perspective unless it is accepted. Two important passages, the third chapter of Genesis and the fifth chapter of Romans, lay down the principles of this matter; Moses and Paul are equally definite on those principles and it is to their words that reference needs to be made to understand the subject.

*“By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men”* (Rom. 5. 12) is the basic foundation, laid by Paul. He refers, of course, to the story of Eden and the Fall in Genesis 3. The parallels which he draws between Adam the first man, who brought death to mankind, and Christ the “second Adam” who brings life, are so exact that it cannot be disputed Paul believed the whole human race is descended from one original pair, that the first man Adam was a real historical character, that he was the individual through whom sin and evil first afflicted mankind. The whole of Romans 5 insists upon this; all men without exception are born subject to death and must eventually end their lives by returning to the dust. *“Death reigned . . . even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression . . . through the offence of one many be dead . . . By one man’s offence death reigned . . . By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation . . . By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners . . . since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead . . . as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”* (Rom. 5. 14-19. 1 Cor. 15. 21-22). This kind of language bears only one interpretation. By the

action of the first man the entire human race has become involved in sin and death and all the evils from which humanity has suffered and still suffers.

Since the Most High is the Author of good and not of evil, since He will not tolerate the persistence of evil as a permanent element, since He is a God of love as well as of power, it follows that this condition of things can only be of transient duration and will one day pass away. In the meantime there are two questions which cry out for answer. First, how can the justice and love of God be squared with this apparent ruthless and callous infliction of evil upon an entire race of beings in consequence of the act of one? Secondly, how was it that the sin of Adam produced so terrible a result upon his offspring? Granted that in fulfilment of the Divine decree Adam must die because of his sin, why must his children share in that death instead of living in their turn in a state of primitive purity before God, and only undergo the same sentence if they also should be guilty of the same sin?

The second question must needs be answered before the first. It is usually assumed that the first human pair, created sinless and perfect, capable of living for ever in union with God and perfection of human nature, became immediately physically subnormal upon account of their sin and thereafter were capable of producing only physically subnormal, dying children. Succeeding generations thus became progressively weaker in physique and intellect and met an increasingly early death. Now whilst this is measurably true, it is not the whole story nor even the most vital part of the story. The clue to the truth of the matter is found in our Lord’s insistence that man, dying creature that he is can receive by faith in him and reconciliation, with God a life that transcends all the power and effects of evil and ensures for him entry into the infinite future and a never-ending place in the purposes of God. That life is known in the New Testament as “aionian” or “eternal” life—the Greek “aionian” has the meaning of superlatively enduring as to both quality and time—so that “eternal life” stands in supreme contrast to the only life which man now knows, which is limited and subnormal both in quality and time. This quality of eternal life is what Adam and Eve possessed before they sinned, a vital, enduring life which linked them closely with God, the

source of all life. That link ensured continuity of life and the full exploitation of all the potentialities of their being so long as they remained loyal to their Creator and in full accord with him. Since to Adam was given the power to transmit life to his offspring it follows that had they remained in that happy state their children also would have been born into a condition of enduring life, and death would have been unknown.

Tragically, this did not transpire. Adam sinned, and from the moment of his sin the link was severed. No longer did he receive enduring life from the sustaining power of God. No longer was he a son of God. No longer did he possess *aionian*, eternal, life. He was animated now only by the same kind of life as the animal creation around him, dependent on the continued survival of the fleshly body and destined to perish with that body. Hence the Divine sentence in Gen. 3. 19 "*Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*". It is true, of course, that the life which pervades all creation comes from God, whether it be that of animals and birds and fishes, or trees and vegetation and algæ. But this is not "eternal" life; it is a life whose only object is the animation of a material organism which has a part to play in the creative scheme for a limited time. When its work is done the organism returns to dust and its life is no more. Of all terrestrial living things, man alone is destined for eternal life and constituted so that he can appreciate and lay hold of eternal life; man alone has the kind of intelligence which gives him power consciously to choose between loyalty, obedience, and disloyalty, disobedience; to co-operate with God in the continued progress of his creation or deliberately to set himself as a discordant element in that creation.

This latter is what Adam did. He consciously and knowingly, in full knowledge of what he was doing, cut himself off from God in a deliberate act of rebellion. The precise nature of his sin is not relevant at the moment—the story of the tree of good and evil may well enshrine some heinous act involving a very definite decision and act of rebellion—but the effect was that the channel through which eternal life came to him from God was interrupted. From that moment he was, like the animals around him, a living, breathing creature dependent entirely on his bodily organism and doomed to perish when that organism came to an end. This was the only kind of life therefore that he could pass on to his

posterity. They also, to this day, have been born into the world possessing only subnormal life which itself ends in death, and had God not provided the means whereby any man so born can, if he will, acquire the gift of eternal life, he must die and remain dead as does the brute beast.

This, then, is why the entire human race is involved in the sin of Adam and shares in his condemnation. There was no alternative. The first human pair had all the potentialities within themselves to bring into existence the entire human race in its fulness and to the limits already foreseen and planned by God. That the first pair took a wrong decision at the very commencement in the exercise of their Divinely bestowed power of free choice was tragic indeed, but it was not by the ordering of God. Rather was it in flagrant defiance of his counsel. He could not be expected to alter the constitution of his creation nor to abrogate his fundamental laws in order to avoid the consequences, and therefore it must be that men thereafter be born dying, into a dying world.

Had it been that God was either powerless or heedless in the face of this situation there would indeed be difficulty in answering the other question, but that is not the case. God is both all-powerful and all-loving and his power and love are alike equal to the need. The damage done in Eden can and will be rectified; by the means which God has ordained it will eventually be possible for any and every man, all men if they so desire, to be recovered from the state of animal life which is all that they have known heretofore, and enter into possession of that eternal life which brings them into living union with God and assures them of a perpetual place in his creation. In the meantime the racial experience with evil and death will in itself prove to be of inestimable value as a concrete example of the consequences of sin. It will satisfy all men that "*righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people*" (Prov. 14. 34). And the fact that many of past generations have gone into death, in consequence of this Adamic condemnation, in partial or total ignorance of the means by which eternal life can be gained, will not thwart God's intention to save all who can possibly be persuaded to turn "*from dead works to serve the living God*". (Heb. 9. 14). The purpose of the Messianic Age under the reign of Christ upon earth is for the reconciliation to God of "whosoever will". (Rev. 22. 17) All who have

died in Adam are to be made alive in Christ (1 Cor. 15. 22) and in that awakening to conscious life under that beneficent administration find the opportunity which was denied them formerly. Although all men die because of their forefather's transgression, none are in hopeless case on that account and at the end it will be only because of his own sin, his own deliberate transgression, not that of another, that any man, of whatever generation or period of history, will miss the goal of eternal life. It was a proverb in Ezekiel's day that "*the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge*" but this, said the Most High, is not going to be true in the outcome. The man who eats sour grapes, his teeth are they that shall be set on edge. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; the soul that sinneth is the soul that shall die (Ezek. 18. 4-20).

It is noticeable that according to Paul and in all Scriptural references to the subject the tragic effects of the Fall—death, weakness, tendency to sin—have all been said to have come upon mankind in consequence of the transgression of Adam, not that of Eve. Now this could be considered strange when it is remembered that in the story it was Eve who took the initiative in the rebellion, Adam only yielded to the same at her instigation. It is constantly stressed that by the man, not by the woman, sin entered the world. Paul, writing to Timothy (1 Tim. 2. 13-14) says "*Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived*" (wholly deceived, according to the Alex. Mss) "*was in the transgression*" which almost seems as if he allows some mitigating circumstance in the case of the woman. There is, of course, no indication in the Genesis story that the Divine prohibition came to Eve other than through her husband, and her plea in extenuation that "*the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat*" (Gen. 3. 13) was not rebutted. She was told that her life henceforth was to be one of pain and trouble, but the formal sentence of death, of return to the dust, was pronounced upon Adam and not upon Eve. This of course does not mean that Eve did not share in the sentence. She, too, had sinned, had therefore broken the link with God and lost her possession of "eternal" life as had her husband, and must therefore go into death as did he. But it does mean that the transmission of the dying state, of human imperfection, of tendency to sin, was from Adam and not from Eve, and this is exactly what the Scriptures consistently declare.

The origin of life is still a mystery to biologists. There is in fact considerable difference of opinion among the experts as to how life should be defined. All living organisms are built up from masses of microscopic bits of living matter called "cells"—in the case of a human being about sixty million million of them—of many different kinds each having a specific function in the body. But the life principle which resides in a living human being and gives him consciousness and intelligence and the ability to know and worship God is something vitally different from the life force which animates those cells and allows them to grow and reproduce themselves. A man can be dead, his life ended, without hope of renewed life save by a resurrection dependent upon Divine power, but biologists can remove some of the cells from his dead body and find them still living; under laboratory conditions they could go on living for a long time. It is true that many scientists believe that the conscious, intelligent life to which we are accustomed did evolve naturally from unconscious but living cells following the evolution of those living cells from non-living chemical constituents of the primitive earth, but this is only a supposition following the general arguments of the evolution thesis and there is no evidence, nor indeed can be, that such a thing did or could happen. All that we know—all that any man knows—is that a single living male cell possessing the mysterious power of commencing an intelligent human life comes into contact with a single living female cell; that female cell begins to multiply itself into many cells, taking on the form and functions of a human body. But the life force which animates those individual cells and causes their multiplication is one thing; the distinctive conscious intelligent human life which constitutes the resultant creature a man is quite another. Lions and tigers and horses and dogs are all made up from the same kind of cells as are human beings, and by the same process, but no other sentient creature of all the countless varieties which inhabit the earth is able to pass on to its offspring that unique kind of intelligent life which is the prerogative of mankind. When all the chemistry, so to speak, of the human body and its functions has been thoroughly explored and completely understood, there still remains this aspect independent of all physical considerations, the ultimate source and nature of the life which each generation passes on to its successor. And we know that this is because God invested

Adam, the creature He had made from the elements of the earth, with life direct from himself and gave Adam the power to pass that life on to his descendants. Thus it would appear that life is passed on by the father and not the mother. The latter provides the initial cell which ultimately becomes the new being but it is the father who quickens it into life. This is why the Scriptures affirm that man's present imperfect and subnormal life is due to Adam and not to Eve. The cells multiplying and assuming bodily form, the chromosomes and their genes which are the physical transmitters of nature and characteristics, all formed from proteins and sugars and so on, are capable, by continual replenishment and replacements, of sustaining the organism to all eternity if the life which powers it is Divine eternal life, but are doomed to early failure and death if that quality of life is absent. Adamic life is subnormal, not eternal, on account of the rupture of the link with God which occurred at the time of the Fall. The moment after the crucial act Adam's bodily organism was virtually as healthy and perfect as the moment before, but he was already a dying creature; eternal life was lost. According to the Genesis narrative it took nearly a thousand years for his fleshly organism to come to its end, but he died eventually.

It is an important principle therefore that the transmission of "Adamic imperfection" to Adam's posterity is not due to physical imperfection of the initial cells—although as time progressed the physical stamina of the human race has steadily deteriorated—but to the deficiency of Adam's life. It may be no exaggeration to say that all that father Adam has been able to pass on to his children is what

may be termed animal life, a life that is purely dependent upon the well-being of the body and comes to an end when the body is worn out. Something like this was pointed out many years ago by C. T. Russell in "*The Atonement*" (1899) when he said that a perfect father would beget perfect children even if the mother were imperfect, but conversely that the children of an imperfect father would themselves share his imperfection even if the mother were perfect. The same principle applies in the case of our Lord's humanity, born of an earthly mother. Because his life was from above, and not, like other men, derived through an earthly father from Adam, He was, despite his participation in human nature through his mother Mary, truly born "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." He "laid hold" of Adam's nature, but there was nothing in him of Adam's life. Thus it was the "seed of the woman", and not of the man, which in Gen. 3. 15 was promised should eventually "bruise the serpent's head".

Another truth which emerges from all this, one more especially related to man's future rather than his past, is that the possession and enjoyment of everlasting life under sinless conditions—the promise made to all who come into union with Christ in the Messianic Age—is not merely a question of a righteous mind in a perfect body in an ideal environment, but rather the state enjoyed by a living being animated by Divinely given and sustained eternal life, consequent upon spiritual union with God in Christ. This is the ultimate ideal; this will be the condition enjoyed by all who ultimately recover from the disabilities of the present, imposed upon them by the sin of our first father, and enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

#### Note on Psa. 126. 5-6

*"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him"* (Psa. 126. 5-6).

This theme of sowing in tears and reaping in joy was more than mere poetic fancy. It was an allusion to a pagan custom with which the Israelites, only just returned from Babylon, must have been thoroughly familiar, associated with the worship of the Babylonian god Tammuz, the god of vegetation and springtime and new life. The sowers went out casting seed into the ground, weeping as they did so because the seed must die; when the time of harvesting the corn was come they went out again with ceremonial rejoicing because it was the time of new life for the world with the gathering of the crop. In their old legends Tammuz, the young and beautiful god, had been treacherously slain and had gone down into the underworld, and

with his going the trees and plants wilted, the flocks and herds failed to bring forth their young. But the underworld could not hold him and he came back, and with his coming new life blossomed forth on earth and all was well. It is impossible not to see in that old pagan legend an anticipation of the death and resurrection of Christ with all that these entail; in that ceremonial weeping because the sown seed must die, and rejoicing when it sprang forth into new life, an anticipation of Christ's own words "*except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*" (Jno. 12. 24). The elaborate mythology of the Babylonians contained some seeds of truth which must have survived from an older and happier time when men, not so far removed from the Fall in Eden, possessed a tolerably clear knowledge of the principles of the redemptive plan of God.

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

### 1. A Voice crying in the Wilderness

“Like a voice crying in the wilderness” is an expression used in the modern world to denote an unpopular message. It refers to ideas which oppose the fashion of the time. It is a lone voice pleading against the action being taken by the majority. In a sense this was how it was used concerning John the Baptist. Matthew, Mark and Luke quote from Isaiah 40. 3. Modern translators have tended to separate the ‘voice’ from the ‘wilderness’ at least in Isaiah. It can be translated “*A voice of one calling; In the desert, prepare the way for the LORD*”, (NIV).

John was the last of the great prophets of Israel and followed quite distinctly in their tradition. His birth and preparation was directly guided by God and he was the “voice of God” bringing his people back to the way of the Lord. He was not expressing his own opinions or looking for popular applause; he had a mission and a message from God. He was, as Malachi promised, the messenger who was to come “*to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple*”. This picture is of a slave who went before the entourage of ancient royalty, clearing the way and making sure that people and materials were swept from the road. Thus he was the herald of the presence of the king. For many centuries Israel had waited for a Deliverer. At first Moses referred to “that prophet”. Much later, God’s promises to David led to the idea of an anointed one—the Messiah. He was to represent God in a very special way to bring salvation to God’s people. He was to put right that which was wrong and usher in a time of peace and prosperity. To John was committed the task of preparing the way for the Son of God. It was the greatest task any human being could do apart from Christ himself. Luke very carefully sets the political and religious scene in the first century (Luke 3. 2). Those verses speak of Roman tyranny and immorality; of local intrigue and weakness and of priestcraft and the oppression of ordinary people. Into this kind of world John the Baptist was born. It was here that he and his cousin were to work and suffer and die. For centuries God had been preparing his people to receive his Son. They had not listened to the messengers God sent, and they were not ready to receive him. The hearts of that generation in Israel were like uncultivated soil. Nothing short

of a mighty storm could now make them ready for their Messiah, so that he could sow his seed of the Kingdom. In that “voice” from the wilderness Israel had her storm and it was a voice which thundered to slave and prince alike without expediency or partiality. It was a voice which broke up the stony hearts of God’s people and came down like rain upon the lives of ordinary but neglected people. Where did such a preacher come from and how had he been reared and trained for his mighty task? Why of all places did he come from the desert? John was born in the hill country of Judea, the child of elderly parents. They were of priestly families within the tribe of Levi. The record says that they were law abiding folk, upright in character and the ones to rear a boy who has to serve the Lord, except that they were past the time when they would normally expect to start a family.

It would be easy to get a very unfavourable view of the priesthood from the Gospels unless we note such comments about Zacharias and Elizabeth. They correlate with the report that came later concerning the growth of the Early Church, which records that “*many priests were obedient to the faith*” (Acts 6. 7). Elizabeth had endured an aching heart for many a long year, for she had no children. It was common in Israel for women to want a child who might deliver God’s people from their enemies. This aged couple had the double honour of entertaining in their home the mother of the One who was to be Messiah and to be the parents of a son who would one day herald that Messiah.

It is reasonable to suppose that Zacharias taught John to be a priest from his earliest years. It was a father’s duty to rear his son to follow his own calling; how much more this boy of whom the archangel Gabriel had spoken. Much more, the old father had been filled with God’s spirit at John’s birth and prophesied that the boy would become the prophet of the Most High. With what interest John must have learned about Zacharias’ encounter with an angel in the Temple as he was fulfilling his duties as a priest. How did the old man relate the shock which amounted to unbelief? With what enthusiasm did John listen again and again to the angel’s words and his father’s prediction concerning his own future.

Zacharias’ words recorded in Luke 1. 67-79

form quite a remarkable hymn of praise. They embody much important teaching and bring together the hopes and promises of God to Israel. This is more than a celebration of his restored speech or the jubilation of a father who has gained a remarkable son in his old age. This is no less than an announcement that God is about to break through into the world of men and come to his people Israel. Zacharias would not know just how this was going to be fulfilled; like so many in Israel at that time, the things contained in his prophecy meant to him that Israel would be restored to her former glory. Nevertheless the vision of the old priest is conveyed to us in words which aptly describe the work of Jesus. He was coming to bring light to replace darkness, salvation from sin and a restored relationship with God. His work would herald that Kingdom which would eventually bring peace and goodwill to all men.

John's education with his father would be much more than was required to become a priest. Every Hebrew boy learned by heart the Messianic promises. Something of their significance would begin to dawn in the boy's heart as he became familiar with those promises. John's parents were old when he was born; by the time he reached manhood it is probable that they slept with their fathers. To whom would John turn? In the period when the Qumran scrolls were coming to light and the Essene community was being publicised, some writers made a case for John having spent time in their monastery. Whether or not he came under their influence for a while the Scriptures remain silent. The Gospel description of John's diet and clothing do not fit at all with the Qumran group; they cultivated their own vegetables but John found his food among the wildlife of the desert. His cloak was like the desert nomad's garments which were made from woven animal hair and quite unlike the Essene white linen tunics. All we are told is that he was in the desert until the day of his appearance to Israel.

While we may find it tantalising that there is so little information about John, it was never

intended that he should draw attention to himself. People commented on the fact that he "did no miracle". He came to prepare God's people for their Messiah and point them to him. He did this without thought of ambition or personal success in the most selfless way possible. He could draw men to Christ and then shrink away into the shadows. His attitude is enshrined in the words of Katie Barclay Wilkinson.

*"May his beauty rest upon me,  
as I seek the lost to win,  
And may they forget the channel,  
seeing only him."* GB 552

It is a vital lesson to learn from one who was so near to Christ. It is more than likely that Jesus and John spent time together in their boyhood as cousins. Yet the words recorded of John about Jesus were not of his human life. John speaks not of the person whom he had known for 30 years; rather it is the spiritual life with which John is concerned, the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. This was to be echoed in Paul's words to the Corinthians; "... we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer" (2 Cor. 5. 16 RSV). Had John gone into the priesthood he might have become a great preacher in the cities and moved among the throngs. He might have spent his time in learning or exchanging thoughts with the great teachers in Jerusalem as Jesus did. God's purpose for John was not in that direction. He spent a long time in the desert, alone and quietly meditating upon the great God of Israel and his word; thus he came to know him in the quietness of his inner being. Not for this Nazarite were the busy streets and public places which could snare him from his purpose; with only the wild animals as neighbours he was away from that which could divert his attention and hinder God's purpose. This is how God has often prepared those who are to speak for him. There must be silence, when self stops striving and God is allowed to act and speak in our lives.

*(To be continued)*

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We who come to the feet of him to learn stand aghast at the limitless expanse of the sea of Divine Truth, and in our littleness feel inspired at once to build ourselves a little enclosure where the revelation of Truth can be kept within

bounds and the waters be calm and still; and in our inexperience we discern not and care not that those imprisoned waters cannot but be muddied with some effects of human tradition and misconception inherited from the past.

## ESAU THE EARTHLY MINDED

Known in Biblical history as the man who sold his Divine birthright for a mess of pottage, Esau has never enjoyed what in these modern days is called a "good press". His earthly-mindedness and casual indifference to the things of God, compared with the reverence and faith of his twin brother Jacob, and the fact that his descendants, grown into a nation, became inveterate enemies of Israel and eventually subject to Divine condemnation, has created a prejudice against Esau which perhaps has failed to give due weight to what may be at least some redeeming features in his character.

The story goes back to the time immediately before his birth; his mother Rebekah was given an intimation from God as to his purpose with the soon-to-be-born twins. Both were to be the father of nations, but the first-born was to be subservient to the second. Since Rebekah and Isaac knew that the Divine promise of the coming "seed" that was to bless all the families of the earth was involved in the imminent birth of these two, they must have realised that in his wisdom the Lord had decreed that the promise should be fulfilled in the second-born. At this point, as Paul observes in the Epistle to the Romans, the children have not yet been born, the Lord's selection could not have been on the basis of manifested fitness for his calling. And yet in the outcome it is seen that God decreed rightly, for Jacob had that within him which made him a believing follower of the Lord whereas Esau, despite certain likeable characteristics, remained to the end of his days the perfect example of the man who has not the smallest spark of religious feeling or reverence in his makeup. As a man of the world he lived, and as he lived, so he died. Who knows but that God, with insight seeing deeper than man, already perceived which of these two developing infants had that mixture of qualities derived from the paternal line of Abraham and the maternal one of Nahor which would best be fitted for the Divine calling which must come to one of them. That, at any rate, might be a more logical explanation than a capricious and arbitrary selection having no rhyme nor reason.

The lads grew up together and their differing characters and temperaments soon became manifest. Jacob, we are told was "*a plain man, dwelling in tents,*" Here the word rendered "plain" really means sincere, upright, whole, in

a strictly moral sense. His life was spent with flocks and herds like his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. Like them, in that condition he learned of the things of God and the special responsibility his family line held in the developing purpose of God. Esau, on the other hand, was "*a skilful hunter, a man of the field*". Not for him the patient day-by-day routine of cattle rearing and care; for him the wide open spaces and the distant mountains, where he could range and hunt to his heart's content. And so the two grew to manhood.

At some time in these early years occurred the incident which is well-known in the story of Esau. Coming in one day weary and hungry from hunting, he found Jacob sitting down to a meal of savoury red beans ("pottage" in the A.V.) and impulsively asked that he might share it. Jacob, for all his uprightness, was an astute man and a bit of a schemer, and he had evidently been thinking about the position which would arise when their father went the way of all flesh. His mother had told him—and probably Esau also—that he was to be the heir of the Abrahamic promise but how much notice would Esau take of that if he then decided he would like to assume the obligation after all? And suppose that Isaac, with his known partiality for Esau, should confer his patriarchal blessing at the end upon his elder son instead of his younger, despite what he knew of the Divine edict? So Jacob determined to strengthen his position by obtaining from his brother a formal renunciation of any rights he might possess in the matter. He proposed that in return for the immediate satisfaction of his hunger Esau should cede to him his birthright as principal heir to Isaac. It was a disproportionate and altogether absurd exchange for so small an immediate favour, but Esau's reaction was typical of the man. "I am going to die anyway" he said "and what profit shall this birthright be to me?" The honour of being a progenitor of the nation that would in future times be the custodian of the Divine oracles, and an instrument for the blessing of all peoples of earth, meant nothing to Esau. "I shall be dead by then, and what good will it be to me in that case" was his sentiment. There was no appeal in the idea of being used by God for the happiness of others; he lived only for himself. Neither did he seem to be unduly concerned about the heir

to Isaac's estate; he evidently did not fancy the life of a cattle raiser and was much happier on his hunting forays. So he quite willingly relinquished all his claims as chief heir to his younger brother, content in the thought that when the time came he would get the usual younger brother's share instead and Jacob would have all the responsibilities and all the obligations. Jacob, careful as ever, got him to swear to his word, which Esau with his usual affability was quite ready to do; and sat down to enjoy his dinner.

The first intimation of the coming rift in the family appeared when they were both forty years of age. Esau married. That in itself was not unusual and was probably beginning to be expected. His father Isaac had married at forty and was now a hundred years of age; probably he was hoping to see grandsons before his time came and have that assurance that the Divine purpose through his family was not going to be frustrated. What was unusual was that Esau flouted the family custom of marrying within the Semitic clan of Terah, a measure intended to maintain racial purity in God's sight, and chose instead to take to himself two women of the Hittites; Judith, the daughter of Beer, and Adah or Bashemath the daughter of Elon. The Hittites were a powerful Indo-Aryan nation in the north and many of them were settled in Canaan and on friendly terms with the people of Abraham—but they were not of Shem, not Semitic at all. They were of Japheth and from Abraham's and Isaac's point of view unfit for alliance with the people of the Lord. There is not much doubt that Isaac remonstrated with his eldest son at this betrayal of the family principle but equally no doubt that Esau quite casually dismissed his father's objections as of no consequence and proceeded with his plans. The Genesis account merely remarks briefly that the situation was "*a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah*".

One is tempted to wonder if Isaac was to some extent blameworthy. The narrative declares that "*Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison, but Rebekah loved Jacob*". They both knew that God had ordained that Jacob should be the heir of promise to carry on the family obligation to God but it does look as though Isaac had a special regard for Esau, influenced by the material advantage of good living afforded by his son's hunting exploits, and maybe had "spoiled" him somewhat so that Esau failed to grow up "in the nurture and fear

of the Lord" as did Jacob at the hands of his mother. Isaac may have experienced a feeling of dashed hopes when he had to stand by helplessly and see his beloved eldest son cut himself off from the people of the Lord by his alliance with these two women of the land.

Seventeen years later came the crisis which jolted Esau out of his easy-going placidity and disrupted the family. Isaac was beginning to feel his age—he was now a hundred and seventeen years old and nearly blind—and he felt the time had come to confer his patriarchal blessing upon his heir so that there could be no dispute after his death. Unaccountably his choice fell upon Esau; he knew full well that Jacob was the Divinely appointed heir but again his predilection for his eldest son led him to ignore the fact. Esau was bidden to take his huntsman's gear, go out into the wilderness and bring back choice venison wherewith to serve his father at a formal feast, during which Isaac would confer his blessing. Had Esau been a man of integrity he would have told his father about the bargain he had made with Jacob seventeen years before, but he did not. He may very well have forgotten the incident or not considered it a serious matter; at any rate he went off to find his venison.

Rebekah overheard the conversation, and determined to frustrate her husband's purpose. She may have justified her conduct to herself by reflecting that she was ensuring that the Lord's intention was carried out, not realising that He needs no shady actions by his devotees to assist the accomplishment of his purposes. At any rate Jacob, following her instructions, impersonated his brother before the blind Isaac, bringing to the feast goat's flesh from the flock, and so received the blessing intended for Esau.

Esau returned from his hunting, prepared his feast, and took it to his father, to the latter's consternation when he realised how he had been tricked. There seems to have been a real bond of affection between these two; Esau's distress in the narrative clearly is not on account of the loss of material things but of the fact that the blessing intended for him had been given to another. "*He cried with a great and exceedingly bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, my father*". Sadly came the reply "*Thy brother came with subtlety, and hath taken away thy blessing*" to which Esau responded bitterly "*he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright, and now he hath taken away my*

*blessing*" and then comes a heartfelt plea "*Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?*" Heavily upon his soul fell the words "*I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants . . . and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?*" Desperately, hoping against hope, Esau pleaded "*Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me, also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept*". So, Isaac gave him a secondary blessing; he should live by the sword, but he should receive of the richness of the earth and one day should be freed from the dominion of his brother. And Esau went out from his father's presence bitter and resentful.

It is impossible not to feel sympathy for this man at this time. His nature, admittedly earthly and having no feeling after God, was relatively simple and trusting, and he had been outwitted by a smarter man. It is not likely that any prospect of winning Esau to a better feeling of reverence for God was improved by this conduct on the part of the brother who did profess faith in God. His normal attitude of good-humoured tolerance changed to one of angry animosity and as he stormed off to his hunting he vowed that so soon as his father was dead he would have his revenge and kill his brother. He made no secret of his intentions—he was not the sort to do so—and the news got round to his mother. Jacob was hustled off to his mother's brother at Padan-Aram four hundred miles to the north until the trouble blew over, but once there he in turn was out-smarted by an even wiler man and it was forty years before he got home again. The Divine law of retribution is very well exemplified in the life of Jacob.

One of the consequences of this incident was Esau's third marriage. Isaac had urged Jacob to find himself a wife from among his cousins at Padan-Aram, of the posterity of Nahor, brother of Abraham, again to preserve the purity of blood of those in the line of the "seed of promise". Esau, learning of this injunction, and painfully conscious of the disapproval his own marriage to the two Hittite women had earned, decided to do something to make amends, or at any rate to please his father. He took, as a third wife, Mahalath daughter of Ishmael, son of Abraham and half-brother to Isaac. This gave him at least one wife of the chosen family but whether this earned him any approval from his father is not recorded. It seems more likely that Isaac had reconciled himself to the fact that his elder son would never be the "heir of promise".

Now sixty years of age, Esau had three wives and a growing family of children to support. It is evident that something more than prowess with bow and arrow was going to be needed and from allusions pertaining to later dates in his life it is clear that he began to settle down to a certain amount of stock-raising and farming although his free-ranging hunting habits with companions of like mind continued and there could be some suspicion of banditry on a small scale. There is not much doubt that he was an opportunist and snatched a living where he could. At some time during the forty years that Jacob was serving Laban away in Padan-Aram Esau formed an alliance with the tribe of Seir the Horite (known to archaeologists nowadays as the Hurrians, a people occupying various parts of the Middle East in very early days) and began to extend his business interests into the land of Seir, south-east of Canaan. Probably to aid the furtherance of those same business interests, he now contracted marriage No. 4, to Aholibamah daughter of Anah the Horite and great-grand-daughter of Seir the founder of the tribe. Since the Horites were also an Indo-Aryan race like the Hittites it would seem that Esau's sudden passion for marriage within the clan which led him to take Ishmael's daughter had as quickly evaporated. His interests and connections were now much more closely intertwined with the family of Seir than they were with those of Abraham; the lure of the things of this world had drawn him completely away from the worship and the people of God.

During the years of Jacob's absence Esau seems to have maintained his home and family and farmlands in Canaan, probably not far from his father's territory, but himself to have spent a great deal of time in the land of Seir (Edom) a hundred miles away, to which he was becoming more and more attracted. The ancient trade route from Arabia to the north passed through his land so that he might well have been involved in profitable trading activities; copper mining was carried on in the south of the land and he may have had a hand in this also. From Gen. 36. 6 it is apparent that by the time of Jacob's return he had become a wealthy and influential man; the fact that he had four hundred horsemen at his beck and call in Seir is an indication of that.

Thus passed forty years, that were filled with activity, years of growth and increase. Esau now had five sons and probably as many daughters; his possessions might have equalled or even exceeded those of his father Isaac, and the old

disputes with his brother Jacob of so long ago were probably quite forgotten. Then one day there appeared at his dwelling in Seir a party of messengers from Jacob.

How Jacob knew that his brother was now living in Seir does not emerge in the Genesis account. Since Esau did not go there until after Jacob's journey to Padan-Aram it is clear that there must have been some communication with the old home in Canaan during the intervening time and that Jacob knew in at least a general way what was going on. The newcomers brought a message from Jacob that he was on his way home from Padan-Aram with great possessions "*and I have sent to tell my lord that I may find grace in thy sight*". This was very conciliatory language coming from the man who by virtue of the birthright occupied the senior position in the family; it is evident that Jacob was in a state of apprehension as to Esau's attitude to him. He still remembered the threat of forty years before. His apprehension was considerably increased when the messengers returned with the alarming news that Esau himself was on the way to meet him accompanied by four hundred men. "*Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed*"; he betook himself immediately to God in prayer for deliverance, and arising from prayer, added an additional insurance by sending in advance of his company a handsome present of some six hundred head of assorted cattle and sheep wherewith to mollify the feared avenger.

He need not have worried. The Esau who met him was the old Esau, bluff, matter-of-fact, and carefree. The matters of the birthright and the filched blessing might never have happened. This was his long-absent brother Jacob and he was glad to see him. "*And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept*"; Esau with genuine emotion, Jacob also with not a little relief. It was going to be all right after all. Then Esau saw Jacob's four wives and their score or so of children and asked "who are these with thee?" "*The children which God hath graciously given thy servant*" was the reply and they came forward to present themselves. This did not hold his interest for very long and he turned to another subject. "*What meanest thou by all this drove which I met?*"; Jacob, feeling himself now on surer ground, apprised him that those were a present "*to find grace in the sight of my lord*". It is here that the latent generosity of Esau's character is revealed. He wanted no present.

"*I have enough, my brother, keep that thou hast to thyself*". It is a warm expression, warm with deeper sincerity than anything else that was said at that memorable meeting. Esau was glad to see his brother; he bore no ill-will for the past, and he was quite satisfied with their relative positions and wanted nothing that was Jacob's. It is true that Jacob demurred and pressed for his acceptance of the present, and at last Esau consented and took the cattle, but the impression given by the narrative is that he was not greatly concerned either way and accepted only for the sake of peace and quietness.

"*So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir*" and the life he had carved out for himself, a life without God but one with which he was perfectly satisfied. Jacob went on in to Canaan and his destiny, a destiny that was to involve the creation of the nation of Israel, custodian of the Divine revelation, and the coming of the man Christ Jesus the Light of the world. About such things Esau knew nothing and cared nothing. He closed down his interests in Canaan, became the dominant figure in Seir, so much so that that its name was changed to Edom, the generic name of the tribe and later nation which had its origin in Esau.

He appears once more in the story. Isaac died twenty years later "*being old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him*". In the record of the last respects to their father the historian has recognised that Esau was the eldest and took precedence; so his name comes first. The last glimpse we have of the brothers together is one of amity.

Of Esau's death there is no mention. He was a hundred and twenty years old at the death of his father. A normal life span at the time was anything up to a hundred and fifty. Jacob died in Egypt at a hundred and forty seven. The last we see of Esau is still in Seir. Ten years later Jacob and his household went down into Egypt and when the nation of Israel which sprang from him came back four centuries later the sons of Esau had themselves grown into a nation. There was no enmity in Esau at the last. Despite his irreligiousness, his complete indifference to heavenly things and his disregard of the Divine calling centred upon his family line, he did at least in his easy-going generosity exhibit the Christian virtue of returning good for evil when he made that spontaneous response to Jacob's proffered peace-offering; "*I have enough, my brother. Keep that thou hast to thyself.*"

## THE SEVEN TIMES OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR

The "seven times" of Nebuchadnezzar's insanity (Dan. ch.4) are usually assumed to indicate seven solar years in his own case, and the length of the "Times of the Gentiles" referred to by Jesus in Luke 21. 24. This latter is claimed to be a period of seven times 360 years, aggregating 2,520 years, which, from the days of Nebuchadnezzar, brings the terminating period within the present 20th century, a matter of considerable interest to those who see in the Bible prophetic periods a confirmation of the signs of the times. There are, however, others who do not consider such treatment justified by the text, that nothing more is indicated in this passage than a more or less indefinite period of time during which the king's insanity was to endure. A consideration of the background to the chapter may throw light on the subject.

The Book of Daniel was written, mostly, by Daniel, and the complete book put together by him. But chapter 4, at least in the main, was not. Up to verse 27 it is the personal account of Nebuchadnezzar himself, of his dream, of his interview with Daniel who explained its meaning, and of the latter's unavailing plea for a change of course that the threatened "seven times" of insanity may be lifted. Then verses 28 - 33 are evidently written by someone who was with the king at the moment of the penalty coming upon him. This could have been Daniel himself; more likely it was Queen Amytis, walking with her husband in the famed "Hanging Gardens" which he had built for her. Then verses 34 -37 are by the king again, recording his recovery and acceptance of the sovereignty of the Most High God, the God of heaven.

The king would naturally use terms and words of his own land, not those of the Jews from Judea, and the account would be in the Babylonian language. At a later date it would be translated into Hebrew, then to Greek and Latin, and eventually into English, appearing today in the Authorised Version of 1611.

The Hebrew expression for "seven times" in Daniel, *but nowhere else in the Old Testament*, is *shibah iddan*. Although the word "times" appears more than two hundred times in the Bible, only in the Book of Daniel is the word *iddan*. This points to the fact that *iddan* is a Hebrew transliteration of the Babylonian word, which the king used.

This involves Babylonian time periods. The modern world measures time on the decimal system, decades, centuries, millenniums, for periods of ten, hundred, and a thousand years. The Babylonians and Assyrians measured time on what is called the sexagesimal system, in which multiples of six and sixty take the place of modern tens and hundreds, following their predecessors the Sumerians, who devised that system before the beginning of known history, certainly prior to the 25th century B.C., which is about the time of the patriarch Peleg of Gen. 11. A unit in this system having a name which would be the equivalent of the Hebrew *iddan* has to be found. Expert astronomers, the Sumerians in those far off days based their time periods on astronomical data. The basic source was the sun. The word *ud*, derived from *utu*, the sun, denoted primarily the solar day; it also denoted long periods of time, as for example *ud-ul-du-eri-su*, "unto eternal days", and *ud-ul-li-a-tu*, "from ancient days of old". The next units were the month of 30 days and the year of 12 months, with 5 days added after the 12th month (September), which latter were called "non-days", to make up 365. The next unit was the *sarus*, a period of 18 years in which eclipses of the sun and moon recur in the same order (actually 18 years and 10 days). After this came the Divine Year or "day of God", which, following the analogy of 360 earth-days to an earth year, was set at 360 years, equal to 20 *sarii* (plural of *sarus*). Mackenzie in "*Myths of Babylonia and Assyria*" has shown that this unit was also in use by the Sumerian civilisation in north-western India, which endured from about 2400 B.C. to 1500 B.C., called by them the "Divine Year" and that this unit was still in use in the Hindoo system in modern times. The Babylonian name would be the *ud-an*, and it would appear that the Hebrew *iddan* is derived from this word. Daniel, spending the whole of his life in Babylon, would obviously use Babylonian time periods, and when at a later date the Old Testament was rendered into the modern "square" Hebrew and the word was transliterated as *iddan* it is more than possible that the translators were perfectly aware of its significance. But in 1611 when the English Authorised Version was prepared there was no knowledge of the Sumerian language and Babylon's system of time periods; that has

come to light only in modern times. Failing such knowledge and having regard to the fact that the Hebrew "id" denotes a long period of time they could do no better than translate "seven times" and hope for the best.

There is a supporting indication in Dan. 7. 25 and 12. 7, where again in the expression "time, times and half a time" the word for time is *iddan*. Three and a half *ud-an* of 360 years is 1260, a figure prominently featured in prophetic interpretation. This period of 1260 years is that in which the earth, moon and sun, constantly circling round one another, are back in the same positions relative to each other, and so constitutes the longest possible cyclic period possible to earth, moon and sun together. (it is actually a fraction over 1262 years; the calendar unit of 1260 was adopted as a round figure fitting into the sexagesimal mathematical system and so equals 70 *sarii* or three and a half *ud-an*). The name given to this latter unit does not as yet seem to be known; if following the Sumerian methods of constructing such names it would probably be *sarus-gal*. The expression as used by Daniel stresses its relation to the 360 year period so that "seven times" again equals 2520 years.

If this reasoning is correct, it would appear that the customary impression that the "seven times" of Nebuchadnezzar and the associated three and a half times of Daniel denote 2520 and 1260 years respectively is not a mere assumption, but is solidly founded on the calendar system of the Babylonians at the time the words were spoken and recorded.

But how did the seven times apply so far as the king himself was concerned? He certainly was not to experience a two thousand year term of

living as the beasts. The usual assumption here is that his term was to be one of seven years, and the "times" then to be of 360 days each. In historic fact this could well have been true. He is known to have died in the year 562 B.C. and the last recorded activity of his reign was his victorious invasion of Egypt in 570 B.C. This would give just enough time for a seven-year absence from rulership and short restoration of regal power before his death. It is unfortunate that the Babylonian Chronicle, which is a contemporary official record of this king's reign, stops short before coming to this period. Perhaps the official scribes at the time felt it were better that not too much was said about that episode in the great king's reign although Berosus the Babylonian historian three centuries later does refer to it in guarded tones. Perhaps after all, the difficulty is more apparent than real. The last verse of 1 Chronicles, referring to the characteristics of David's reign, speaks of "the times that went over him", an indefinite expression that could only be interpreted as meaning a period rather than a stated number of years. It may be that the Babylonian king, and Daniel also, understood the "seven times" to have a dual significance; one an indefinite period while the king's malady was to persist, the other and more important one, the longer definite period during which the four "wild beasts" of Daniel's vision should hold power from the time of Nebuchadnezzar's accession to the coming of the Divine Kingdom on earth. That at any rate has been the understanding of the Christian Church from Apostolic days to the present, and in this our day has been well supported by current "signs of the times".

### Peter the Teachable

Much has been said respecting Peter's rashness and the difficulties into which he continually got. The criticism is surely to some extent justified, but we are to remember that the Master loved him greatly, partly on account of his zeal, partly on account of the energy which on several occasions got him into difficulties. One thing should always be remembered in his favour, that although he was the oldest of the Apostles he was evidently one of the most meek and teachable of them all. Of his mistakes he made a mirror, and thus, learning to know himself more particularly, he was safeguarded through the many dangers natural to his temperament; and he stands forth in the Scriptures as one of the very noblest of the Apostles. The wisdom of Peter's course is

illustrated in a little poem called "*The Three Fault Finders*." It tells that the three fault finders were provided each with a crystal to do with as he pleased; and this was the result:—

*"The fool contrived of his a lens,  
Wherein to gloating eyes,  
The smallest blot that could be found  
Was magnified in size.  
The just man made of his a pane,  
All clear without a flaw;  
Nor summer sun nor winter rain  
Affected what he saw.  
The wise man pondered long and well  
How best to search, to aid,  
Then, taking up the crystal given  
Of his a mirror made.*

## ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

### 9. The Hope of Israel

Chapter 10 is a continuation of the latter part of chapter 9 in that the vision of Christ who comes to conquer the world by love and persuasion in contrast to his predecessor Alexander the Greek who attempted to do so by force, and failed, goes into its culmination in the era of our Lord's reign over the earth still yet to come. "Corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids" is the conclusion to chapter 9 and that is followed immediately by the promise in chap. 10 of the Lord giving showers of rain and grass in the field; this is a vivid picture of the Millennial Age at work. "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain, so the Lord shall . . . give them showers of rain, to everyone grass in the field", This is still in the future tense: the day has not yet come but this is the prospect and it will surely be, and the standpoint of the prophet is as though he stands at the very threshold of that day and announces what he sees.

But the Lord has another word to speak, one that looks back to the past. "The teraphim have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain" (vs.2). The teraphim were miniature images of the pagan gods, standing on shelves or in niches in the house to protect its inmates from harm; but they could not protect. "Therefore" says the Lord, the people "were troubled, because there was no shepherd". He has more to say about the unfaithful shepherds in the next chapter, but for the moment he contents himself by saying "Mine anger was kindled against the shepherds and I punished the goats, for the Lord hath visited the house of Judah and made them as his goodly war-horse" (vs.3) The Lord is here taking his stand as it were in the dawn of the Millennial Age when the apostate leaders and unfaithful pastors have been deprived of their positions and the Lord himself has come out of his place to feed and exalt Israel. The past times had known the power of idol worship, of false prophets and soothsayers, of rapacious shepherds and ambitious leaders, the "he-goats" of verse 3. "Be as the he-goats before the flocks" was his admonition in the days of the Captivity (Jer 50. 8) when he called upon Israel and Judah to assert themselves and take the lead among the nations; but more often the leaders were themselves apostate as in this case and merited condemna-

tion. "Shepherds" was the term for rulers whether civil or ecclesiastical; the priests were shepherds and so were the kings. "The priest said not, Where is the Lord? and they that handle the law knew me not; the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit" (Jer. 2. 8). But now those dark days are past, and the Lord is taking action.

"The Lord of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his war-horse in the battle. Out of him came forth the corner, out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together" (vss. 3-4). The time indicated is that at which the Lord of hosts has made the house of Judah his war-horse in the battle; that fixes it at the inauguration of the Messianic Age. From God comes the "corner" (*pinnah* – chief man, or as we would say "the key man") which harks back to Psa. 118. 22. "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner" and Isa. 28.16. "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a chosen corner stone, a sure foundation. He that believeth shall never be confounded". (The RSV puts verse 4 in the future tense "out of him shall come" which is logical.) So too, is the "nail" in this same 4th verse, alluding to Isa. 22. 23, the nail "in a sure place", the Messiah upon whom all things will depend. So also, is the battle bow, which symbolises the triumphal progress of Messiah against the forces of evil as in Psa. 45, "thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies". Logically, then, the restored and purified people of the Lord shall indeed, as verse 5 declares "be as mighty men which tread down their enemies . . . because the Lord is with them. And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph . . . and they shall be as though I had not cast them off. . . . and they of Ephraim shall be like a mighty man . . . their children shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord." (vss, 5-7).

With this stirring and somewhat martial picture of the victory which righteousness gains in the "Last Day" comes the Lord's promise to Israel regarding their future destiny and the downfall of their opponents. He will "strengthen the house of Judah" and "save the house of Joseph" and they will be restored to their

land (vs. 6). Ephraim shall be regathered following the Divine call. The mention of these three, Judah, Joseph, Ephraim, denotes that the centuries-old rift between the two halves of the nation has been healed; there is now only one people of Israel and that people is a united one rejoicing in the Lord.

*"I will hiss for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them; and they shall increase as they have increased. And I will sow them among the people; and they shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live with their children, and turn again"* (vs. 8-9). The word "hiss" in vs. 8 has the meaning of calling by means of a pipe or wind instrument. This is not a call to war, as of a trumpet. The pipe or flute is an instrument of peace and the call is to come to a land where peace reigns and the peaceable arts of life can be followed without hindrance.

This picture of Judah, Joseph, and Ephraim being united in the arts of peace and godliness is a remarkable one when the implications are realised. Joseph was the favourite son of Jacob and his father conferred upon him the birthright, as Isaac had done with Jacob a generation earlier. From Joseph that birthright passed to Ephraim, one of Joseph's twin sons, but in later times the tribe of Ephraim became the most apostate of the tribes. Sadly did the Lord speak through Hosea the prophet *"When Ephraim spake trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died"* (Hos. 13. 1). So Ephraim became the leader of the Ten-Tribe kingdom with all its apostasy, and Judah of the Two-Tribe kingdom became the one through whom the purposes of God with the nation were eventually to be worked out; so Christ came of Judah and will one day be the greater David to rule all men everywhere, *"with justice and judgment even forever"*. So there was enmity between Ephraim and Judah from that time and forward. Now in this vision Zechariah sees that enmity replaced by unity. Judah and Joseph / Ephraim, two tribes and ten tribes, are no longer divided into two peoples; they are one, blood-brothers as they were at the first. The prophet Ezekiel described this in his picturesque symbol of the two sticks, inscribed with the two names, which became the one stick in his hand. *"Son of man" said the Lord to Ezekiel, "take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah . . . take then another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim . . . and join them one to another into one stick, and they shall be one in thine hand . . . Behold, I will take the children of*

*Israel from among the nations, whither they be gone, and will . . . bring them into their own land, and I will make them one nation in the land . . . and one king shall be king to them all, and they shall be no more two nations neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all."* (Ezek. 37. 15-25). The whereabouts of the "Lost Ten Tribes" has been a subject of speculation, a great deal of claimed history and not a little fanciful speculation for centuries. The Lord knows where they are and his word will be fulfilled in his own time and way.

So *"I will sow them among the people and they shall remember me in far countries"*; this is the Dispersion among all nations subsisting throughout this present Age between the First and Second Advents. But, *"they shall live with their children, and turn again"*; this is the Restoration at the end of the Age. *"I will bring them . . . out of Egypt . . . and out of Assyria, and I will bring them into . . . Gilead and Lebanon, and place shall not be found for them"*. Verse 11 defines the manner in which God will do this great thing. He will *"pass through the sea with straightness"* (the A.V. "affliction" in vs. 11 means straightness or tightness) and in this context pictures a deliverance analogous to the Red Sea crossing where God led the hosts while *"the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left"* (Exod. 14. 22). He shall *"smite them the waves in the sea, and all the deeps of the river shall dry up"* continues vs. 11, a manifest allusion both to the Red Sea passage and the later crossing of Jordan into the Promised Land. *"And the pride of Assyria shall be brought down, and the sceptre of Egypt shall pass away"*.

Egypt and Assyria, traditional enemies and oppressors of Israel throughout the nation's history, well symbolise the world powers which have continued that oppression since the days of the Romans. In such fashion will the powers of evil of this world give place when God rises up for that purpose, as surely and inexorably as that of Egypt failed in the days of Moses. So the people of God will be given strength (vs. 12) *"and they shall walk up and down in his name"*, an affirmation of confidence that at that time, the time of the Messianic reign, peace and prosperity shall come, and the dark shadow of evil flee away.

In these two picturesque chapters, 9 and 10, the prophet conducts his readers through a rapid survey of history, outlining the careers of two great personages, both of whom set out to achieve world domination, the one by fear and

force, the other by love and persuasion. The first was the Greek, Alexander the Great, conqueror of the world three centuries before the First Advent, a man of whom it was said that after subduing all known countries he sat down and wept because there were no worlds left for him to conquer. Three years later he died and the empire he had built fell to pieces. Verses 1–8 of chapter 9 tell of his progress and his conquests so far as they affected or concerned Israel. The

second is Christ the Lord, Prince of Peace, who came, not with fanfare of trumpet and show of force as did Alexander, but in lowliness and love. Verses 9–12 picture his coming and his invitation to men to accept him. Then the rest of chapter 9 and the whole of chapter 10 foresee the day yet to come when He takes to himself his great power and reigns, King of the nations. And under that reign there will, at last be peace.

*(To be continued)*

## Seiss on the reality of the spiritual world

*One of the 19th century's most noted preachers was Dr. J. A. Seiss of Philadelphia. In this extract from his writings : ("Lectures on the Book of Revelation") he reveals his grasp of the substantial reality of the celestial world at a time when Christian theology visualised heaven as an intangible, insubstantial realm in which the redeemed exist as wraith-like disembodied spirits having neither purpose nor activity. In this respect at least Dr. Seiss was well in advance of his times.*

\* \* \* \*

"An incorporeal and immaterial eternity for man is aside from the teachings of God's Word. No wonder that professed believers of our day are anxious to put off getting in to the heaven they believe in as long as the doctor's skill can keep them out of it, and finally agree to go only as a last despairing resort. It has no substance, no reality, for the soul to take hold on. It is nothing but a world of shadows, of mist, of dim visions of blessedness, with which it is impossible for a being who is not mere spirit, and never will be mere spirit, who knows only to live in a body and shall live for ever in a body, to feel any fellowship or sympathy.

"But such are not the ideas of our futurity which the Bible holds out to our faith and hope. Did men but learn to know the difference between a Paradise of sense and a Paradise of sensuality, the truth of God would not suffer in men's hands as it does, and their souls would not suffer as they do for something solid to anchor to amid the anxious perturbations of life and death. Did men but rid themselves of the old heresy that matter means sin, and learn to know and feel that there was a material universe before

sin was, and that a material universe will live on when sin shall have been clean washed away from the entire face of it, they would be in a better position both to understand and to enjoy the fore-announcements of the futurity of the saints which God has given for their consolation amid these vicissitudes and falsities. Says one of the greatest Scottish preachers (Dr. Chalmers) 'There is much of the innocent, and much of the inspiring, and much to affect and elevate the heart in the scenes and contemplations of materiality,— and we do hail the information, that, after the loosening of the present framework, it will again be varied and decked out anew in all the graces of its unfading verdure, and of its unbounded variety, and that instead of being transported to some abode of dimness and mystery, so remote from human experience as to be beyond all comprehension, we shall walk for ever in a land replenished with those sensible delights, and those sensible glories, which, we doubt not, will lie most profusely scattered over the new heavens and new earth.' We are now walking on a terrestrial surface, not more compact, perhaps, than the one we shall hereafter walk upon; and are now wearing terrestrial bodies, not firmer and more solid, perhaps, than those we shall hereafter wear. It is not by working any change upon them that we could realise, to any extent, our future heaven. The spirituality of our future state lies not in the kind of substance which is to compose its framework, but in the character of those who people it. There will be a firm earth, as we have at present, and a heaven stretched over it, as we have at present; and it is not by the absence of these, but by the absence of sin, that the abodes of immortality will be characterised."

## THE VINE AND THE GREEN OLIVE TREE

The Prophet Isaiah sings of the vineyard of his beloved. It is situated on a fruitful slope, well dug, the stones have been removed, and it is planted with the choicest vine. In it there is a watch-tower and a winepress and it is surrounded by a wall and a hedge. He then tells who the vine portrays "*For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah, the plant of his delight.*" In Jer. 11. 16 there is another picture; speaking of Israel and Judah God says "*you once were called to be a lovely spreading olive tree*" (Moffatt).

Both these pictures portray fertility, fruitfulness, but what happened? Speaking of the vine God says "*When I looked for it to bring forth grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will take away the hedge, break down the wall, it will be trodden down, laid waste, and not pruned or cultivated; but there shall come up thorns and briars. I will also command the rain to rain no rain upon it.*" But the vine itself was not destroyed. Of the lovely spreading olive tree the prophet declares, "*With the roar of a great tempest He will set fire to it and its branches will be consumed*" (Amp), but, the tree itself is not destroyed.

In these two pictures there is portrayed one of the greatest tragedies in the world's history. The Old Testament is a sad commentary on this neglected vine, this burnt olive tree. What a tragic family was Israel; Joseph's jealous brothers sold him into Egypt as a slave, but what was the outcome? Later on when Joseph's brothers were brought before him, he was so overcome that he could not keep back the tears and asked to be alone with them. He tells them who he is and says "*do not be angry with yourselves because of what you did, for God did send me before you to preserve life*". After the death of Jacob, Joseph again addresses his brothers saying (Gen. 50. 20-21) Moff. "*You meant to do me evil but God meant good to come out of it, as is happening today, when many lives are being preserved, so do not be afraid: I will maintain you and your little ones.*"

Ponder this incident in the life of Joseph and his brothers, look forward to the time when Jesus (the antitype) will welcome his brothers, the children of Israel who so cruelly treated him, and will say "*God meant good to come of it, so do not be afraid, for I will maintain you and your*

*little ones*". However, much is to transpire before this happy event. When Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to Jacob in his old age that he might bless them, Jacob reversed the natural order, and when Joseph sought to rectify the matter Jacob said "*Manasseh shall become a people, but truly his younger brother shall become greater than he and his seed shall become a multitude of nations*". In Gen. 49. 22 we find Israel's final words to his family; he says of Joseph "*he is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well, whose branches run over the wall. His bow abode in strength and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob*". History reveals that the two tribes of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, led the tribes to victory in the land of Canaan; (Joshua was an Ephraimite) and they occupied about half the land, including large tracts on the east bank of Jordan, so literally "ran over the wall". It is significant that the name Ephraim means "fruitful" and this thought of fruitfulness runs as a thread through the study.

However yet again something goes wrong, for in both the minor and major prophets Ephraim is condemned over and over again. This is summed up in Psa. 78. 67 "*Moreover God rejected the tent of Joseph and chose not the tribe of Ephraim*" (in which the tabernacle had been accustomed to stand) (Amp). Why was this so? Hosea 9. 8 (Amp) reads "*Ephraim was intended to be a watchman with my God, but he has become a fowler's snare in all his ways. There is enmity, hostility and persecution in the house of God*". In Hosea 7. 8 Ephraim is described as "half-baked" and in vs. 11 "like a silly dove", because he courted favour with first one country and then another, calling to Egypt and Assyria for help. What of the fruitfulness implied in his name? Hosea 10. 1-2 (Amp) Israel is a "*luxuriant vine that puts forth its (material) fruit. According to the abundance of his fruit he has multiplied his altars (to idols); according to the goodness and prosperity of their land they have made goodly pillars (to false gods). Their heart is divided and deceitful; now shall they be found guilty and suffer punishment*" (Hosea 9. 16. 17 Amp). "Ephraim is smitten, their root dried up, they shall bear no fruit. Yes, though they bring forth, yet will I slay even their beloved children. My God shall cast them away, because they did not listen to and obey him, and they shall be

wanderers and fugitives among the nations.”

But enough of this sad story. Turn now to the New Testament. The first chapter of John's gospel speaks of the gospel's beginning on earth; there Jesus is described as the light and life of the world, but what do we find in verse 11? He came unto his own and his own received him not. So the sad story continues into the New Testament. Mark 12 contains an account of the parable of the vineyard in which our Lord uses almost the same words as in Isaiah 5. The vineyard was planted and the owner went abroad, letting it out to labourers. At the end of the season he sent servant after servant to receive the fruit of the vineyard but they were insulted, beaten or murdered. So the sad story goes on; the owner sent his son, saying to himself, surely they will respect my own son. But the labourers murdered him and threw his body out of the vineyard. The parable continues, *“What do you suppose the owner of the vineyard is going to do? He will come and destroy the men who were working his vineyard and will hand it over to others”*.

This parable is self explanatory. Consider the amplification of it in the letter written by St. Paul to the Roman church. This is found in chapters nine to eleven and uses the other picture, that of the olive tree. In the opening verses of chapter nine Paul deplors the infidelity of his own race, and enumerates the blessings which were theirs. This recalls the words of Isa. 5. 4. *“What more could have been done to my vineyard, what have I left undone”* But Paul knew that God's purpose is not, and cannot be, utterly defeated, for Rom. 9. 10 reads *“Now this does not mean that God's word to Israel has failed, for you cannot count all ‘Israelites’ as the true Israel, nor can all Abraham's descendants be considered truly children of Abraham”*. In chapter ten he continues to outline the cause of Israel's failure, and how they missed the way, and concludes in chapter 11. 14 *“Has God then totally repudiated his people? Certainly not. It is unthinkable that God should have repudiated the people whose destiny he himself appointed.”* He then goes on to show how that in the providence of God, disaster has been turned to good account. This recalls the outcome of the incident in the life of Joseph which prefigures Israel's treatment of Jesus. So he says (Rom. 11. 28–29 Phil) *“As far as the gospel goes, they are at present God's enemies—which is to your advantage. But as far as God's purpose in choosing is concerned, they*

*are still beloved for their father's sakes. FOR ONCE THEY ARE MADE, GOD DOES NOT WITHDRAW HIS GIFTS OR HIS CALLING.”* Here Phillip's translation interpolates a sub-heading, *“The whole scheme looks topsy-turvy, until we see the amazing wisdom of God”*.

Does the whole scheme look topsy-turvy today? What is happening in Israel? The answer seems to depend upon what we are looking for. Some writers stress the material prosperity of Israel, saying that it is an indication of God's favour, but Israel and Ephraim prospered in the past, and this was not a sign of God's favour. Their fruit was not then, and is not now, the sort that God seeks. One is saddened by the pictures of the girls and youths of Israel being trained for armed combat. We look—but we look in vain—for some indication of their leaders turning to God in their besetment; but Ephraim still trusts in his own way, in chariots, and in a multitude of mighty men; or to modernise the picture, in fighter planes, in bombs and rockets, and in aid from other nations. But, you may say, they must fight with modern weapons. Why must they? In Hosea 1. 7 (Amp) God says *“But I will not save them by bow nor sword, nor by equipment of war, nor by horses, nor by horsemen”* (see also Isa. 31. 8 & 9 and 37. 36). In the history of Israel there is ample evidence that God can and does save, not by weapons. (Read the accounts in 2 Chron. 20. 1–24. Judges 7. 12–22. 1 Sam. 14. 6–16). In the last account quoted Jonathan and his young armour-bearer showed themselves openly to the Philistine garrison; this seemed a stupid thing to do, but Jonathan had said to his armour-bearer previously *“Come on, let us cross over to this uncircumcised garrison; perhaps the Eternal will do something for us, for the Eternal never has had any difficulty about delivering his people, by means of many, or by means of few”* (Moff). Would that some Jonathan would stand up today, for there is still no sign of any faith in God's ability to deliver them so the same thing must happen to modern Ephraim as it did long ago, but with a different outcome!

Jer. 30. 7 refers to *“Jacob's trouble.”* There is much conjecture as to how, and when this takes place; read this verse in its context. Verse 3 reads *“The days are coming saith the Lord when that I will release from captivity my people Israel and Judah, and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave their fathers, and they shall possess it”*, Whether they possess it now or not is

open to question, but verse 5 continues "*For thus saith the Lord, we have heard a voice of trembling and fear and not of peace*" (Moff.). Jacob's trouble is then likened to the pains of a woman in child-birth, spasmodic, increasing in severity and becoming more frequent as time passes. Is this Israel's experience today? Do not quibble as to how and when this takes place, but rather note well the outcome "*But he (Jacob) shall be SAVED OUT OF IT!*"

For so long the vine has been neglected and over-run with briars and thorns, the olive tree has had other and wild branches grafted in, now must come the painful operation. The thorns and thistles of pride and avarice must be grubbed out, the briars of injustice and idolatry torn away; the burnt hedge (trust in weapons) cleared and the crumbling watchtower rebuilt and a new wine-press dug. The wild olive branches will go and the natural branches re-grafted. All this constitutes a major operation, but it is necessary if Israel and Ephraim are to bear fruit. Slowly but surely the work will proceed, and out of bitterness will come salvation.

We have dealt at some length on this sad story, but this is inevitable as it has lasted for so long. Now look, not at the seen things which are transient, but at the spiritual things which are eternal. So much of the prophecy of Hosea is condemnatory, dwelling upon the punishment which Ephraim merits and has received, but it also contains some wonderful flashes of hope and rejoicing. Israel is pictured as an unfaithful woman bearing three children, but Hosea 2 speaks not only of her punishment but of her rehabilitation also, "*So I will allure her, put her alone and apart, and speak to her heart; then I will restore her vineyards, and make the dale of trouble a door of hope: then shall she answer me as in her youthful days, when she came up from Egypt's land*" (vs. 15 & 16) Moff. In Jer. 31. 1-20 God promises to build Israel afresh and restore Ephraim as "my favourite son, my darling child". Ephraim, so roundly condemned and punished for so long will at last return to favour. There are many passages in the

prophecies which are indeed a window of hope to Israel. Many are in the form of vivid visions in which natural pictures portray coming events.

When Ezekiel was in exile in Babylon, far from his beloved Jerusalem, he saw the glory of the Lord in the Temple. Fire from the throne-chariot sets fire to the city and the glory of the Lord departs from the Temple, pauses at the East gate, then moves to the Mount of Olives. It is in the tradition of the Rabbis that for three and a half years the Shekinah tarried on the Mount of Olives in the hope that Israel would repent, but they did not. The prophet then sees a vast battlefield strewn with the bodies of men long dead. As Ezekiel prophesies as instructed "*there was a thundering noise and behold a shaking and trembling, and a rattling, and the bones came together*". (Is not this another picture of Jacob's trouble?). He then sees sinews, then flesh, then skin covers the bones, but there was no breath or spirit in them. Is not this a picture of Israel today? Then breath and spirit came into the bones and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceeding great host. The prophet then sees the Temple rebuilt, the priests in their various orders installed, the land portioned out, and the tribes dwelling in peace and prosperity. He sees the Glory of God approaching the city from the East, from the Mount of Olives. He then describes the return of the Glory of the Lord to the city. Forget the sad story of past ages, forget Jacob's trouble of today, and join the prophet in his lovely vision of the glorious future. "*And the glory of the Lord came from the East, and his voice like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory. And the glory of the Lord entered the temple by the East gate; behold the glory of the Lord filled the temple. And He, the Lord, said unto me, this is the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever*".

So shall the "vineyard of my beloved"—the lovely spreading olive tree—flourish and bear fruit for all eternity.

The world is preparing day by day for the millennium, but you do not see it. Every season forms itself a year in advance. The coming summer lays out her work during the autumn, and buds and roots are forespoken. Ten million roots are pumping outside; do you hear them?

Ten million buds are forming in the exils of the leaves; do you hear the sound of the saw or hammer? All next summer is at work in the world, but it is unseen by us, and so "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation".

H. W. Beecher



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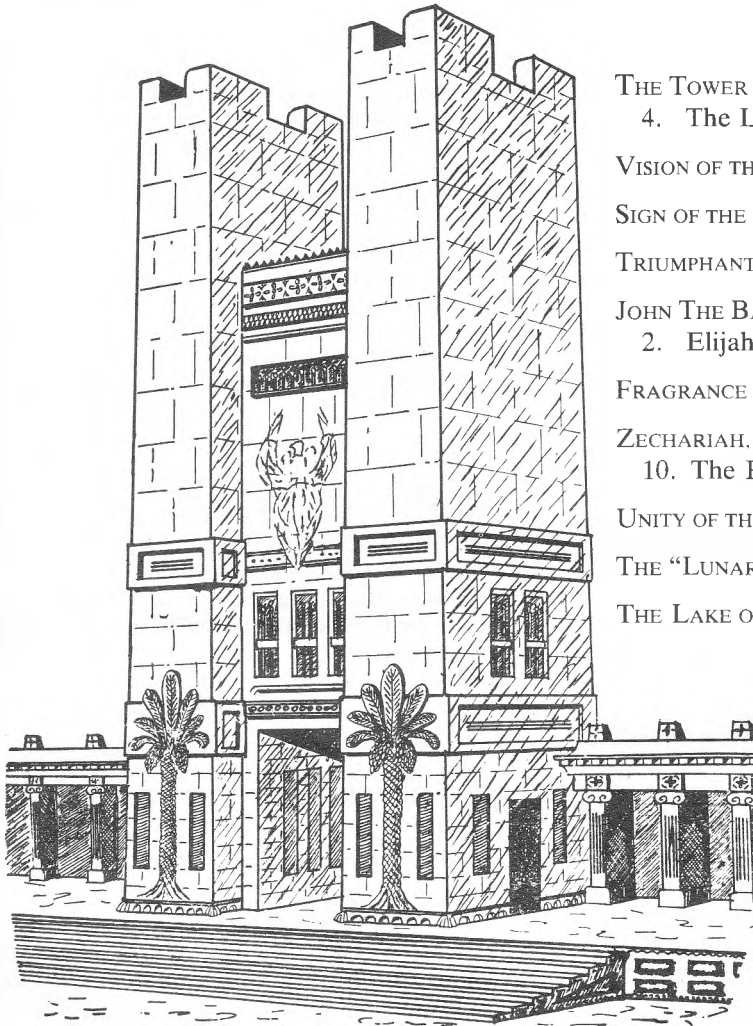
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Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### BOOK REVIEW

**"The Oxford Companion to the Bible"**. B. M. Metzger & M. D. Coogan. 912pp Cloth, £35, ISBN 0-19-504645-5 Oxford University Press, 1994. (Note: A special price of £30 applies for copies purchased before 31 August 1994.)

This book will find its place in university libraries and theological seminaries, essentially a handbook for students pursuing the conclusions of its more than two hundred and fifty contributors, mainly of the "critical" school, for which reason some of its presentations may not be so well received by that section of students of the Bible, probably a minority in these modern days, who maintain the factual accuracy of the historical passages. Nevertheless its thousand pages contain a mass of useful information and some penetrating analyses not usually found in works of this kind. In the realm of pure theology the comments under the headings of Death, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity and so on are particularly apt and thought-provoking set against orthodox creedal interpretations. There is much of interest in the very comprehensive articles on the various books of the Apocrypha, OT and NT, the history of the Bible manuscript texts and versions through the ages, the story of theological research, and that of the world-wide circulation of the Bible by the Bible Societies. The sheer size of the book probably accounts for the somewhat tantalising brevity of some of the articles—so much more is known to-day, which could be said about

Pontius Pilate, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Book of Jasher; in limiting the application of that mysterious number 666 in the Book of Revelation to the Emperor Nero in the 1st century it fails to go on to the numerous other cases where the coded number has been applied to half a dozen other personalities from Nero through Mahomet and Louis XIV of France to Hitler in modern times. It is refreshing to find the progress made by the critical school since Schultz in 1891 said "the legendary character of the pre-Mosaic narratives was proved by the fact that they dealt with a time prior to all knowledge of writing" where here, a century later, that knowledge is carried back to the 32nd century B.C. In a book of nearly three-quarters of a million words it is inevitable that one or two mistatements should creep in; thus on page 244 it is said that Seth was the father of Enoch where it should be Enos; Enoch came five generations later. On page 525 the Babylonian Most High God is Marduk, whereas in fact that title is that of An, the Most High God who went back to Sumerian times and from pre-history, as witness Nebuchadnezzar II, whose favourite Deity was Marduk, admitting that Daniel's God, the Most High God, was superior to his own gods. There is little attempt to put the case for the traditional acceptance of Bible narrative as true history but apart from this there is a wealth of useful information assembled within the book's covers.

**The BSM.** Although it is well known that the BSM is sent free of charge to all who are genuinely interested and request it, we do from time to time receive letters enquiring as to its cost of production from some who wish to make a contribution and desire this knowledge for their own enlightenment. For the information of such it can be noted that the production and postage costs amount at present to £5.50 pa for readers in UK and £7 for those overseas, the difference being due to the inordinately high postal rates recently imposed by the British Post Office. This is for the information of enquirers; we stress that costs are met by completely spontaneous gifts by those able and desiring to further the circulation of the BSM and its associated literature.

### Gone from us



Bro. John Beavan (*Melksham*)

Sis. Addie Sayer (*Rugby*)



*"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."*

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

### 4. The Lord came down

*"And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men builded" (vs. 5).*

Did God really come down to earth in person? The account certainly says so, but then so does the Book of Exodus, in the story of Moses at the burning bush, say the same thing respecting God's purpose to deliver Israel from Egypt. *"I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians"* (Exod. 3. 8). There are a number of occasions in Old Testament history where God is said to have come down to earth but the expression is almost always recognisable as a figure of speech indicating that God turns his attention earthward to perform a particular act or work. It is possible, of course, that there was an actual appearance of a messenger from above, coming in the authority of the Most High, just as there was in the case of Abraham at the time of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and as there were on other occasions in later Old Testament history. Once we admit the existence of a celestial world having its citizens busy about the work of God, we have to admit the possibility of communication between the respective worlds, celestial and terrestrial. The Bible takes the position that such visits have taken place on certain momentous occasions. An understanding of the precise manner in which God "came down" to see the city and the tower is not important; it is the outcome which has to engage our attention. Just as the Lord pronounced judgment upon the antediluvians at the time of the Flood for their impiety, so now He comes down to pronounce judgment upon the builders of the Tower.

*"And the Lord said 'Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language: and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do'."* (vs. 6). Compare that last sentence with the expression in Gen. 6. 5 "every imagination of the thoughts of his (man's) heart was evil continually". It is once more the imagination of man's heart that is the cause of the mischief; God knows that the course of sin must inevitably continue and flourish measurably unchecked until his due time for taking firm control of all mankind and imposing upon them that rule of the shepherding rod which will at last wean them away from sin and make of them convinced and unchangeable servants of righteousness.

But back there at the time of Babel nothing of this could be done; indeed it became necessary for God to do something to expedite and hasten the essential developments which must take place in the earth before men could be ready to listen to the voice that will speak from heaven. So God acted there and then to scatter them over the face of the earth. They would not go willingly; He would see to it that they went of constraint. We can visualise to ourselves the change that came over the scene when the Divine judgment had gone forth and the schemes of these men were frustrated, that they could no longer work together in the execution of this enterprise to which they had pledged themselves.

*"Go to" said the Lord "let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth, and they left off to build the city" (vs. 7-8).*

The Septuagint has it *"they left off the build the city and the tower"*. This may very well have been the original text. The story implies that the object, the tower, was frustrated, in which case the partly built edifice may have stood in its unfinished condition for a considerable time, perhaps several centuries, before the project was resumed and completed. The actual date of the founding of Babylon is unknown; McQueen in *"Babylon"* (1964) says that its origin *"is lost in the mists of time"*. It was already there at the time that known history — apart from the Bible—begins, at about the 25th century B.C., approximately the time of Eber the patriarch of Gen. 11., with the other cities mentioned in Gen. 10 as associated with the Biblical hero Nimrod, Erech (modern Uruk), Calneh (Nippur), and Accad (probably Ur — not the Akkad of Sargon, which was quite a few centuries later). The first two kings of Uruk claimed to have been son or grandson of the sun-god, Marduk. The Hebrew transliteration of Marduk, which in the native language is Na-marad-uk, Na-marad the god, is Nimrod, founder of Uruk according to Gen. 10. The earliest Sumerian epics date to about 2000 B.C., by which time paganism was firmly established. These same epics, seven hundred years after the events to which they relate, describe the

building of the Tower by the god Marduk. For what they are worth, they could imply that the second attempt to build the city and Tower could have been perhaps three or more centuries after the Dispersion, and if this second attempt was in fact led by the Scriptural Nimrod he could have been either the grandson or great-grandson of Cush, which is in harmony with Gen. 10 and could also have been the source of Josephus crediting him with being the builder.

It should be noticed that there is no indication here of the differentiation of language occurring at the Tower, before the scattering. It has often been assumed that the story narrates the suspension of building activities consequent upon a miraculous confusion of language making it impossible for any man to understand his fellows. Nothing of the sort. *"Let us confound their language"* says God. *"So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence, upon the face of all the earth"*. The scattering was the cause of all the language differentiation, which came as the logical result, and what the Lord did in order to effect his purpose was to divide and scatter them. The development of divergent languages was the inevitable result, a process which has continued ever since, and is still continuing as tribes and communities separate and migrate into new territories. It ought not to escape notice, though, as a sign of the significance of current events in their relation to the Divine purpose, that in these latter days the contrary influence is at work in that the growth of world travel and communication with its consequent mingling of communities is having the opposite effect, inducing a growing uniformity of language and speech. It is possible to travel almost to any part of the world and find English and several other European languages spoken without much difficulty. It might well be that the purpose for which differentiation of language was employed has been served and that the time has come for all humanity to be brought together again; that at any rate is the purpose of the Messianic kingdom.

How was the separation effected? Probably by reason of the same influence that has frustrated so many of the schemes of men in days since then—the development of differences of opinion on methods, on policy, on all that had to do with the project in hand. The process of scattering may have been a long one. The Semitic writer of Genesis 11 can trace Japheth's children only to the second generation but

Ham's to the third. That may indicate that Japheth's "tribe" moved off first and that the break between Shem and Ham came a generation later. What is fairly certain is the fact that Ham's descendants remained in possession of the land—a few centuries later Shem's children, having settled and multiplied in Syria, were pressing on the sons of Ham and invading their territory. Of Japheth we hear no more—he and his went north, following the River Tigris in all probability, to settle in lands farther north. In after years they had little or no contact with the other two peoples, and are mentioned hardly at all in later Scripture history. Shem and his house went up the Euphrates and settled in what is now North Syria, from whence their descendants in the fourth or fifth generations began to spread, some southward into the great peninsula of Arabia,—the sons of Joktan; some of their names as recorded in Genesis 10 survive still as names of South Arabian tribes—and others back along the Euphrates to the plain of Shinar itself, where they met with the sons of Ham who had remained there all the time. These were apparently the sons of Peleg the brother of Joktan, for six generations later we find Abraham, with Terah his father, of the line of Peleg, living in Ur of the Chaldees in the south of the land on the then shore of the Persian Gulf. But by that time the invading Semites had so intermarried with the native Hamites—the Sumerians—that the two races had virtually become one. By that time also Babylon had become a relatively great and powerful city.

The narrative says that they left off to build the city. The earliest notice in secular history that we have of Babylon is in the time of Sargon of Akkad, and that must have been at least four or five centuries after the frustration of the original project. In Sargon's day Babylon was a holy city sacred to Marduk and it was conspicuous both for the Tower, E-temen-anki, and the Temple, E-sagila. At some time between, the building of the city must have been resumed by the sons of Ham, and this is in harmony with the Genesis 10 account, which declares Babylon to have been the beginning of the kingdom of Nimrod, who was a Hamite.

Unlike the Babylonian legends of the Creation and the Flood, which have been known for many years, until the latter half of the present century no similar legend relating to the confusion of tongues was known; this enabled critics of the Bible to dispute its historicity. With

the decipherment, soon after mid century, of a number of epics relating to the previously unknown city-state of Aratta in the Iranian mountains the position changed. In an epic dating from a time about that of the birth of Abraham, "*Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*", there appears in a hymn sung in the temples in praise of the sun-god Marduk, chief deity of Babylon, a distinct reference to the occurrence. The archaic nature of the language has given rise to variations in translation by different authorities, but a general appraisal of the sense of the hymn is given here. There is an evident mix-up with the story of Eden but a clear comparison between the original unity of language and its later differentiation.

*"In times of old there were no snakes, no scorpions, no hyenas, no lions, no dogs, no wolves. There was no fear nor apprehension. Men had no enemies. At that time the lands of Shubar and Harmazi, Sumir of the harmonious voice, of wealthy Uri, of secure Mardu, the entire world, the people resting secure in God, gave praise to En-lil in one tongue.*

*"Then En-ki, the opposing lord, the opposing prince, the opposing king, the lord of abundance, the lord of wisdom, the wisdom of the land, the wisdom of the gods, the lord of Eridu, professing wisdom, changed their speech into contention, whereas the speech of men had been one."*

At the time of the epic, paganism flourished. The Most High God, An, the God of Heaven, worshipped as the only God by Noah and his descendants for probably nearly a thousand years, was now being thought of as manifest in two aspects, En-lil, meaning Lord of the spirit or of the air (the Sumarian word *lil* means spirit, breath, wind, precisely as does the Hebrew *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma*) was God in the heavens, and En-ki, meaning Lord of the earth (and the nether regions) was God upon earth and to do with earthly things. En-lil was viewed as a fatherly and beneficent Deity whose special abode was Nippur (Calneh of Gen. 10), the holy city of the Sumerians. En-ki was a robust god by no means always of benevolent temperament whose habitat was the ancient commercial seaport of Eridu at the then extremity of the Persian Gulf and whose chief occupation was looking after the interests of his own supporters. In this poetic composition the entire community of men is pictured as living in harmony with En-lil the Lord of Heaven until En-ki the Lord of earth interfered and caused contention amongst men

with consequent differentiation of language. The Genesis account, from its own internal evidence, was written five hundred years before this epic and the latter shows how the story survived in mutilated fashion, to be re-expressed against a polytheistic background, to be sung in praise of pagan deities in the temples of the day. The inference so often drawn, although not so expressed in the Bible account, that the development of languages followed and was due to differences of opinion and policy on the part of the builders of the Tower is at least supported by this very ancient hymn.

This is the end of the story as such. The writer has achieved his purpose, to explain how men were scattered over the earth and how they came to speak different languages. In Gen. 10 he describes the different nations and their geographical distribution, each having its own language, and in Gen. 11 he tells how that distribution came about.

*"Therefore is the name of it called Babel: because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of the earth."* (vs. 9).

This verse is a comment upon the story. It may have been written at the same time as the original account was written or it may have been added at a later time. We do not really know just when the story was first written down. It may have been as early as the time of Joktan's sons and the invasion of Sumeria, by the Semites; this is deduced from the fact that in Gen. 10 no descendants of Joktan after his own sons are named, as though at that time the writer of the account lost touch with that branch of the family. But the account may well have been written later. In any case we can reasonably assume that it was committed to writing by one of Abraham's ancestors and that was how it came into the patriarch's hands in due course.

The observation in verse 9 is due to a play upon words—a pun! The Hebrew word for "mingling" or "confusion" is *balbal*. The pronunciation is sufficiently like "Babel" for the writer to say "Therefore is the name of it called *Babel* because the Lord did there confound (*balbal*) the language of all the earth. By our English standards it may not be considered a very good pun; but it afforded the writer of the account an opportunity to show his contempt for the idolatrous city, and what is the inevitable end of that which is erected in honour of false

gods—confusion.

The first nine verses of this chapter picture the descendants of Noah, at first living and travelling together in primitive simplicity, finding a pleasant and productive place in which to dwell, giving way to overwhelming ambition and going on from that to active rebellion against God. It tells how God intervened from above and frustrated the scheme, and in that it gives assurance of the Divine intention so to overrule the deeds of men that his own Plan will go forward into execution as He ordained. It does not profess to tell the end of the story;

how that men took the path of rebellion, and the Tower whose building had been halted by the intervention of God was after all completed and dominated Babylon for many generations. But God is not mocked. That Tower is not there to-day. And in like manner the time will come when evil will be no more, and the shadow of rebellion no longer fall across the sunlight of Divine rule over men. The remainder of the story of the Tower, gleaned as it must be from the pages of history, is itself a parable to this end and bears testimony to this truth.

*(To be continued)*

## VISION OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

He sat on the mountain, a lonely old man, bereft of all save memories of a long life spent in the service of Christ, and as he sat, there arose before his wondering eyes a marvellous vision, a vision of the Holy City, descending out of Heaven to settle for ever upon the earth. In his vision he got to his feet, descended the mountain and went into that Holy City and saw all its wonders, and the glory of his experience has been written in golden letters with jewelled capitals at the end of the book that bears his name.

The panorama of history had already been unfolded to John in vivid imagery and he had been carried in spirit into the Age of peace and righteousness. Now he was to experience the final revelation, that of the restoration of Eden and all that was lost when man, because of sin, was expelled from Eden. It seems as though Rev. 21. 1-8 is the seer's own introductory synopsis of the actual vision which is recorded in detail from 21.9 to 22. 5. He had just witnessed the pictures of Millennial judgments which occupy chapter 20 and now he was to view further aspects of the same Age. He was to see the coming of men into reconciliation with God, their healing of body and mind, and their entering into an eternal inheritance of righteousness and peace. Even the very landscape was changed. In exultation he cried "*I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away . . . and I John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem . . . and I heard a great voice out of heaven saying 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and*

*God himself shall be with them, and be their God'. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.*" (Rev. 21. 1-4). So an angel came to him, and took him into the city, that he might see for himself what God was doing.

The old city of Jerusalem had been destroyed, twenty years previously. All the golden hopes that it was soon to become the city of David's greater Son, from which He would rule the earth in righteousness, had been shattered. *Uru-salim*—City of Peace—named in almost prehistoric times after the ancient Semitic god of peace, had never really been a City of Peace; nearly always one of strife and blood. But now he saw that the golden promises of the prophets were true words indeed, even although their fulfilment must wait for the ending of a world, the passing of the heavens and earth in which he and his fellows still lived. The New Jerusalem would come to earth to be the true City of Peace, and then all would be fulfilled as God had promised. So he gazed upon its shimmering glory, with its great and high wall marking it out four-square, the length even as the breadth, and followed with his eye its gleaming buildings, terrace upon terrace, tier upon tier, up and up, until they reached the central buildings, so high above the outer wall that the height of the city appeared to be as great as its breadth, and as he gazed he rejoiced in spirit.

And now, following the angel, he had reached the wall, a towering wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits high, more than half the height of

St. Paul's Cathedral in London, a shining precipice of brilliant green jasper. Green is the Millennial colour, the colour of fields and forests, for the desert is to blossom as the rose, and trees grow in the wilderness, and those who pass into the Holy City pass into a fair land of smiling meadows and sparkling streams. Nature will come into her own again and the squalid erections of men be done away. But how to effect an entrance? John gazed upon that two hundred feet height of rampart, twelve times twelve cubits, built upon the twelve foundations gleaming like precious stones, in each foundation the name of an Apostle. He looked upon the twelve lofty gateways with their two-leaved doors of pearl. His memory raced back to earlier days when as a lad he had sat at the feet of doctors and rabbis and learned of the twelve portals of heaven, out of which the sun emerges, in every month a different portal, returning at night that at dawn it might emerge again. From those twelve portals, said the rabbis, the angels come forth from the presence of God to execute their commissions on earth—and now he himself was seeing with his own eyes twelve just such portals out of which the blessings of God were to come like the sun rising each day and travelling in his strength. Twelve was the number of perfection; and only those who are perfect, righteous, undefiled, may enter into the Holy City; all that is unclean and that defiles must forever remain outside.

Now he was inside the city. Following his guide, he had passed through the lofty gateway with its attendant guardians and was standing in the street, the "broad place" or central square of the city, a street that shone like gold and reflected the light like glass. It was not that the sun was shining; John knew how bright the Palestinian sun could be at noonday but here there was no sun visible in the clear heavens. And yet the light was radiantly brilliant, a light that touched the surface of the ground so that it shone like burnished gold. He knew, without being told, that it was the light of God, Who giveth light and life, the light of the One Who dwells between the cherubim, shining out from His place and overpowering the light of the sun. So John lifted up his eyes to where the Temple ought to be, there on the summit of Mount Moriah—but here in his dream city of Jerusalem there was a difference. There was no Temple.

Long and earnestly he pondered over the meaning of the enigma. The Sanctuary that for many long ages had made Jerusalem what it was, a place of prayer for all peoples—to have no place in the city that shall be at last? To what could men look when they came before God in reverence and adoration? And as if reading his thoughts, the revealing angel turned and looked up toward heaven, and into John's mind there came the memory of words spoken long ago—it seemed a long time ago now but the memory was as fresh as if it had been only yesterday. "*God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth.*" Ah! there was the answer. What need of a Temple made with hands in that glorious future day when all men would know God as a Father and come to Him in sincerity and confidence, with no sacrifices but those of praise and thanksgiving? The material building which for so long had represented God to the multitude would wax old and vanish away; God Himself would be the Temple, and the day would certainly come when the true worshippers would neither in the mountain of Samaria nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father, for all would know Him, from the least unto the greatest, and come before Him without need either of priest or veil to separate their sin from His holiness.

A touch of vivid green, away there in the centre of the broad place, set startlingly against the sheen of golden buildings and glitter of precious stones; a green that was not the green of jasper, or of beryl, or of emerald. He looked again; there were trees, trees bearing rich fruit, and between and beyond them the glint of light upon water. He went towards them, and as he drew near beheld a place where was the throne of God, and from that throne, quietly, gently, but in abundant volume, came the shining waters of a crystal river.

As he took his stand upon its banks and looked down into its limpid depths the vision of the city faded from his sight, and left him standing upon the river's edge, looking out into a mighty distance, a vista of lush meadows and far-away stately mountains, a view of redeemed multitudes returning to Zion, returning to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. He knew that he was looking upon the River of the water of Life.

## THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN

Jesus declared (Matt. 24. 30) that following the "tribulation of those days"—the catalogue of world troubles which leads up to the end of the Age, "*then shall appear*"—a word meaning to make evident, manifest, not necessarily by physical sight, literally "to bring to light"—"*the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven . . .*" Just what is meant by the "sign of the Son of Man" has given rise to a variety of opinions; the structure of the sentence demands that it be something in the nature of a preliminary spectacle or happening which indicates the imminence of the actual revelation of Christ to the waiting world, something which men can see or appreciate as the evidence of that which is to follow. If one tries to visualise the point in history at which this world has all but reached its end, when society as we know it is on the brink of final disruption, when the world's politicians are on the point of giving up, then what is the outward evidence then being displayed before men that a great change is imminent? All Bible prediction in the Old Testament, as well as much Apostolic teaching in the New, conspire together to indicate the completion of a process which has an integral place in the events of the Time of the End but has not yet attained its zenith. Is that process the resurgence of Israel?

Of all the strange events of this century, the appearance and continuity of the sovereign state of Israel is the most inexplicable. Occupying a territory only the size of Wales, it has become a power to be reckoned with in the counsels of the largest nations. In a world of super-powers armed to the teeth, it is classed by the world's strategists as the fourth strongest military power. When Britain relinquished its Mandate over Palestine in 1948, the world waited to see the handful of Israelis pushed into the sea by an overwhelming flood of Arabs. Instead, they saw ten million Arabs defeated by two million Israelis and the new state proclaimed in defiance of the whole world. And no one has been able to do anything about it. Six wars have waged against these tenacious fighters and they are still there. More than two millenniums ago the Lord

said through the prophet Zechariah that He would make Jerusalem a burdensome stone to all the world (Zech. 13. 3); that prediction has come true. And the question has to be faced; what is the secret of the apparently miraculous survival of these people? What is the power that sustains them? What is to be the outcome?

The Scriptures are positive. Israel is to be a converted and holy people appointed to introduce the Divine Kingdom on earth and engage in a world-wide missionary work among all nations under the guidance and leadership of the Lord Christ and his Church from heaven. They are not, as a nation, converted and holy at present, but that will come. Their present politicians and leaders, with all their good qualities and skilled administration, are politicians of this world. Before Israel becomes the converted and holy people the Lord intends, they will need new leaders, stalwart men of God, inflexibly set for righteousness, men of vision and character, turning the nation away from its reliance upon the policies and practices of this world, taking to themselves the practices of the world to come.

Is this the "sign of the Son of Man in Heaven", the immediate precursor of his revelation to the world, this unexpected and unexplainable phenomenon, the emergence of a righteous nation, led by righteous men, eschewing all human means of offence and defence, and relying in complete faith upon the power of God to protect and deliver from all enemies? In the days of the Ten Plagues on Egypt, Pharaoh's magicians were able to reproduce the first two plagues and so Pharaoh took no notice of Moses, but when Moses called down the third plague the magicians found themselves powerless. So they said to Pharaoh "*this is the finger of God*" (Exod. 8. 19). So will it be at this end of the Age; the rulers of this world, "taking counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed" (Christ) will find themselves faced with a mysterious power they can neither understand nor withstand, and they will have to say to each other "*this is the finger of God*".

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When we depend upon organisations, we get what organisations can do; when we depend upon education, we get what education can do;

when we depend upon man, we get what man can do; but **WHEN WE DEPEND UPON PRAYER, WE GET WHAT GOD CAN DO.**

## **TRIUMPHANT ENTRY**

He owned a little grocery shop in a south-east London suburb, in the days before the 1914 war, long before supermarkets had been invented. A short, rather rotund man, he looked the typical grocer as he stood behind his counter six days a week, wrapping tea and sugar and butter for his customers. But the seventh day was different. He had come in contact with a people who promulgated a message such as he had not heard before in all his Christian experience. Gone was the dark conception of a vengeful God who would consign the bulk of his created ones to an eternity of hopeless separation from his holiness on the ground of unbelief even although most of them had either never heard of him or at best only in a miserably distorted view of his purposes, and preserve for his Heaven only a chosen few. Gone was the grim expectation of a sudden cataclysmic descent from Heaven of a punitive Judge who would send trembling sinners to an eternal doom without hope of reform and burn up the world as a thing too evil to endure. The evangel he had now received was one which told him his Lord would come, not in fashion to strike terror into the hearts of the beholders, but to preach good tidings, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that were bound. "*A Ransom for All*"; that was the watchword; none would be lost who could possibly be saved. God has a Plan, and that Plan was even now moving into its final phase, the promised Advent at the end of this Age for the purpose of converting the world in the next, the time of "*whosoever will, let him come*", And this Twentieth century, went on the message, is the time when the powers of Heaven are impinging upon the affairs of this present world to bring about this great change. So the message was that of John the Baptist; "*Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*". The King is here, his Advent is in progress, his open revelation to all the world soon to be manifested. So he joined himself to the community of enthusiasts who were heralding this soul-stirring gospel, and with every packet of tea and sugar and butter he included a tract to tell his customers the good news. And from time to time he found himself helping to keep order at London's largest auditorium, the Royal Albert Hall, full to its capacity of over seven thousand, gathered to hear this good news of what by now was being called the Divine Plan

of the Ages.

He was not a fluent speaker; he was not really proficient at leading a Bible study. But there was one thing he could do. He could be a good doorkeeper. So he became one of the two doorkeepers at the large London church which had grown up around this thesis, where a thousand or more gathered every Sunday to hear the message of utter dedication of life to the Lord now, with association with him in the witness of to-day, and the world wide evangelism of all mankind in the coming day when would be fulfilled the prediction "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", when the Lord's assertion that all that are in their graves shall come forth into his Kingdom, "*and they that hear shall live*", will be realised. So every Sunday he could be seen in the entrance vestibule, with his brother doorkeeper, as tall and stalwart as he was short and rotund, for which reason we lads called them—when they were out of earshot—"Gog and Magog"; and he, of course, was Gog.

And so, in simple faith and complete dedication of life, he played his part in all that was done, and as the years went by held consistently to his faith in the new world that should be.

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He was an old man now. The years had taken their toll; his time was nearly come. The little grocery shop had passed into other hands and there were now no tracts in the packets of tea and sugar and butter. He was no longer doorkeeper at that big church with its thousand worshippers; that too had passed into other hands, alien hands, where the gospel preached was no longer the one that had fired his spirit those many years ago. But the fire remained, and the faith. And he found fellowship and inspiration among others whom he had known in those days now gone; some of the lads who had dubbed him and his companion Gog and Magog in those past happy days were now grown men, and with them also the old fire and faith remained and they were now carrying the flag he and his had so valiantly held aloft in those early days of missionary endeavour.

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We sat around the bed, talking quietly among

ourselves. The doctor had gone now; he said it would not be long. It was beginning to get dark. He lay still, eyes closed, hearing nothing, seemingly unconscious, breathing becoming steadily slower, quieter, fainter. Two hours ticked out their minutes; there was silence in the room; it seemed as though he had gone.

A swift, convulsive movement; his eyes opened; he sat upright in the bed. A voice stronger by far than any had heard from him for weeks past rang through the room "*The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. HALLELUJAH*". He fell back. He was still. "*And all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.*"

### Dr. Campbell Morgan on the Second Advent

If you take away from me the doctrine of the Second Advent of Christ which is to be a crisis in human history as definite as the first coming, I am the most pessimistic of men. If you tell me that the work of the missionary is to convert the world by preaching, I am hopeless indeed.

But when I realise that the work of the missions is to evangelise the world by preaching of the Gospel for a witness, and that beyond the Advent there will be a new age in which human history will be perfected, then I wait with patience for the crisis which is to come, and serve, as God helps me in order to hasten that coming of our Lord Himself.

May God deliver us from taking so great, so stupendous and sublime and far-reaching a vision of the wisdom which transcends our finite theory, in order to formulate a doctrine that God has chosen a few people to be saved and left the rest to be damned forever. That is an unwarranted deduction.

The plan of the Church existed in the mind of God from eternity. He predestined the Church that it should be conformed to the image of his Son. Paul peered into the deep things, the infinite mysteries, until somewhere back in the past ages he saw in the mind of God the Son of his love, the arch-type of all perfection, and he

declared that He predestined men and women that they should be conformed to that likeness. The Church then is not an experiment in human history. It is part of the plan of God. It is the conception, the plan of God from eternity.

Finally the Church is eternal in yet another sense. The consummation is eternal, for the Church is to serve the purpose of God in the coming ages. Through the Church, in its union with Jesus Christ, there will be revealed in the ages to come "the exceeding riches of his Grace" and there will be unveiled before the angels the "manifold wisdom of God".

This is the first note of the central preaching of the letter to Ephesians. The Church of God is eternal. Its conception in the past eternity was the plan of God. Its construction in time is the power of God. Its consummation in the coming ages will be for the fulfilment of the purposes of God. Are we of this Church? If we are then we were in the heart and mind and plan of God in the ages gone; we are to fulfil the purpose of God in the ages to come, and the plan of the past and the purpose of the future are linked by the power of the present; for plan, power and purpose are alike eternal.

*Dr. G. Campbell Morgan*

To give praise is very becoming for the believer. It becomes as natural as breathing is to the physical body. Thankfulness and praise are twin sisters and where the one is found the other follows close in its track. Realising the deep need of love and mercy and being the recipient of the same causes the heart to overflow with gratitude to its donor. Like the Psalmist the language is: "*I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth.*"

Never forget that the Almighty is a great deal bigger than our experience of him; that the Lord Jesus Christ is a great deal bigger than our experience of him. People won't go through the labour of thinking, consequently snares get hold of them, and remember, thinking is a tremendous labour. We have to labour to 'bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ'.

*(Oswald Chambers)*

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

### 2. Elijah has already come!

Jesus once asked the crowds *"What did you go out into the wilderness to behold? A reed shaken by the wind? . . . A man clothed in soft clothing?"* (Luke 7. 24.25). This makes it clear that ordinary people went further than the river Jordan to find John. Was a crowd really attracted by this recluse who so far had shunned the company of men and women? What did they want with him? Some modern critics have suggested that John was a "long haired way-out type" who attracted the dissidents and frustrated members of society. The Gospel records that those who went to John were quite ordinary, law-abiding citizens who needed some practical ways of expressing their faith. John however, lived in the tradition of many of the prophets, who had to be tough enough in body and mind to withstand the trends of society in their own day. His message was perhaps even more alarming to ordinary folk than that proclaimed by his great forebears. He was less like the sedate prophets such as Elisha and Isaiah and was hewn in the same form as Elijah.

The Old Testament closes with the prophet Malachi's message from God *"I will send my messenger to prepare the way before me"* (3. 1). This same man also declared on God's behalf *"I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse."* (4.5.6). Then followed the four hundred years silence until John came. Jesus was quite definite about the fulfilment of this prophecy on two occasions. The first was when John sent his disciples to Jesus with the question *"Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?"* (Luke 7.20). The second occasion was when Jesus descended the mountain from the Transfiguration with three disciples. They were evidently still pondering the vision of Jesus with Moses and Elijah and asked why *"the scribes say that Elijah must first come"?*

The question then arises as to how John the Baptist was like Elijah? How could they be expected to identify the one who was to turn the hearts of fathers and children to each other? What did the prophecy in Malachi mean? Perhaps the words of the angel recorded in Luke 1.17 gives us a clue. *"He will go before him in the*

*spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."* It may be that the work of the "second Elijah" is one of reconciliation among families and tribes. However, "fathers" often refers to the patriarchs. The generation into which Messiah was coming was an evil and rebellious one. The messenger's task was to create a condition of repentance, that reconciliation was to be achieved between First century Jews and the memory of the upright patriarchs. Whatever the meaning of this obscure passage, John was to preach the message *"Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"*. He was a moral catalyst demanding a change in behaviour.

The emphasis was upon "the spirit and power of Elijah". It is fascinating that no two Biblical characters are more alike than John the Baptist and Elijah. They were both lonely men who depended on Nature for their needs. They entered the social world of their contemporaries only when they had a message to deliver from God. They both felt impelled to issue stern warnings to the royalty of their day. Both brought the people of Israel to a moment of crisis when they could choose the way of God or the way of the Devil. In spite of their great spiritual strength, both men knew feelings of despair and failure. For those in John's day who really knew the spirit of the 8th century prophet, the Baptist was a sign of the imminent coming of Messiah. The religious leaders of the First century failed completely to recognise the situation. John's message to Israel was uncompromising. He told the people of Israel that they must prepare for judgment and that they could only avoid the wrath of God by true heart repentance. Through the voice of the prophets God had long demanded a high standard of moral behaviour and spiritual awareness in their worship. John spoke of the separation of wheat and chaff; his point was further emphasised as he spoke of the axe being laid to the root of the tree. God's people as a nation were at risk because of their way of life.

John's spiritual message was supported by the kind of advice which he gave to the people who came to him. Quickly he saw through the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who came out to see him. He called them a brood of vipers.

men who had only venom for those with whom they spoke. For centuries Israel had been given the commission to tell God's message to pagan nations; they thought of themselves as being indispensable to God, but John made it clear that this was not so. His answers to ordinary people were not altogether the type that might have been expected. He did not tell the tax collectors to give up their job as well paid civil servants of the Roman Empire. Many of these men were regarded by fellow Jews as traitors. He told them to be honest in their collections. He did not tell the soldiers to leave the army or Temple police force. He warned them not to be violent nor blackmail the religious authorities into giving them more pay. He told all who would hear to be fruitful in their lives, by sharing what they had with the poor and needy; this had been the recurring theme from Moses to Malachi. Few of God's rules had been broken more than this disregard for those in need.

These ethical principles were not new. John was not stirring up political conflict or making religious division; he was calling Israel back to the faith of their fathers. The one thing that was new was the great proclamation "*The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*". When John had been born people were in expectation of God's intervention in the life of his people; later they had flocked to the desert to hear him. The early disciples of Jesus had travelled from Galilee to hear John; others must have done the same. There was spiritual hunger in Israel. There was

recognition of a need for guidance, which the national leaders had failed to give. Their interpretation of Scripture was literal, laying heavy emphasis upon ritual and legalism; in so doing they had missed the spirit of true piety.

Compassion and not sacrifice had been the cry of the prophets; circumcision of the heart, they had warned, was the important sign of their religious life. At the base of national life was the social unit of the family; in John's day family life had reached an all time low ebb. The rules of divorce, permitted by Moses, had been abused beyond recognition; as a result women were no longer interested in getting married and starting families. This was brought about not by the dregs of society but by religious men. So John turned on the highest family in the land, son of Herod the Great, and accused him of stealing his brother's wife. It cost the prophet his freedom and eventually his life. But not before he did one last great act in the Jordan.

When John had gone from the scene and Jesus was making his last appeal to Israel in Jerusalem, the priests and lawyers challenged him about his authority for what he was doing (Luke 20. 1-8). Jesus countered them with a remarkable question. He asked them about John the Baptist's authority. If they had answered Jesus' question, they could have answered their own. It is equally clear that the ordinary people believed that John was God's prophet.

*(To be concluded)*

### Bethlehem and Jesus

Bethlehem cannot account for Jesus.

Consider the meaning of this fact, "*that from the lowliest of peasants sprang the soul that has swayed the mightiest intellects of the world.*" The moving powers of the eighteen centuries have been themselves moved by Jesus Christ.

Consider another related fact, "*that out of the most materialistic of religions came the most spiritual of teachers.*" Judaism clung with almost ferocious tenacity to external signs and symbols. Many things in the Old Testament are concessions to this national and racial materialism. An altar of stone or bronze, a literal sacrifice of slain beast or bird, a visible tent or temple with a mercy-seat on which Jehovah was supposed to descend and sit—these were to the Jews essential to any religious life.

He rebuked that aspiration with unswerving courage, and died because He taught sordid materialised souls to worship in the temple of the heart only.

Consider, also, "*that out of an age which exalted power as supreme, came one who exalted love as supreme in God and in man.*" The symbol of Rome was the rapacious, unwearied eagle. Military virtues were supreme. The Jews wanted a conquering general as Messiah. Out of such environment and atmosphere came One who exalted the feminine virtues, and proclaimed that the meek should inherit the earth.

And as Bethlehem could not produce Christ, it could not confine Christ.

*(Selected).*

## FRAGRANCE

*"The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume"* (John 12.3. Weym.)

Fragrance is one of the extras that a benevolent Creator has bestowed upon mankind. Out of all the bounties of Nature, perfume is one of its peculiar treasures. The vegetable kingdom could easily perform all its essential purpose and remain scentless. Yet the manifold fragrance of bark and stem, of root and flower, of oils, gums and resins, of spices, leaves and fruit are proof that God designed for man's benefit a fragrant world.

Man's first home was a garden. Botanists have discovered an odoriferous flora in all parts of the globe. Their estimate that one in every thirty plants is perfumed is not likely to be exaggerated. A walk round any garden or down any country lane will call the attention to many perfumes which linger in the memory. The western nose is still familiar with the fragrance of lavender, rosemary, mint and thyme, once highly prized in herb gardens, where the heavy scents of old roses, of pinks and wallflowers, lilacs and honeysuckles, limes and sweet briars filled the air with rustic sweetness and the peace of country life.

The sweet scent of drying hay, of crushed grass, the fragrance rising from a field or garden, even from a dusty road newly washed by a reviving shower of rain, have the power to awaken half forgotten things, to create a yearning for peace and beauty, to soothe the fret and strain produced by the pace and sounds of the hectic, modern world.

This fragrance and the sense of smell are not without design. The sweet perfumes of flowers uplift the spirit. Aromatic perfumes soothe the nervous system wearied by close confinement or too close pressures with the discords and staleness, the more noxious vapours of crowded life.

Perfume of a rich and spicy odour was lavishly used in the east. Kings and priests received a costly anointing, while the ceremonial of religious services smoked with burning incense. The ritual of swinging censers was a means of worship. As sight and sound appealed to the mind, the heart was gratified by the fragrant clouds which rose from the altar of incense. The Bible is rich in metaphors borrowed from sweet smelling plants. The recipe for the holy anointing oil and for the incense of the sanctuary

was a closely guarded, Divine prerogative, not designed for private use but for man's communion with God.

Worship and prayer were the sweet odours of the devout, loyal human heart, ascending to heaven through a fragrant veil in which the Spirit of God commingled awhile with the spirit of his people. These rich perfumes expressed the delight and satisfaction of God in such pure worship, while the worshipper was revived, stimulated and refreshed through the medium of perfume.

The sweet-smelling savour which rises to the Throne of grace is that of sincerity. In John's vision he saw the four and twenty elders having not only harps in their hands but golden vials "full of sweetness" which are the prayers of saints.

Perfume is more than a distilled essence. It is the fragrant breath of Nature exhaled by forest, meadow, mountain and garden, a sweetening of all the air in a silent acknowledgement of the love and loveliness of the creative spirit. If prayer be its counterpart, then it is the spiritual breath of life, as natural and spontaneous, as constant as that floral breath which flows in health-giving waves from vigorous trees and plants. Both are a sign of health, a symbol of joyous care-free existence.

Incense which has anointed kings and hallowed the altars of the Most High has its equivalent in the human heart. The compelling charm of the human being lies not merely in a pleasing, outer appearance, but in an inner grace. As every lovely thing is beauty so every grace is love, the very heart and centre of being, the very essence of God. "*God is love and everyone that loveth is born of God*". Love is the hallmark of God, stamped upon all his creation. As fragrance lies in the heart of Nature, so love lies in the heart of human beings. When given whole-heartedly to God and unselfishly to others in willing service, it constitutes that fragrance of the heart which fills the house, any and every house, where its essence flows from a generous service to refresh and inspire by its stimulating properties.

When Mary of Bethany took her "pound of ointment of spikenard very costly" for the anointing of Jesus, she at least knew what she was doing. So did the recipient of her generosity, for He knew himself to be both King and High Priest, shortly to complete his sacrificial work

upon the cross. Hers was no mere phial of distilled sweetness, but a vase of rare and expensive perfume whose odours would linger on through many days, doubtless refreshing the last hours of the Son of Man, hustled from court to court and finally to Calvary.

*"Against the day of my burying hath she done this"*. Nicodemus also came with spices, and the women who were first at the tomb. Eastern perfumes were the products of Arabia, India and the spice islands. Great skill was required in their blending. It was a high art and the apothecary of that day was not a seller of medicines but a maker of rare perfumes. The costly spikenard came from a plant growing on the mountains of India. Many aromatic plants grow in the high places, entombed in snow half the year, their flowers white as though expressing that purity and isolation from the valleys below in which they could not live.

Blended with oils and resins the spikenard was sealed with wax into an alabaster container. Some of these have been found in ancient tombs, some still sealed, others broken, their perfume still strong and lingering after the passing of centuries. It was such a vase that Mary unsealed, pouring out its rich contents on the Lord as he sat at supper, the perfume rising like incense, filling the whole house, enveloping all who were there in a holy fragrance which lingers today about all who read the Bethany story.

It was no accident, but a long foreseen incident that He who was both King and Saviour should be publicly anointed with a king's anointing. His very name was "as sweet ointment poured forth". No other name has so refreshed and stimulated with hope and adoration the hearts of men and women down the years as the sweet name of Jesus, and no life can have ascended to God in such rich clouds of incense as the sacrificial life of the Lamb of God who gave himself and was given of God that love may yet prevail over all that is crooked, evil and perverse.

Jesus both gave and received the choicest perfumes. The inspired Psalmist saw him *"anointed with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad"*.

It is the picture of the heavenly bridegroom, the Kingly Son of God equipped with power and authority to bring gladness to the earth. In his

first brief ministry the healing of his seamless dress, the hem of his garment, brought relief and strength to the touch of faith. He passed through crowds or stood surrounded by sick, neglected people and the perfume of the high places from which he came flowed to them in compassion. He went about in the cities and villages teaching, preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

What an illustration of heavenly perfume poured out in fragrant earthly ministry! What a glorious hope of things to come! When the same power wielded by wisdom and love releases to all flesh the unstinted flow of universal blessing, the very atmosphere will be cleansed and charged by healing virtues. The burgeoning earth, the blossoming deserts, the joyful fields, the rejoicing trees pouring out their fragrances upon the benevolent breezes, will recreate that old, lost garden which had the tree of life.

Jesus prized the lily of the fields, seeing in it a lovely beauty that far surpassed the royal dress of kings. The most fragrant plants are often lowly, humble of dress and inconspicuous in size, yet their hearts are laden with that delicious perfume which cheers and inspires. Large, flamboyant blooms often have little to give but their outward show. The fragrant are tiny bells and florets, the small trumpets, sometimes pouring their perfume on the night air. So does God hide his sweetness in a lowly heart. Behind many a plain face beats a golden heart full of true devotion. The best is brought out of many quiet lives when trouble and sorrow, pain and distress, lay their hands upon the lives about them. The unsuspected kindness and unrevealed goodness breathes out a healing, comforting fragrance into those dark hours.

The precious spikenard is owned by those who dwell with Christ in heavenly places, far removed in thought and conduct from this present world. Like Mary they pour the heavenly perfume garnered from the mountain tops into a fragrant earthly ministry. The lingering incense of their lives writes their daily commendation in the Master's words, *"What she could do she did"*.

Not creeds but deeds, fragrant with loving kindness, is what people need. The fragrance of love, gracious, delicate, discerning, stimulating, generous and responsive is God's greatest gift to all creation.

## ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

### 10. The Rejected Shepherd

Zechariah's 11th chapter is the story of Israel's suffering under false shepherds, and her rejection of the true shepherd who would have fed the flock but was refused. Historically it covers the time between the period of the First Advent, pictured in symbol in chapter 9, and that of the Second Advent with its related events, shewn in chapters 12-14. The background is the land of Israel as it so often appeared when suffering invasion and destruction, and the basis of the picture a pastoral one, the relation between the sheep and the shepherds, bad and good. In the end only a faithful remnant survive, but this remnant enters into the stirring events of chapters 12-14 and emerges triumphant at the end.

The curtain rises upon a scene all too familiar and infinitely sad. Judgment upon Israel because of apostasy is being executed by the agency of foreign oppressors, invading the country and desolating the land. *"Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars! Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen! Wail oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been felled! Hark, the wail of the shepherds, for their glory is despoiled!"* (chap. 11. 1-3 RSV). Every time the Assyrians or the Babylonians invaded the land they came down from the north, first destroying the stately cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan, cutting down the standing timber for the construction of war machines or carrying it away for building purposes in their own land. Then as they swept southward the pastoral country was despoiled, the people's flocks and herds pillaged and their villages burnt. Finally came the turn of the valley of Jordan and the highlands of Judea. All this happened in consequence of Israel's apostacy from God, for thus were the terms of the Covenant. These three opening verses constitute the scenery, the stage upon which the drama is to be presented.

*"Thus saith the Lord my God; Feed the flock of the slaughter, whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed be the Lord, for I am rich; and their own shepherds pity them not"*. This "flock of slaughter" is Israel, doomed to pillage and violence and death at the hands of alien invaders and her own rulers. This was so often the case in Israel. The people forsook the Lord and

followed other gods and then found that those other gods were quite unable to protect them from their enemies. They forsook the principles of righteousness in their national life and found that oppression and injustice rebounded upon their own heads. But this time worse was to come. In the past God had always delivered after a season. *"Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble"* recounted the Psalmist *"and he heard, and delivered them out of their distresses"* But now, says God, *"I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, but I will deliver every man into his neighbour's hand, and into the hand of his king; and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them"* (vs. 6). This verse fixes the period to which the chapter applies; it is that following the Babylonian captivity. Up to the restoration from that captivity in Zechariah's own day God had always delivered. Sooner or later the circumstances which gave rise to the chastisement changed, and God intervened, and the people were restored to their own land, and freed, if only temporarily until the next apostasy, from their oppressors. But not any more. The next apostacy, with its penalty of calamity, was one that was to endure until the end, until the very time of the Kingdom and the final repentance and regathering. That apostasy had not begun at the time Zechariah received this message; the enthusiasm of the Temple rebuilding was still upon the nation and the fervency of Messianic hopes following its recent deliverance from Babylon, but it began very shortly thereafter and has continued without intermission to this day. The fulfilment of chapter 11 therefore must be held to begin not very long after the death of Zechariah and continue to the present.

From verse 7 onward the speaker is the Shepherd of Israel, the One appointed by God to lead Israel into their appointed destiny, if so be they would be led. In the Old Testament He is the Divine word, the *Logos*, the Son. In the New Testament He is the Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ. This chapter presents him in both aspects, for although as the Divine Word He ministered to Israel in pre-Christian centuries it was as Jesus the Christ that He manifested himself to them at his First Advent and was rejected. That is what this chapter is all about.

"So I fed the flock of slaughter, therefore also the godly of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Beauty and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock" (vs. 7). Here is action; the Divine Shepherd enters upon a pastoral mission which for all we know might have been God's final effort to bring Israel to a position of readiness for the opportunity which was to open before them when their Messiah came to them. The three centuries prior to the First Advent was a period of intense nationalism on the one part and fervent expectation of Messiah on the other; Judah became an independent political State for a short time and the Pharisees and Zadokites and other zealous religious sects had their rise. It was a golden age for the God-fearing element in the nation, expecting daily the fulfilment of all that God had promised, but it was also a time which gave increasing scope for the development of a rigid, bigoted view of the Divine purposes and a narrow, arrogant attitude of superiority over other nations and peoples which ultimately overcame the better things and created the Israel which condemned and slew Jesus Christ. For three centuries the Shepherd fed the flock, a flock that was doomed to slaughter, and a few, the godly of the flock, profited, but the majority turned away. At the end of those centuries a small minority were ready to receive and accept Jesus in the way He came, and the rest, even although "all men were in expectation", were found wanting. They knew not the time of their visitation.

The shepherd's staff named "Beauty" (properly "Favour") is explained in verse 10 as picturing the Mosaic Covenant, obligatory upon Israel but so often in their history repudiated and violated. The other staff, named "Bands" (properly "Binders") is referred in vs. 10 to the organic union of the peoples in the land. Both of these staves had their place in the Shepherd's ministry during those three centuries. The Covenant was reaffirmed and the sect of the Pharisees represented the national adherence to the letter of that Covenant. The pre-Babylonian division into two nations, the two tribes and the ten tribes, was ended at the return from Babylon and now the nation was one; tribal divisions were practically eliminated and the entire nation was known as Judah, the people as Jews. Never in all history had Israel enjoyed so favourable a position and opportunity to go forward in faith and expectation to meet and receive their

coming Messiah and with him fulfil their age-old commission to be a light to the nations and declare God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

At this auspicious point the Shepherd moves to action, and describes that action. "*The three shepherds also I cut off in one month, and my soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me*" (verse 8). In the sequence of events pictured in this chapter this cutting off of the three shepherds, whatever it may mean, is prior to the rejection of the good Shepherd by the flock and their payment of thirty pieces of silver for his services (vs. 12) so that it must have its application during those three centuries before the First Advent. Who or what, then, are the three shepherds thus cut off and what is the significance of the "one month"?

It is only to be expected that so obscure a phrase should be difficult of interpretation. It is said that among all the commentators and scholars involved with the Book of Zechariah there are extant some forty interpretations of the "three shepherds". Almost all confess themselves baffled by the "one month". There are not many expositors who have realised that this chapter constitutes a link in what might be termed a prophetic history of the period between the Restoration and the First Advent occupying chapters 9 to 11 and merging then into the events of the end of this Age in chapters 12 to 14. Once this fact is appreciated a pointer to the meaning of the three shepherds is provided. The A.V. has it "Three shepherds . . ." but the Hebrew text has the definite article. "*The three shepherds . . .*" Three specific unworthy shepherds are indicated and they are all cut off together "in one month". This is before the First Advent. Vs. 15 speaks of a fourth unworthy shepherd who afflicts the flock after the Divine Shepherd has been rejected and therefore after the First Advent.

The term "shepherd" is used either for native rulers or guides, as in Jer. 2.8; 17.16; 23.1-4 and Ezek. 34.2 or for foreign rulers and oppressors, as in Jer. 6.3; 25.34-38 and 49.19. Whatever man or power ruled the people was a "shepherd". It is interesting in this connection to note that in primitive Semitic languages the same word did duty for "king", the ruler of the people, and "shepherd", the keeper of sheep. Since the background of this chapter is the foreign domination of Israel, and an integral part of the action is God's declaration (vs. 6) that He will deliver them into "*his neighbour's hand and into*

*the hand of his king, and they shall smite the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them*" it seems reasonable to conclude that the three shepherds picture foreign ruling powers whose dominion over Israel permitted by God for a season, is cut off by the Divine Shepherd preparatory to his offering his own self as king.

In such case it is easy to see in the three shepherds the three Gentile powers which by Divine permission, and within the framework of the period known as the "Times of the Gentiles", exercised control over Israel. Babylon, Persia, Greece; these are the three shepherds whose influence hung heavily over Israel until well within the period covered by this 11th chapter, and then, more or less abruptly, disappeared from the scene.

It is customary to think of each of these powers as ruling Israel in turn and giving place at the end of its term to its successor, Politically this is so. Persia overthrew the Babylonian empire in 538 B.C. when Cyrus captured Babylon, and Greece overthrew Persia in 331 B.C. when Alexander in his turn captured Babylon. But in practice each nation continued and various rebellions and other military adventures make it difficult to say with precision just when each one was truly superseded by the next. In point of fact all three existed in the days of Zechariah and all three exerted various degrees of influence over Judah. This is where the allusion to the three shepherds being cut off "*in one month*" might have its place. Daniel, in his vision of the four world-empires, says (Dan. 7. 12) "*As concerning the rest of the wild beasts (i.e. the three representing Babylon, Persia and Greece) they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time*", True to this, Babylon, both city and nation, continued after its capture by Cyrus in 538 B.C., until the building of Seleucia on the Tigris by the successor of Alexander about 281 B.C. attracted commerce from the city. Antiochus, the next Greek ruler, rebuilt the old temple in Babylon but the city was doomed and it vanished between 250 and 200 B.C. and this marked the full end of the old Babylonian people and power. The last Seleucid king of the second empire, Persia, was defeated in 236 B.C. by Arsaces I, founder of the Parthian empire and this marked the end of ancient Persia (the modern State and nation of that name developed long afterwards, in the early centuries of the Christian era). Greece, the last of the three powers, was increasingly harassed

by the rising power of Rome and lost its independence about 228 to 208 B.C. Thus in a practical sense all three world powers, Babylon, Persia and Greece, came to an end, were "cut off", as Zechariah has it, during the third B.C. century. This century can therefore quite reasonably be spoken of as the "one month" of judgment on these powers. A similar usage is met with in Hos. 5.6-7 where the unfaithful of Israel "*go with their flocks and their herds to seek the Lord but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them. They have dealt treacherously against the Lord . . . now shall a month devour them with their portions*". The RSV renders that final expression "Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields" and the meaning seems to be that the dawn of a new month ushers in a period of judgment and destruction on those who have incurred the Divine displeasure in past-time. The month as a short time period compared with the year as a normal time measurement is reminiscent of our Lord's words "Except those days shall be cut short there should no flesh be saved". Judgment, swift, sure and final, is pictured as taking place within the confines of one month. And in thus cutting off the three oppressive shepherds the Shepherd of Israel expresses his loathing for them, and they for him, as in verse 8.

So the Shepherd turns to his flock, the flock that is still rebellious and is in consequence doomed to destruction. Perhaps it is at this point we should begin to see the events of the First Advent taking shape. The history of the period immediately before the Advent shows that the nation as a whole was in no condition to meet or to accept its Lord. The work of the Shepherd for three hundred years, since the golden days of the Restoration, of Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah, had produced a faithful "remnant" who were ready for him, but the rest were unworthy and fit only for rejection. So we have verse 9 "*Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die: and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off: and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another*". That prophecy had its fulfilment in real history when Jesus pronounced over Jerusalem its doom "*How often would I have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*". (Matt. 23.38). And at the same time came the reality of verse 10 "*I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it assunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. And it was broken*

in that day; and so the godly of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the Lord". Jesus cut that staff asunder and abrogated the covenant when he declared to the Scribes and Pharisees "*The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*" (Matt. 21.43).

Almost immediately the challenge came to Israel of the First Advent formally and finally to accept or to reject the Shepherd. "*If ye think good, give me my price*" (vs. 12). For three and a half years He had moved amongst them, doing good and offering them the Kingdom of God. Perhaps the point at which this invitation applies is at the end of Jesus' ministry when He presented himself in formal fashion as Israel's king, riding into Jerusalem "*upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass*" (Zech. 9.9) and despite the immediate cries of joy and enthusiasm was within a few days rejected with the cry "not this man but Barabbas". The token of that rejection was thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas by the priests for his share in the betrayal.

Now here comes an intriguing coincidence of thought. Following the Shepherd's request for his wages, he goes on to say "*So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, cast it unto the potter—this magnificent price at which I was assessed by them*". The latter phrase is the literal Hebrew and is suggestive of the Lord speaking ironically of the amount which in ancient times was the price given for a slave or compensation due for the death of a slave. That was all that Israel would offer in return for the pastoral care of the Shepherd. "*And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord*" (vss. 12-13). There has been a lot of discussion and speculation as to the meaning of this expression. It is not easily apparent why the money should be paid to a potter or why there should be a potter in the Temple anyway. Some have suggested that the word rendered "potter" is a colloquial word for treasury or treasurer and that the Shepherd thus paid the money into the Temple funds but there is no real foundation for this. The most reasonable explanation, bearing in mind the scornful rejection of this "magnificent price", is that the expression "cast it to the potter" was a saying expressing contemptuous rejection of a worthless thing. We have a somewhat similar phrase today when we speak of a man as having "gone to the dogs". So the picture afforded us is one in which the Shepherd,

insulted by the paltry sum of money given him as wages when he might reasonably have expected respect, esteem, gratitude and love in return for his ministrations, goes into the Temple courts and contemptuously throws the money on the floor of the Sanctuary.

Matthew's gospel draws attention to this passage when he recounts the story of Judas and the betrayal of Jesus (Matt. 27). The correspondence is not exact. The Shepherd receives the money as wages; Judas received his as the price of betrayal. The priests used the money after Judas threw it on the Temple floor to buy the "potters field" to bury strangers in; this is not the same thing as casting the money "to the potter" on the floor of the Temple. Matthew suggests a fulfilment of prophecy but there are numerous instances in Matthew's Gospel where he is quite clearly quoting an Old Testament passage as illustrative of, or analogous to, the incident he narrates without really claiming that the one is a prediction of the other. It is not so much in the details of Zechariah's vision on the one hand, and of Judas' betrayal on the other, that the prophecy resides, but in the central principle. In both cases the Shepherd of Israel is rejected by those to whom he had ministered and the symbol of that rejection was a monetary one, thirty pieces of silver, thrown back upon the floor of the Temple in the sight of the ecclesiastical rulers who were primarily responsible for the rejection. Matthew, in the A.V. of Matt. 27.9 credits the prophecy to Jeremiah instead of Zechariah but it is generally agreed that this is probably a mistake of an early copyist; Matthew does not always mention the prophet's name in his allusions and probably he did not do so in this instance, and a later transcriber, taking it upon himself to add the name, added the wrong one. This supposition is confirmed by the fact that Sinai Palimpsest, a 4th century copy of a 2nd century Syriac translation, thought to be the oldest translation of the Gospels into any language, does not include the reference to "Jeremiah the Prophet" in this verse, and neither do the Peshitta and the Diatessaron (two 2nd century Syriac versions) or the 2nd century Old Latin versions.

"*Then I cut assunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between*" (prop. "among") "*Judah and Israel*" (vs. 14). The preposition can mean equally "between" and "among". At the time of the First Advent there was no distinction between

the ten tribe and the two tribe nations and no brotherhood which could be broken. There was a very real sense in which the entire nation, Judah and Israel, viewed as an entity, was disrupted and the brotherhood between its individual members destroyed. The brotherhood existing *among* the citizens of the nation was completely and finally broken when, in A.D. 70, Titus quelled the Jewish rebellion against Rome, destroyed Jerusalem, and exiled the entire people, scattering them into all parts of the Roman empire. Even today Israel has not recovered from that Dispersion. This symbolic action of the prophet indicated the fact that following the rejection of Christ the nation was doomed to the breaking of family ties and national bonds, to separation and scattering all over the earth. Judah and Israel, after fifteen hundred years of national existence in the Land of Promise, would be a nation no longer.

Verses 15 to 17 describe the agency by which that scattering was to be accomplished. Three evil shepherds in verse 8, Babylon, Persia and Greece, had already been cut off. The true

Shepherd had been rejected. "*We have no king but Caesar*" cried the mob at the time of that rejection. Now they should have Caesar. The "worthless" (not "foolish" as A.V.) shepherd of vs. 15 is the fourth of the shepherds which afflicted the flock and well pictures Rome, the fourth oppressor of Israel. This is one who, according to the RSV, "*does not care for the perishing or seek the wandering, or heal the maimed, or nourish the sound, but devours the flesh of the fat ones, tearing off even their hoofs*" (vs. 16). That is a very eloquent description of the Gentile power that has ridden roughshod over Israel throughout the long centuries of this Christian era. But retribution comes. Israel brought this suffering upon herself but that does not excuse the perpetrator. "*Woe to the idol shepherd*" says God. Judgment shall come upon his right arm and his right eye. His power and his perception will be alike destroyed, and in the troubles that are upon the nations in our own day we see the fulfilment of that prediction.

*(To be continued)*

### The Kingdom Within You

A Christian Church ought to be an exhibition of heaven upon earth—a manifestation of Christ below—a witness for God in the midst of the world, so that the world looking at the Church may be able to say: "This is a specimen of what that which is called the Gospel can do; this is a model of what the Christian teaching can achieve." And so all with whom we come into contact in our intercourse in life will say: "That man does not say much about his Christian beliefs when transacting his business, but there prevails in all that he does an integrity, a

singleness of eye, a simplicity of purpose, a faithfulness to his engagements, and a superiority to trial, that proves he must have some fountain of peace and comfort and joy that we have not; we will go and hear what he hears, learn the lessons he has learned, and taste, if it be possible, the happiness which we see in his character." Such a one becomes to mankind either the salt that silently keeps a society from corruption, or the light shining on the hilltop that illuminates the earth with a ray of the glory of heaven.

*(Forest Gate Bible Monthly.)*

This business of Christianity would be fairly straightforward if all that was required was to preach the death of Jesus; not to live his life. But the Lord presumably knew best how his Gospel might be made understandable and it was He who said men would know his disciples by their love one for another; talked about a light which was to shine before men, and an unhidden city. Writing about him, speaking about him, it would all be so much easier. It is living like him that He requires. And there's the rub. *Rev. Paul Gliddon*

*These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.—Rev. 14.4.*

Christianity is not acting according to the letter of certain rules and regulations. *It is following a living Christ; walking as He walked; doing as He did; imitating his example in all things.* This is Christian movement—Christian action. It is keeping the eye fixed upon Jesus, and having the features, traits and lineaments of his character imprinted on our new nature, and reproduced in our life and ways.

## UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

*“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace . . . till we all come in the unity of the faith . . . unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”* (Eph. 4.3-13).

The picture in Ephesians 4 is that of Christian growth, from the condition of “babes in Christ” to that of full Christian maturity (but, even so, not the perfection of character which is to be ours beyond the Vail. Eph. 4 has to do entirely with this life and not the next). Right at the outset immature believers are exhorted to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” and an essential part of this “walking worthy” is the “endeavouring” to keep the unity of the Spirit. As a help to our efforts in this connection we are reminded that there is one Body—one Spirit—one hope of our calling—one Lord—one faith—one baptism—one God. In all these we share as brethren, and we all have the same basis upon which we stand. Our abilities may and do differ, and so does our capacity for understanding the deep things of God’s Word, and this will in turn affect our understanding of doctrine or modify the viewpoint we take, but “*to every one of us is given grace (favour) according to the measure of the gift of Christ*”. He proportioned his gifts according to our capacity for receiving and making use of them and as we are able to make use of more because of our growth in grace so He gives us more. Thus for the instruction and upbuilding of the one-time “babes” He has given, as the Apostle says here, “helps” of all kinds, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers in order that these same growing Christians, having attained Christian maturity, should come into the unity of the faith and knowledge of Christ and so become what he calls a “*complete man, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*”.

Now this unity of faith into which such a mature Christian has entered is not, as so many imagine it to be, merely a unity of assent to various points of doctrine, although an under-

standing of the great Bible doctrines concerning sin and death, redemption and life, the High Calling and mankind’s destiny is a necessary factor in the attainment of that unity. But this unity of the faith is really the final fruitage of which the unity of the Spirit is the original seed. Unity of the Spirit is based upon our fellowship with each other and our belief in Jesus and his words; the unity of the faith is built upon our fellowship with God and our knowledge of him and his laws. The first can be entered into comparatively quickly, so soon as we come into Christ and meet with his people; the second is the result of long years spent in “growing up into him in all things”. The one is therefore clearly a development from the other, but even when we have entered into the unity of the faith, and attained the full stature of a man in Christ, we are still like Paul, knowing only in part, seeing as in a glass, darkly. The day has yet to come—and it will not come this side the Vail—when, especially in matters of doctrine, we attain full perfection of understanding. That need not hinder our unity now; in fact, according to Eph. 4, if our unity now is hindered by any such consideration, if we allow ourselves to be carried hither and thither by every “wind of doctrine”, never attaining, if we do not play our part in the oneness of the Body, then, implies the Apostle, we are still children. And although in one sense it is as children that we inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, it is not so in this sense. As children in innocence, sincerity, humility, teachableness, yes, but as immature babes as yet unable to manifest the character likeness to Christ which is an indispensable condition, by no means. This life is our training ground and until we have been proved fitted and qualified for the stupendous work of God which awaits all who are called and chosen, but also faithful, we cannot expect to hear the momentous words “*Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*”.

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The safe position in Christian thinking is to remember that there are deeper depths than we can fathom, higher heights than we can know; it keeps us reverent, keeps us from hardening off into a confined, cabined experience of our own.

*(Oswald Chambers)*

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When the heart is quiet and the door is shut on the world, we can give thanks to God for sleep, for merriment, for our opportunities to worship with others, but let us not neglect to give thanks for this same quiet hour when the heart communes with God and is still.

## THE "LUNAR MONTH" IN PROPHECY

What has been called the "lunar month" or "prophetic year" has figured and still does figure in presentations of prophecy students, especially when calculations of the probable date of the Second Advent or the end of this world-age is the subject of inquiry. The fact that our Lord told his disciples that He himself did not know the time of these events although he had the same Bible from which modern-day students draw these conclusions might justify the impression that we can be rather presumptuous in trying to discern from the same Scriptures something that He himself could not. Upon the other hand, the obvious fact that Daniel's celebrated foreview of the "seventy weeks" from Daniel's period to the First Advent of Jesus was so marvellously and accurately fulfilled in history might justify the conclusion that there may be something in these chronological prophecies after all.

What is called the "year-day" principle in this branch of Scripture investigation is well known and has been from the early centuries of the Age. It has its origin in the picture given to Ezekiel (chap. 4) of the duration of Israel's independence under kings from the accession of David to the dethronement of Zedekiah, three hundred and ninety "days" for the complete nation, north and south, until the Assyrians had completed the taking into captivity of the Ten Tribes, and then forty "days" for the Two-Tribe nation of Judah. "*I have appointed thee each day for a year*" said the Lord (Ezek. 4.8). On this basis is founded such prophetic interpretations.

Christian students and writers began to fix dates for coming events on the principle of one day to each solar year, from the indicated starting point to the later centuries of the Age. Fulfillments for periods whose beginnings were by then in the past began to be calculated but sometimes they did not easily fit. It began to be pointed out that Israel's calendar was based upon a "lunar year", twelve revolutions of the moon round the earth, and that the round figure of 360 did figure in Scripture prophecy, and so the "prophetic year" of 360 days was born. The fact that the waters of the Flood were upon the earth one hundred and fifty days, from the seventeenth day of the second month to the seventeenth of the seventh, was adduced to clinch the argument and thereafter there existed an alternative method of calculation.

Unfortunately the true lunar month is not one of 30 days. The mean time taken for the moon to circle the earth is 29½ days and the "lunar year" is therefore one of 354 days. The origin of the 30 day month has to be sought in a different sphere.

The lunar calendar of Israel was adopted when they left Egypt at the Exodus, and it commenced with the month Nisan. "*This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you*" said the Lord (Exod. 12.2). The commencement of the year was determined by the appearance of the new moon nearest the spring equinox, the beginning of spring. But twelve such lunar months aggregate 354 days whereas the true solar year is one of 365¼ days less about 11 minutes, and the ancients knew that as well as we do. If that difference is neglected the result is that the following year in the calendar comes eleven days before the true year has ended, and if that goes unchecked, before long when spring is expected it is still winter. In order to keep the calendar in line with the seasons it was the practice, when the deficiency amounted to thirty days, to add an extra month at the end of the year, a system known as "intercalation" and the month is called the "intercalary month". Seven such intercalated months were thus added in every period of nineteen years at the end of the month Adar (March), the twelfth month of the year. Thus the year of Israel varied between 354 days in some years to 384 days in others, but over nineteen years averaged 365 or 366, the true solar year. This solar year would logically seem to be the year applicable to prophetic interpretations.

Israel was not the first. The Babylonians had introduced this type of calendar, beginning the year with Nisan (April) and intercalating the additional month as required, round about 1500 B.C., about the time of the Exodus from Egypt. It is an interesting fact that the Hebrew names of the months are Hebraised transliterations of Babylonian names, thus indicating that the two nations had the same calendar system. Thus Nisan is the Babylonian Nisanu, Tishri is Tashritu, Adar is Addaru, and so on. It is possible though that the names came into use in Israel at a later date, for there is evidence in the Old Testament that in earlier times they were known only by their numbers. It is also fairly clear that in early times, up to about 1000 B.C.

the native Canaanite names for the months were in partial use, as witness Lev. 2.14, Exod. 9.31, Deut. 16.1, Kings 6.38 & 8.2. At any rate, it is clear that in Israel the year, although reckoned by the passage of the moon, was strictly and only the ordinary solar year.

Whence then the 360 day year? This goes back to a time before the adoption of the calendar described above and it was current at a time when the ancient nations began the year, not in the spring, but in the autumn. It was still the same 365 day year, but it was based on twelve months of thirty days each, with five days added at the end of the year. Right at the beginning of known history, in the days when the peoples of Shem and Ham were multiplying in the plain of Shinar and developing the world's first great civilisation, they created a calendar system which for simplicity has not been surpassed. It was already old in the days of Noah since it is in harmony with the Flood narrative and could have been devised in Antediluvian times. The Sumerians, the people of Ham, were keen students of the heavens and of all natural phenomena, and they knew that the sun, viewed from the earth, in each month passed across the position of one of the twelve major constellations of stars, the well-known stars of the Zodiac. They evolved a mathematical system based on twelves and sixties (where the modern system is based on hundreds) and this circular passage of the sun across the stars became an obvious measure of time. Twelve months of thirty days each gave them 360 days which fitted into their mathematical system and inspired the division of the circle into 360 degrees, which has endured to this day. The synchronism of this with the actual solar year of 365 days was attained by adding five days at the end of the twelfth month and these were termed "non-days". Although no evidence appears to

have been found to show how they dealt with the "leap year", it is fairly obvious that having got this far, they would add six days instead of five every fourth year and so keep the year in step with the seasons. Their year began in the autumn, so the non-days were added at the end of our September.

The Genesis story of the Flood illustrates this principle. The months were denoted by numbers and not by names — that came later. The Flood commenced on the 17th day of the second month (Gen. 17.11) which was our November. It ceased, and the Ark grounded, on the 17th day of the seventh month (8.3-4), April, and the duration was, as stated, 150 days, five months of 30 days each. From the first day of the tenth month in 8.5, to the first day of the first month *in the following year*, in 8.13 was a period of three 30-day months plus the five non-days, 95 days in all, of which the first 54 were occupied by the incidents of the raven and the doves. Thus the "Flood calendar" was consistent with the Sumerian calendar of the period prior to 1500 B.C.

A curious fact in this connection brings in the New World. The Maya Indians of South America, when discovered by the Spaniards in the 16th century, were found to have a calendar system of their own, unlike the old world calendars in that it had 18 months of 20 days, which again equalled 360 days, and again five days added at the end to make the complete year. This calendar is of extreme antiquity; their era indicates a starting point back in the days when Sumer and Egypt were emerging as independent nations but it does at least suggest that in ancient times, as in the present, the solar year was the unit of time. The hypothesis of a 360 day "prophetic year" does not seem to rest upon a very sure foundation.

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In a remarkable statement, Paul tells us that experience worketh hope. Perhaps only a Christian Apostle could have made such a statement. In the case of the unconverted, it is probably true to suggest that experience, far from working hope, leads to little more than despair. Those who are living without Christ in this world can find little in their experience to stimulate a sense of hope. The wages of sin is death, and a life that is committed to evil can know little of joy, and certainly nothing of eager anticipation of the glories that are yet to be revealed.

Character never can be, strong, noble, and beautiful, nor can conduct be worthy of intelligent beings bearing God's image, if Scripture truth be not wrought into the very soul by personal search and pondering. Let us not stay for ever in the primer of religious knowledge, amid the easy things that we learned at our mother's knee. There are glorious things beyond these: let us go on to learn them. The word of Christ can get into your heart to dwell in you and transform you only through intelligent thought and pondering.

## THE LAKE OF FIRE

One of the most vivid symbols of the Book of Revelation is the lake of fire and brimstone into which all that is evil is cast at the Last Judgment and annihilated. In time gone by it was synonymous with Hell, the place of eternal conscious torment for the wicked. Today, in certain by-paths of Universalist theology, it is considered descriptive of the final purification of the unclean and sinful so that they may at last be admitted into the fellowship of the saints. Rightly to appraise the symbol, however, it is necessary to explore its derivation and consider what the expression must have conveyed to the first readers of Revelation in the days of the primitive Church.

It is usual in the Gospels to refer to the fate of the finally impenitent as being cast into *Gehenna* ("Hell" in the A.V.), the Greek name for the valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem where the city garbage was cast and burnt, a symbol of the destruction of the worthless. Its ever-burning fires gave it the appearance at night of a valley of fire and the New Testament references to "hell-fire" are based on this fact. *Gehenna*, however, is not mentioned in the Book of Revelation; the Lake of Fire takes its place, but it is easy to see that the more highly coloured imagery of the Book of Revelation has transmuted *Gehenna* with its fires into a veritable lake of consuming fire.

There is a striking correspondence between the Lake of Fire of Revelation and the vivid descriptions of the place of final punishment for Satan, evil angels, and sinful men, in the Book of Enoch. This book, which was widely known in the days of Jesus, had a great influence on the background setting of many allusions in the New Testament; Jesus based some of his parables and sayings upon its contents. Jude quoted directly from it in his epistle. It enshrines the general views of Judaism a few centuries before Christ on the subjects of righteousness and sin, ultimate rewards and penalties, the Messiah and Millennial reign, and the resurrection. Hence it is of value in elucidating what these later visions of Revelation were intended by the Holy Spirit to convey to the primitive Church, and therefore to us.

The Book of Enoch pictures the same fiery doom for the unregenerate as Revelation does by the symbol of the Lake of Fire. Enoch calls it the "chaos of fire" as, for example, speaking of

the doom of the fallen angels "*In those days they shall be led off to the chaos of fire, to the torment and the prison in which they shall be confined for ever*" (1 En. 10.13). Again, this time referring to unregenerate men "*Wait ye indeed till sin has passed away, for their names shall be blotted out of the book of life and out of the holy books, and their seed shall be destroyed for ever, and their spirits shall be slain, and they shall cry and make lamentations in a place that is a chaotic wilderness, and in the fire shall they burn*" (1 En. 108. 2-6). Another passage is reminiscent of Rev. 20 concerning the binding of Satan during the Messianic Age and his judgment at its end: "*and the Lord said to Raphael, Bind Azazel (Satan) hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert . . . and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, that he may not see the light. And on the day of the great judgment he shall be cast into the fire*" (1 En. 10. 4-6).

It has been customary to use these and similar passages as an argument for belief in eternal torment among pre-Christian Jews but although it may well be true that some did interpret them in that fashion just as Christians have interpreted the "hell-fire" symbols of the New Testament similarly, it is probable that the author or authors of the Book of Enoch intended these rather lurid passages to be taken metaphorically, for elsewhere in the book it is fairly evident that the penalty for sin was envisaged as eternal death. For instance: "*I will give them over into the hands of mine elect. As straw in the fire so shall they burn . . . As lead in the water shall they sink before the face of the righteous, and no trace of them shall any more be found . . . they shall fall and not rise again, and there shall be no one to raise them; for they have denied the Lord of Spirits and his Anointed*" (1 En. 48. 9-10). Again, "*For the sinners there is judgment impending with me, so that I shall destroy them from the face of the earth*" (1 En. 45. 6). "*When the secrets of the righteous shall be revealed and the sinners judged, and the godless driven from the presence of the righteous and elect . . . none shall seek mercy from the Lord of Spirits, for their life is at an end*" (1 En. 58. 3 & 6).

It is against this background that the allusions in Revelation should be viewed. Jesus used the

same figure of speech upon occasion, as in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, where the sentence upon the sinners is "*Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matt. 25. 41). He quite evidently used the expression in the same sense as does the Book of Enoch, and in fact almost certainly based this parable upon certain passages in that book.

In the New Testament reference to the Lake of Fire occurs five times, always in the Book of Revelation. In ch. 19. 20, as the culmination of the vision of the Rider on the White Horse from Heaven—our Lord in glory at his Second Advent—engaging in the final conflict with, and defeating, the forces of evil of this world at the end of this Age, the two principal opponents, the "Beast" and the "False Prophet" are said to be cast alive into the lake of fire and brimstone. These two symbolic creatures can be briefly described as picturing the religio-political anti-Christian forces of this Age, and their casting into the fiery lake "alive" their consignment to destruction whilst in the midst of their active hostility to the Lord Christ. There is no reclamation from this fate; the fires are not purificatory, but destructive. Following the overthrow of the evil institutions of man's creating, preparatory to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom upon earth, they pass out of existence, never to return. The allegiance of men to these systems and their influence in men's hearts will be nullified during the process of evangelism and conversion which is the purpose of that Age. The Beast and the False Prophet disappear for ever.

The remaining four instances are located in point of time at the end, rather than the beginning, of the Messianic Age. These four deal with happenings associated with the Last Judgment. In Rev. 21. 6-8 it is indicated that those who have not by that time become sons of God by conversion, but elect instead to remain in their sins, "*shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*" The same ones are referred to in ch. 20. 15. "*Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*"

Later on, in ch. 21.27, it is stressed that nothing that defiles or is of sin or evil will enter the symbolic Holy City, the eternity of blessedness which God has ordained, but only "*they which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life*". This allusion goes back to the days of the Exodus, when Moses came to the Lord to confess the apostasy of Israel in making themselves an idol god. "*This people have sinned a great sin*" he said, and then, because of his love for his people and his solicitude for God's purpose for them; if God could not forgive "*then blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written*". To which the Lord responded with a basic principle in his redemptive purpose "*Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book*" (Exod. 32. 31-33). The Book of Life in Revelation is the New Testament counterpart of God's Book of worthy Israel in the Old. In that case those who proved themselves worthy were preserved for God's future purpose and went into the Land of Promise. The unworthy, because of unbelief, were erased from that Book and their carcasses fell in the wilderness; they never entered. Similarly, those who respond to the drawing power of God in Christ, who become sons of God by a renunciation of evil, and acceptance of Christ and dedication of life to him, even although that conversion and dedication take place at the eleventh hour of the Messianic Age, devised to afford all men abundant opportunity for the same, are assured of eternal life in the infinite ages of the future; they enter the Holy City. But those, if such there be, who steadfastly and irrevocably reject the Divine offer of salvation in Christ, whose hearts are so fully set in them to do evil that there is nothing left in their minds and hearts upon which the love of God can work, who use their God-given gifts of absolute free-will to say "I will not"; for these there remains nothing and can remain nothing but the loss of God-given life, life which can only endure eternally if in union with God through Christ. The antithesis of life is death; the Divine law is "the soul that sinneth it shall die". In the Book of Revelation that final destruction is pictured as consignment to the Lake of Fire, "which is the second death".



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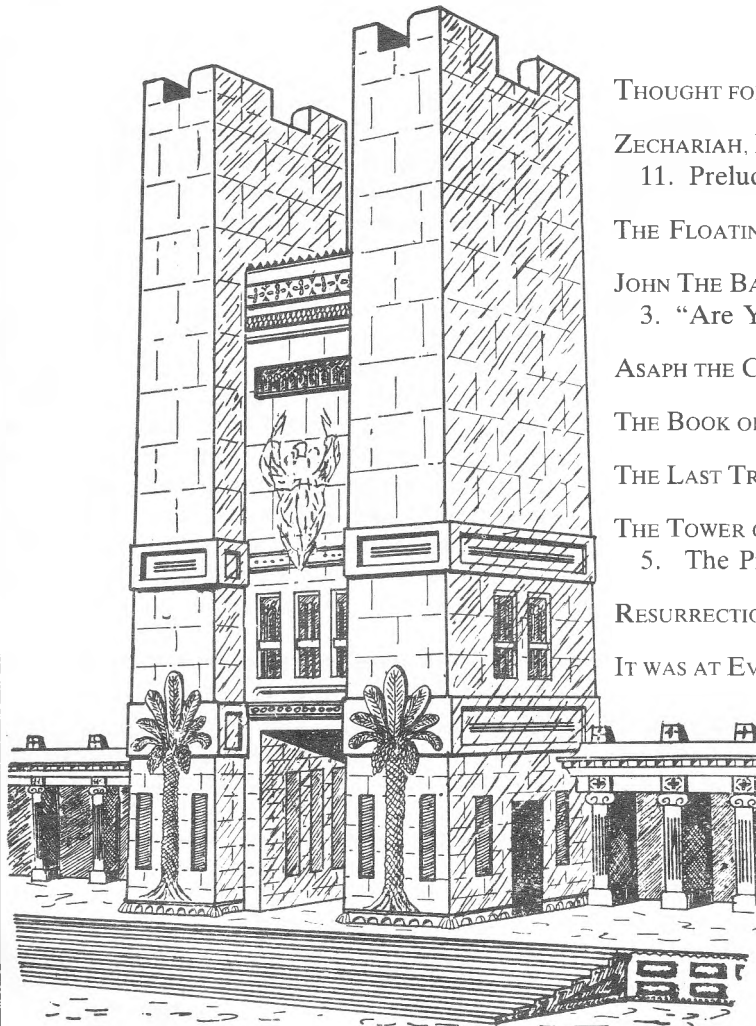
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Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

*"Who can know what is good for a man in this life, this brief span of empty existence through which he passes like a shadow?"* (Eccl. 6. 12 NEB).

That writer must have been feeling very despondent when he penned those words, but then by his own admission he was a man who had possessed and enjoyed everything of a material nature that life had to offer—wealth, power, success, homage—and found it all as ashes in the mouth at the end. None of it was enduring and at the last he was no better off than when he started. The total of human achievement, no matter what it embraces, he says in another place, is but "frailty and a striving after wind". The book is written from this standpoint, that of the futility of life if this is all that it means. But he did know better, and at the conclusion he reveals his knowledge that his life and its affairs, its actions and its achievements, are intended to serve a great purpose in the future that succeeds

death. *"let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter"* he says; *"fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil"* (Eccl. 12.13-14). This life only appears to be a "brief span of empty existence"; in reality it is the first stage of a developing experience which leads ultimately to full awareness of God's purpose and acceptance of the indicated place in that purpose. But because the deeds and achievements, good and bad, of this brief life are moulding our characters already in the direction of our destiny it is inevitable that they all will be brought into judgment. That is why it is so important to come consciously and deliberately into line with the Lord Jesus Christ now and in sincere consecration of life and abilities to him begin already to walk in the way of eternal life.

### NOTICES

**Christian African Relief Trust.** The Annual Newsletter, detailing the work of this registered charity for 1993, is to hand. Founded in 1983 by Bible Students in the Midlands, it now has supporters and workers from a number of denominational affiliations, and the report makes interesting reading. Supported entirely by freewill donations, the Trust, which sends out food, medical supplies and clothing to nine Central African countries, despatched one box of such in 1983, 830 the following year, increasing in each successive year until in 1993 ten thousand such boxes were shipped. Administration expenses are borne by the five Trustees so that all donations are applied to the primary purpose. Gifts of food or good used clothing alternatively to donations are sincerely appreciated. Distribution after arrival at destination is supervised by ministers or charitable organisations on site who report results so that every precaution is taken against abuse. For copies of the News-

letter or other information, and for offers of assistance in the work when feasible, write to the Secretary, Mr. G. G. Tompkins, "White Gates", Tinker Lane, Lepton, Huddersfield, HD8 0NE.

### Gone from us



Bro. Sidney Bucknell (*Nottingham*)

Sis. Peggy Hudson (*late Manchester*)

Sis. E. Parker (*Arundel*)



*"Till the day break, and the shadows flee away."*

## ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

### 11. Prelude to the Great Day

The last three chapters of Zechariah's prophecy tell the story of the end of this Age. They commence with the rumblings of the coming conflict, the confusion of nations in their hostility to Israel and the incoming Kingdom. They go on to tell of Israel's growing awareness of her Divinely ordained destiny and the development of a "remnant" which will be faithful to God through the fiery trials which lie ahead; of the emergence of new leaders, stalwarts of olden time returned to rule in righteousness during and after the crisis; of God's promise that He will surely defend Jerusalem. A spirit of grace and supplication begins to become manifest among the people, a recognition of their past national failure to accept and believe on Christ, culminating in a campaign against the modern political idolatry which will still have great influence in affairs.

Nevertheless the nation as a whole is not yet truly converted; some there are who face the coming crisis with apprehension and unbelief and some, perhaps, who are in the land only for the material prosperity it brings them and not by reason of any real faith in the Divine purposes. These will be purged out, cut off from the land, exiled, when the test of faith is applied. But a loyal section remains, steadfast while the enemy advances, and at that moment Divine power is manifested for deliverance. The 14th chapter tells in detail of that final phase, when the forces of unrighteousness meet head-on with the powers of Heaven and are destroyed. So the story closes. God's earthly "people for a purpose", the "Holy Nation", is standing secure among the nations and ready to embark upon its destined mission, that of proclaiming God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

Verse 1 of chapter 12 is an introduction to the momentous happenings of chaps. 12 and 13, covering the preliminary events of the period immediately preceding the dramatic moment when God rises up to deliver Jerusalem. It is important to realise that these three chapters do cover happenings occurring over a period of time; the gathering of the nations against Jerusalem and the fiery trial into which the people enter and from which only the faithful "remnant" emerge is not the work of a moment. Many distinct and varied factors enter into the sequence of events which characterises Israel's

history at the end of the Age and they have to be viewed in their proper relation one to another. Hence the solemnity of this introductory verse. "*An Oracle!*" says the R.S.V. "*The word of the Lord concerning Israel! Thus says the Lord, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of man within him*". It is a strange verse, seemingly having little bearing upon the prophetic statement which follows, and yet, of course, it is vitally connected. The predominant theme of these three chapters is the all-pervading power of God, and his absolute supremacy over this earth that He has created and the men thereon to whom He has given life. In these three chapters the armed might of this world's evil is brought to a focus and launched against the earthly citadel of God's holiness, and is utterly broken. Nothing in all the earth can stand against God when He rises up to act. Hence it is fitting that right at the outset He declares himself the One who brought heaven and earth into being and made men to have the powers they possess. And having thus stated the fact, God goes on to declare his intention. "*Behold I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem*" (vs. 2). The "cup of trembling" is a figure of speech used several times in the O.T. (see Psa. 75. 8 and Isa. 51. 21-22; ) it is the cup of wine put into the hands of an enemy to cause stupefaction and confusion, and so assist the ease with which that enemy can be repulsed and defeated. This is what Jerusalem (a figure for all Israel) is to become to the nations. During practically the whole of this century that has been true. Since 1917, when General Allenby captured Jerusalem and liberated the land from Turkish control, the consequent political problems have been a source of stupefaction and confusion to the world's politicians. And the problem has grown worse with time. "*On that day*" God says "*I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it shall grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth shall come together against it*" (ch. 2. 3 R.S.V.). The word for "grievously hurt" means to be cut and lacerated by a burden too heavy to hold; how true it has been that in these latter years every political power which concerns itself with the problem of Israel finds it one that is "too

hot to hold", to use our modern colloquialism.

The expression "come together against it" seemingly refers to the gradual hardening of opinion against Israel typical of the present time. Judah and Jerusalem are associated together in the crisis and, later on, in the deliverance, this being the implication of the phrase in verse 2. Why it should be thought necessary to stress this fact when it would normally be expected that Judah, the land, would naturally share the fate of the capital city Jerusalem might be thought rather strange, but it may be because in the historic invasion of Judah by Sennacherib two centuries or so before the time of Zechariah Judah was desolated whilst Jerusalem was delivered, and since that invasion was evidently the background against which Zechariah's presentation is set there might be an indication here that in this particular detail the reality does not correspond with the background. Three times in the narrative it is made plain that Judah and Jerusalem come through the crisis together.

Verse 4 pictures the next development in the situation among the nations. The Lord will "*smite every horse with panic*" (not "astonishment" as A.V.) "*the riders with madness, and every horse of the people with blindness*". Horses in prophecy are metaphors for the military might of nations; the well known passage in Isa. 31. 1-3 is a good example of this. Blindness, madness, panic; surely these are the characteristics manifest in the policies of the nations in their dealings with the "Middle East" problem today. That which commenced with the cup of stupefaction, becoming a burdensome stone which lacerates all who pick it up, develops finally into complete failure to apprehend the true nature of what is happening, that the Most High is preparing the way for his intervention in the affairs of earth. Blindness, madness and panic is a very late stage in the period of preparation for the last siege of Jerusalem.

Now the workings of God begin to become outwardly evident. At this point, when blindness, madness and panic begins to grip the nations, "*I will open mine eyes upon the house of Judah*" says the Lord "*and the governors of Judah shall say in their heart, the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be my strength in the Lord of Hosts their God. In that day I will make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on*

*the right hand and on the left; and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again*" (ch. 12. 4-6). This is a most remarkable statement, for it speaks of a time in the end of the Age, prior to the deliverance of Israel and therefore prior to the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom, when the leaders of Israel avow their own faith and the faith of their people in God. "Our strength" say these governors "is not in the arm of flesh nor in carnal weapons, but in God". This implies an awakening of faith in the nation, a beginning of that turning to God which blossoms into fulness at the time of the actual deliverance. At this moment God has opened his eyes upon the house of Judah and some have responded.

Who are the governors? These are political leaders of a new kind, for none of today's statesmen, even those of present day Israel would adopt so hazardous a policy as faith in Divine protection, and neither would their peoples. These governors are men of God, raised up from some totally unexpected source. There is good reason for the conclusion that they are none other than the promised heroes of Old Testament days, the "Ancient Worthies", restored from the dead to lead the nation into the Kingdom. If this in fact be so then the chapter has already carried us to a stage in the events of the end of the Age very near to the final act, the consummation when Divine power is employed to bring the kingdoms of this world to their end and establish the earthly Kingdom of God in their place. By that time the "change" of the Church will have taken place and the work of the Messianic Age be at the point of commencement.

The impact, upon mankind generally, of the advent of these governors will be tremendous. "*Like a blazing pot in the midst of wood, like a flaming torch among sheaves*" says the R.S.V., "*they shall devour to the right and left all the peoples round about, while Jerusalem shall still be inhabited in its place*" (ch. 12.6). This verse is so momentous that it needs to be viewed in correct relation to the rest of the narrative with some care. It has its place prior to the active intervention of God to save the city at the critical moment; the influence of the "governors" is felt among the nations for a little while before, and it is a consuming influence. It is almost as if the battle commences and rages for some time before God steps in, and during that time the burden of defence rests upon the governors and the nature of that defence is indicated in this

verse. Something of this kind appears to be demanded by the more detailed narrative of chapter 14 where the siege continues with sundry losses to Israel but without harming the faithful remnant, until, after the nation has been purged of its apostates who then go into exile, the time of actual Divine intervention comes and the city is saved.

*"The Lord will give victory to the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem may not be exalted over that of Judah"* (ch. 12. 7 R.S.V.). The expression "tents of Judah" really denotes the dwelling places of the ordinary populace of the land—derived from Israel's early experiences at the Exodus; "tents" became a term throughout the Old Testament for homes, whether temporary or permanent. There is a contrast here between the people of the land generally and the "upper crust" of society concentrated in the city and the king's court. Many of the invasions of Old Testament times saw the country dwellers despoiled and enslaved whilst the walled and defended city Jerusalem held out and escaped. There will be nothing like that in this battle of the Last Day.

The entire land is to be delivered from the invader; further, in order to intensify the fact that God is fighting for his covenant people as a whole and not just for a few elite, as it were, in the city, the countryside is to be first to experience deliverance, so that neither the royal ruling house of David nor the aristocracy of Jerusalem can claim priority of Divine favour over the masses of the people. The application of this symbolism to the time in question, when no Davidic kings rule nor is there any "aristocracy" element in restored Israel, is a little difficult to perceive. Perhaps it is intended to convey the idea that despite various vivid Old Testament pictures of the siege of Jerusalem,

which from the literal viewpoint would involve the subjugation of the surrounding countryside, in this case the whole of the land of Israel is to be inviolate. It is certainly true that the siege of the city is just as truly a siege if the invaders are drawn up around the frontiers of the land instead of just outside the city walls and this would certainly be more appropriate to the idea of an entire nation awaiting the assault of the enemy in perfect trust in God and experiencing deliverance thereby.

*"In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem"* (ch. 12. 8-9).

This is the final stage. David of old was the champion of Israel; his exploits both as a "guerilla" fighter, as we would say, in his early days, and as a warrior king later on, made his name a legend. "Saul hath slain his thousands, but David his ten thousand" sang the maidens of Israel after one of his resounding victories. Even the weakest of the people "in that day" will be valiant as was David; not by dint of physical prowess in material warfare, but in the triumphs that faith will then bring. The house of David in ancient times was the ruling house, the royal family. "In that day" the ruling house will be the company of the resurrected Ancient Worthies and they truly will be "as God, as the angel of the Lord before them". Just as the Angel of the Presence went before Israel in the days of the Exodus, guiding and protecting them, so will the men whom God has appointed prove themselves sure guides and strong defenders in Israel's time of trial. So the Lord will defend his people and render ineffective all the assaults of their adversaries. *(to be continued)*

#### Note on Luke 9.53

*"And they did not receive him, because his face was set to go to Jerusalem"* (Luke 9. 53).

All Palestinians looked alike in features and in dress, in that day, just as today, and there was no physical difference between Samaritan and Jew then, just as there is little between Arab and native Israeli to-day. It was the fact that the little band was headed for Jerusalem that betrayed their Jewish nationality. The racial animosity that smouldered between Samaritan and Jew overpowered the proverbial Eastern hospitality

which normally was extended to all travellers at night, and caused them to refuse lodging to the pilgrims. It was not that the Samaritans wished to "speed the travellers on their way". Recognising this hostility, the disciples, imbued, we fear, with the spirit of retaliation, wished to call down fire from heaven to consume them, and so gave opportunity for a reproof which is often needed to-day as much as then: *"Ye know not what spirit ye are of; the Son of Man is come not to destroy men's lives but to save them"*.

## THE FLOATING AXE-HEAD

*An Old Testament  
story*

The prophet Elisha, living with his students at Gilgal, north of Jerusalem, was induced to seek a more commodious living space near the River Jordan. The account in 2 Kings 6 tells how they went to the chosen place and commenced to fell timber wherewith to build a house. During this operation one of them, apparently working close to the river's brink, had the misfortune to lose the head of his axe in the water. In some distress he sought his tutor, Elisha, for help. "Alas, master" he said "it was borrowed". For that reason, obviously, the question of its recovery was urgent.

"And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he showed him the place." Then Elisha "cut down a stick, and cast it in thither, and the iron did swim".

Ever ready to seize upon the miraculous, past generations of commentators have called this the miracle of the swimming axe-head; more than one volume of Bible Study helps list this incident under the heading of "Old Testament Miracles". There seems singularly little purpose in such a miracle. No great lesson is expounded or public demonstration of Divine sovereignty given. A careless youth had his lost axe-head returned to him in the sight of half a dozen companions and that is all. The incident is related in a casual, matter-of-fact fashion as though it was not a matter of any great importance and then the historian goes on to talk of something else.

The Jordan near Gilgal is between sixty and a hundred feet wide and varies in depth between four and six feet, with a well defined channel flanked by level terraces on which, more particularly in ancient times, there grew an abundance of trees, canes, shrubs and reeds. The water was too deep to retrieve the axe-head easily and yet not so deep that a little ingenuity would not solve the problem. Elisha "cut down a stick" according to the A.V. "Cut down"—*qatsab*—means to form or shape, as with a tool of some kind. An example is 1 Kings 6. 25 and 7. 37 "... cherubims of one measure and "size" where "size" stands for "shape". Another example is Cant. 4. 2 "Like a flock of sheep that are "shorn"; the paring of the wool from the sheep is likened to the paring down of wood that is shaped. "Stick" in the text is "ets" which denotes a tree, a branch or any piece of wood, shaped or unshaped, indiscriminately. Elisha took a piece of growing timber and shaped it to his purpose; probably made it into the form of a flat plank. He then "cast it in . . . and the iron did swim". "Cast" can mean equally cast, throw, thrust or put, and "swim" denotes the ideas either of swimming or floating. This latter word is in the Hebrew grammatical form known as Hiphil, signifying the causative "he caused it to float",

giving a different slant on the matter than that indicated by the A.V., which has it as though the iron did swim of its own volition. The true rendering is shown in several translations such as RSV "and made the iron float", Fenton "... thrust it (the stick) in there and floated the iron", and the Septuagint "... threw (the stick) in there and the iron came to the surface".

The axe-head was evidently five or six feet down in the water and too far from the bank to be fished out easily. Elisha seems to have shaped a long pole to a roughly flat form and thrust the pole into the water in such a fashion as to insert its end underneath the axe-head as it lay on the river bed. He had only to let go his own end of the pole to have it rise to the surface, bearing upon its farther extremity the lost implement. The youth had then only to reach out for the floating timber, bring it to the bank, and recover his axe-head. This is precisely what the narrative says "And he put out his hand, and took it".

Why so trivial an incident is recorded at all is a bit of a puzzle. The historical books of the kingdom of Israel were compiled by many generations of historians over a period of five hundred years or so and this little interlude, 2 Kings 6. 1-7, might well have been written down in the first place by the youth who lost the axe, a memory of the manner in which the great prophet of Israel came to his aid in a relatively trivial personal problem. Those responsible later on for compiling this part of the Book of Kings might have considered the incident worthy of record as illustrating how Elisha in all his greatness did not abstain from quite minor deeds of helpfulness when the occasion came before him. But we need only ask why the Holy Spirit saw to it that this story was included. There must be a reason, for "all scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3. 16). Maybe it is that an admittedly learned and devoted man of God who might easily be charged with being a mystic and out of touch with the affairs of daily life is here shown, despite his piety and "other worldliness", to be of a practical mind and definitely aware of the troubles and needs of his fellows. When the lad was in trouble Elisha came to the rescue with a business-like application of elementary mechanics and his pupil was duly grateful. We too, with all our knowledge of and insight into the things of the next world, do well if we can, when occasion arises, render practical assistance to those of our fellows who have become involved in some everyday trouble. To that extent the story has certainly been given for our example and instruction in righteousness.

## JOHN THE BAPTIST

### 3. Are You He?

It had been revealed to John the Baptist that when Israel's Messiah appeared he would recognise him by the witness of the Holy Spirit. (John 1. 33). The two men, Jesus and John, may have known each other since they were boys and met when their mothers met. Perhaps John's departure for the desert had meant that they had not seen each other for many years. Now, as Jesus approached the Baptist, John found it hard to understand why his cousin needed a baptism of repentance. Evidently John believed that Jesus needed no such baptism. However, John was about to enact a ritual which added a new dimension to baptism.

When Gentiles had entered the Jewish faith as proselytes, they had been baptised. By doing so, pagans had indicated that they had left their former life behind and had adopted the way of life of the Jews with its Law and ritual. Israelites born into the Kingdom of God as known in the Old Testament required no such repentance. Their moral standards had come to them as children of Abraham and in him they were right before God. If they had failed to live up to those standards then they may have felt the need to go to John in order to renew their covenant.

The difference between the Baptism of John and the Baptism of Jesus is clarified by the early Church record in Acts. 19. 1-7. Paul was at Ephesus when he came across twelve disciples who had progressed no farther than the baptism of repentance. The work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and lives had not yet begun. They had never discovered that when Jesus comes into the life of a believer, it is not just a work of reformation. Baptism in the name of Jesus brings new life with powerful growth that transforms the believer into the likeness of Christ.

When Jesus came to John he was taking a step which no one else had ever taken. He was not asking to be given back the status which he as an Israelite had lost because he had broken the covenant given through Moses. Jesus had never lost that relationship. He was now pointing the way forward to those who would receive resurrection life by God's mighty power (Rom. 6. 5-11). It is this which enables the disciple to conquer sin and do the things which God wants him to do.

The power of the Spirit, so evident in the fellowship and witness of the Early Church

recorded in the Book of Acts was first manifest in the life of Jesus. All who give real evidence of believing that he is the Son of God, receive the same Spirit. John's baptism of repentance was now coming to an end by this act of baptising Jesus; he was able to give his witness to the identity of Jesus.

John began to see the change in the work of God, so he introduced his disciples to his cousin. Instead of the fiery prophet denouncing the evil of his generation in such words as "*the axe is laid to the root of the tree*", he announced Jesus as "*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" (John 1. 29-37). The sacrifice which was now prepared removed not only the sin of one nation, but the sin of the whole world. John began to see that God is not going to remove the sinner but that his heart goes out to the sinner in order to remove the sin.

At that moment too we see the greatness of John. He realised that his work was now almost finished. He accepted that the number of his disciples and the extent of his influence would decrease. He foresaw that the work and discipleship of Jesus would correspondingly increase. Like Elijah before him, he must be swept away from the scene of Divine activity before he could really see the fruit of his work; he must step down from the limelight so that another might shine in the glory of the Father. There was no thought of envy in John but rather a willingness not to stand in the way of God's work which must go on; he rejoiced that Christ had come to give to the world that which he could never give. Envy there was, among his disciples who remained loyal to him. He began the hardest part of his ministry, that of retiring gracefully. He rejoiced to see Jesus' success in attracting people to the Gospel but this could only mean his own eclipse in public ministry. As with all those who do God's work, while his mission was in progress his enemies could not destroy him. Once the work was done and Messiah had come, John had to bear his final witness in prison. What a prison it was. High in the hills overlooking the Jordan valley John could hardly see the wonderful landscape which he must have loved and where he had so freely roamed. He was like a caged eagle, with all his strong, still youthful energy, pent up in chains. All his life he had been free from the confinements of men and

stone walls; now he sat brooding upon what had happened. It is not surprising that his mind turned to that other young man, still free to preach and work among men and women, boys and girls. John must have believed that Jesus was establishing the kingdom of God; as Messiah he must surely bring to an end the injustice, the corruption and cruelty of such tyrants as Herod. He might well have asked why Jesus was not judging sinners and bringing the wrath of God upon those who disobeyed his law. Surely those who had borne witness to the Kingdom and purpose of God would be set free. Unable to bear it longer, John sent messengers to Jesus to ask him *"Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?"* John knew that Jesus would not deceive him; his problem was not trust but confusion. How did Jesus feel when he heard that question? Had others asked it from similar motives? Some had left him after the feeding of the five thousand (John 6.66).

Jesus invited John's disciples to observe what was going on. This was more effective than sending a harsh reply, warning John to have stronger faith. Jesus knew human frailty and the temptations to which it was subject. His answer to John remains a monumental witness to what Jesus came for and how to judge the work of others. Like many another, John's pious hopes of good people receiving their just deserts, were being dashed. God is never in a hurry; He does not do things in the human way.

As John's disciples watched, they saw Jesus heal the sick and give sight to the blind. They heard how He cleansed some from leprosy and raised others from death. There appears to have been a great deal going on which is not described in the Gospels. Jesus was showing that the only power which can overcome evil is love. The power of the Spirit of Christ would take a long time to dislodge the powers of darkness; love is a slow worker but its results are more lasting than that which would only scratch the surface with human methods of retribution. His rebuke to his cousin was simple and loving. *"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard . . . and blessed is he who takes no offence at me."* Some did take offence and turn away; another did also and became a traitor. Would that his followers were half as gentle. When John re-opens his eyes in the resurrection there will be no one greater to accept that everlasting love which will conquer the Herods and Neros of this world.

*"Blessed is he that is not offended in me"* said

the Lord. Many more were going to be offended by Jesus' method of introducing the Kingdom of God. It certainly did not suit the ears of many in Israel to be told that the Son of God could mix with tax collectors and what they considered to be the dregs of society. It was offensive to Israelites to hear that God sent his prophets to foreigners to bestow their favours, as Jesus showed in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4. 25-27). Jesus was different from John. John was an ascetic type, whose life was pure and free from the atmosphere of human society; he probably would not have moved among the poorest outcasts or touched those suffering from leprosy. He would never have had a meal with the drunkards. Jesus was different in that he saw something of the heritage of Abraham (and perhaps something of the image of God) in poor depraved sinners. Jesus did not find the company of the elite rich religious folk very comfortable. J. B. Phillips translates the passage in Luke 7.31,32 *"What can I say that the men of this generation are like - what sort of men are they? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other, 'We played at weddings for you, but you would not dance, We played at funerals for you, and you would not cry! John the Baptist came in the strictest austerity and you say he is crazy. The Son of Man came, enjoying life, and you say 'Look, a drunkard and a glutton, a bosom-friend of the tax-collector and the outsider!' Ah, well, wisdom's reputation is entirely in the hands of her children!"* The Jewish people found Jesus and John very disturbing, and like many others, they did not want to be disturbed.

Ordinary people's comment upon the life of the Baptist was *"Though John never performed a miraculous sign, all that John said about this man was true"* (John 10.41 NIV). Would that such comment could be made about everyone who has claimed to follow Jesus. Could it be said of our witness?

Jesus' epitaph to John has puzzled many. He said *"I tell you, among those borne of women none is greater than John; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he"* (Luke 7.28). Would John find no place in the kingdom he so valiantly proclaimed? John was numbered with those who proclaimed the Kingdom of God, and like Moses and Samuel, Isaiah and Jeremiah he must have a place in the ultimate purpose of God. John's greatness, like that of all the prophets, lay in his deep humility and trust.

They remain extraordinary examples to all disciples of Jesus; but those who share the suffering and the throne with Christ are different from those who will be subject to Christ on earth. Because they will be the type of people that they were in this life, they will be completely happy and mature in the place God has assigned to them when they rise from the dead into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. God does not fail to honour those who honour him. They who sometimes suffered so much for his cause, will receive a life of peace and joy wherever it is and whatever they are doing.

The final word therefore is left to the writer to the Hebrews, who so vividly described the faith of the men and women of the first and 'old' order of spiritual things. It was a shadow or type of that which was to come. Now it had come and so the writer completes his picture gallery with the words ". . . *all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*" (Heb. 11.40).

*The End*

## ASAPH THE CHIEF MUSICIAN

*A man who made melody to the Lord*

*"For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God."* (Neh. 12.46).

Asaph was a great choir-master; so great that his name lingered on for many generations after his death and in all Israel's after history the Temple singers were known as "sons of Asaph". Here was a man whose talents and whole life were consecrated to God and used in one particular direction, in the ministry of sacred song. Who knows how many hearts in Israel were turned more reverently toward the God of Israel and how many minds to the more sober consideration of the Covenant and their responsibilities as a chosen and separated people to God, in consequence of that ministry? The ascending of praise and thanksgiving to God is a very lovely thing in Divine worship; and it is more than that. The heart's devotion can rise to heaven on the wings of song, and the renewal, the re-affirming, of one's own consecration can be carried to God by the voice of thanksgiving. It is part of the service in which all can join and express for themselves in their own way the love and gratitude they feel for all his benefits. Sometimes a speaker, anxious to conserve as much of the time allotted to the service as he can for his address, requests that one of the hymns be omitted, or the long ones shortened. He does not well who does so. The Father looks upon the praises and prayers of his people in their gathering together with as much interest and sympathy as he does upon the ministry of the spoken word and, who knows, maybe he gets less weary of listening to the praise and thanksgiving of the congregation than he does of the sometimes overlong perorations delivered in his name by the minister.

Asaph lived in the days of David. He must have

found in that king a very ready sympathiser with his services and a quick readiness to make use of his characteristic talents. David himself in his younger and—who knows—happier days had been a singer and a poet. As a shepherd lad he had whiled away many a pleasant hour on the hillside, while the sun shone warmly down, composing and singing simple songs of praise to God. In later years, when in the service of King Saul, he played the harp and sang the same songs to his own accompaniment. Now, with all the cares of state pressing on his shoulders and the claims of several wives to satisfy he probably had less time for such direct indulgence in his musical tastes; but when he came to organising the worship of God he remembered the charm that music had always had for him, and realising what it could mean in the worship of Israel, he looked around for a suitable man to place in charge of such things and found a twin soul in Asaph.

It was when King David had brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem after its long sojourn in the house of Obed-edom, following its capture by the Philistines in the days of Eli two generations earlier, that Asaph received his appointment. According to 1 Chron., 16.4, David had "*appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the Ark of the Lord God of Israel; Asaph the chief . . .*" As the account goes on we find that there were players on psalteries and harps, and priests with trumpets, and Asaph himself, in addition to his duty of leading the choir, "*made a sound with cymbals*". It seems evident that this Temple music was by no means a subdued affair; more likely is it that it bore some distinct resemblance to the Salvation Army bands of our own day. But the Lord blessed it; that is the important thing; He blessed it! that is a point to remember when we feel

disposed to decry and condemn a form of service which some others are conducting to the Lord's glory but a form which does not appeal to ourselves. The Lord's arm is not so short—nor his imagination so limited—that he is compelled to confine himself to just one way of doing his work and although we do tend to flatter ourselves that we are the only ones who understand his Plan and therefore the only ones to work for him or to speak in his name, there is plenty of evidence to the unbiased observer that the Lord does find use for many of the efforts put forth by Christian disciples of many differing theologies despite the shortcomings of some of them as respects a clear vision of his Plan.

Now Asaph was not only a musician, he was also a prophet. He must have been a very self effacing one, for there is no mention of the fact during the time of his own life. Perhaps the greater glory of his royal patron obliterated any lesser radiance that might have shone from the Chief Musician. But in the days of Hezekiah, several centuries later, there is a casual reference which goes to show that his prophetic office was remembered equally with his musical skill. 2. Chron. 29. 30, tells us, in connection with Hezekiah's restoration of the Temple service after the idolatry of Ahaz, that *Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped*".

So Asaph was a seer—a prophet! In his musical preoccupation he found time to study the Word of the Lord and to become a fit medium through which the Holy Spirit could speak. What would be the subjects of his prophecy? Without much doubt he would prophesy, as did all the prophets, concerning the King and the Kingdom, and the conditions of entrance into that Kingdom. Like all the prophets, he would speak of Judgment and Restitution, and call the people to repentance and dedication of life to God's service—to consecration. How would he speak to them? Surely through the medium of his sacred office! Not for Asaph the free, unrestricted wandering through the countryside in the manner of Amos the herdsman or Joel the vine-dresser. Not for Asaph the standing in the royal court in the company of princes and politicians of this world, like Isaiah or Daniel. His duties kept him in the place where daily worship was being constantly

offered, and it was there, and in the course of that worship and those duties, that his prophecy, if it was to be given at all, must be uttered. And therefore it is that for the prophecies of Asaph we must look into the psalms of Asaph.

There are twelve in number, these psalms which are accredited to David's chief musician. Some have suggested that they might not all actually be from Asaph; that the structure of at least one seems to indicate a composition of a much later date, but there is really little or no evidence to support such hypotheses. These twelve, Psalm 50 and Psalm 73 to 83 inclusive, are entitled "Psalms of Asaph", and there is every reason for concluding that we have here compositions that are the work of this fervent-hearted Levite, set to music and rendered under his direction by the sacred choir in the days of David. And being a prophet, what more natural than that he should incorporate in these songs the understanding that the Holy Spirit had given him?

It would take many pages to exhaust the doctrinal and prophetic teaching left on record in the twelve psalms that enshrine the ministry of Asaph. A few brief allusions must suffice. And no such short survey can start on a more appropriate theme than the one which led Asaph to compose the 73rd Psalm—the Permission of Evil. Not exactly a doctrine, as we understand the term to-day, perhaps, but how vital a foundation for our own orderly and satisfying appreciation of the Divine mysteries. "*I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked*" he says (Psa. 73.3) . . . . "*they are not in trouble as other men . . . . they have more than heart could wish . . . and they say 'how does God know?'* . . . *When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; THEN UNDERSTOOD I THEIR END.*" Ah, yes, that is where we, too, understand why God has permitted evil, and that He will not allow evil and the evildoer to continue for ever. It is in this psalm, too, that Asaph coined a word that has been an inestimable source of encouragement to the disciples of Jesus in all the centuries of this Gospel Age; "*Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.*" (Psa. 73.24).

It must have been this realisation of God's determination to vindicate the righteous in due time that led Asaph to the train of thought revealed in Psa. 77. "*I have considered the days*

of old" he says *"the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night; I commune with my own heart; and my spirit made diligent search. Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever . . . hath God forgotten to be gracious?"* Then, in a swift revulsion of feeling *"I will remember the works of the Lord. I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of all thy doings."* In the study and consideration of the Plan of God as revealed in his past actions Asaph found both consolation and instruction to explain the apparent inactivity of God. *"Thy way, O God, IS IN THE SANCTUARY"* (vs. 13). That was the great lesson and it is so still with us. The teaching of this Psalm is the over-ruling providence of God and his wise direction of events for the ultimate good of all men. He is leading them through many strange and hard experiences that they might learn at last the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and come willingly and voluntarily in harmony with God's righteousness. *"Thou leddest thy people like a flock"* are the concluding words of the Psalm. To the doctrine of the Permission of Evil therefore we have to add the doctrine of Divine Providence that doeth all things well.

The next theme to which Asaph devoted his talents was that of Divine Judgment, and here two of his Psalms, 82 and 83, share the burden of the song. *"God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods"* is the tremendous opening of Psal. 82. None of all created beings are exempt from God's judgment if so be that sin has entered and found a lodgment. Even though they be called gods, children of the Most High, they will die like men, and fall like one of the princes, should the contaminating effects of sin so demand. If wicked men take counsel against the people of God, and say (Psal. 83.4) *"Come, let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance"*, He will rise up and cause them to scatter and be no more, as the rolling leaves and dust before the whirlwind, twisting and twirling about in the terrible blast of his anger (vs. 13-15). And Asaph saw clearly—so clearly—that the final effect of Divine Judgment is *"that men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the most high over all the earth"*. (vs.18).

Now Asaph comes to prophecy. In Psal. 78, 79 and 80 he sings of God's chosen people Israel, of

his goodness to them and their unfaithfulness to him. *"Give ear, O my people"* he cries *"to my law. Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old"* (Psa. 78.1). Then he sings of the great deeds of old, the victories and triumphs of Israel in the wilderness, the continued faithfulness of God in face of the persistent unfaithfulness of Israel. So, at last, *"he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel; so that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh . . . and delivered strength into captivity"*, But when God saw the distress into which his people had fallen, and how the enemies of righteousness exulted over the sorry state of those who despite all their faults and all their failures and all their perversities were still the people of God, then *"the Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine, and he smote his enemies, . . . he put them to a perpetual reproach."* What a wonderful commentary upon the Divine Plan it is to say, as Asaph here says *"so he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands."* (Psa. 78.72).

The song drops to a lower key. Asaph's prophetic insight showed him that in days yet to come, long after he himself would be sleeping with his fathers, there would be trouble and distress upon Israel because of renewed unfaithfulness. He saw a day in the which fierce Babylonian soldiers would come and despoil the city and the sanctuary, and take all the treasures thereof captive to Babylon. *"O God"* he cries in agony in the opening stanza of Psal. 74 *"why hast thou cast us off for ever? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture?"* In vision he saw the Temple destroyed and lifted his voice in impassioned protest. *"A man was famous according as he had lifted up axes upon the thick trees. But now they break down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers . . . they have cast fire into thy sanctuary . . . they have burned up all the synagogues of God in the land"*. But it is in this psalm that he rises up to a lofty plea for the fulfilment of God's Plan, a fulfilment which he knows is sadly needed because of the world's sin. *"Have respect unto the covenant"* he urges *"for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty"*. Psalms 74 and 75 both reveal Asaph's knowledge that such a time of disaster must come upon Israel, and that it would be followed by judgment upon the nations that oppressed them. *"In the hands of the Lord*

there is a cup, and the wine is red . . . the dregs thereof, the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them" (Psa. 75.8). So it is that in Psa. 76 he passes on to a brighter view of prophecy and glimpses something of the day of light and gladness that is to follow the overthrow of God's enemies "When God arose to judgment, to save all the meek of the earth—surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Psa. 76.10). There is his faith in the Millennial Day, in those "Times of Restitution" which Peter, long centuries afterward, was to declare had been spoken of by all God's holy prophets. Asaph was one of those prophets.

It was in the 50th Psalm that the great singer attained his loftiest height of vision. In that wonderful pæon of praise and prophecy he traverses briefly the whole of God's later works, succeeding that earlier phase when Israel after the flesh was the only instrument to God's hand. There in Psalm 50 Asaph has taken a mighty stride forward and sees the development of another Israel, gathered to God in another covenant, and in the ecstasy of that revelation he

calls "gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice" (Psa. 50.5). Perhaps that last vision of all showed him the majesty and power of God more vividly than anything before. It was at any rate with this train of thought in his mind that he uttered the sublime words that we have used so often ourselves to describe the all-power of our Father and our God: "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills"!

"Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me, and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God." The vibrant words die away into silence; the melody fades away in the distance. Asaph the singer, the musician of David's choir is no more. He sleeps with his fellows, awaiting the call to enter the new world about which he so constantly spoke and sang; but his words live on after him, and we, three thousand years later, find strength and encouragement and inspiration because an obscure but zealous and earnest man of God, away in those far-off days, used his talent for music and poetry to sing praises to the God of his salvation.

### Saul versus Paul

"Saul" is used in the Book of Acts up to his visit to Cyprus, where (Acts 13.9) both names are used interchangeably; after that he is always called Paul. No explanation of the change is given in the N.T. When, standing trial before Agrippa and relating the circumstances of his conversion, he quoted the heavenly voice on the Damascus road, he used his Hebrew name "Saul", from which it would appear that he regarded the Hebrew name as fitting in the Jewish context. The fact that the name of the Roman governor of Cyprus was Sergius Paulus has induced some to suggest that Saul changed his name to Paul—which is Paulus in Latin or Greek—upon making the governor's acquaintance, in the belief that with a Roman name he would be better received in the Roman world. What is more likely, however, is that Paulus was his "patronymic" or surname. Unlike most of his fellow-Jews, Paul was a Roman citizen, born

with the privilege of Roman Citizenship. (Acts 22. 28). This meant that his father had acquired Roman citizenship. In such case such status would have been accompanied by a Roman name so that the Apostle's full name might well have been Saul Paulus, just as that of St. Mark was John Marcus. Paul's visit to Cyprus was the commencement of what was to be a life-long ministry in the Greek and Roman worlds; Judea was left behind from now on. What more natural than that he should henceforth be known by his Roman surname rather than his Jewish first name. In Jerusalem he had been known as Saul of Tarsus because of his birthplace; as a member of the intensely nationalistic Sanhedrin, his Jewish name would certainly be used in preference to a Gentile one; as the Apostle to the Gentiles no such inhibition existed and it was probably the part of wisdom to let himself be addressed and recorded by his Roman name Paulus.

To give praise is very becoming for the believer. It becomes as natural as breathing is to the physical body. Thankfulness and praise are twin sisters and where the one is found the other follows close in its track. Realising the deep

need of love and mercy, and being the recipient of the same, causes the heart to overflow with gratitude to its donor. Like the Psalmist, the language is: "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth."

## THE BOOK OF LIFE

*"And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works"* (Rev. 20.12).

The theme of the Book of Life, in which is written the names of those who ultimately attained the destiny of the redeemed, is most prominently set forth in the Book of Revelation, in company with its twin theme, the Lake of Fire which receives all that is ultimately judged unworthy. It has its Biblical origin in the time of Moses, and its ultimate origin at a time considerably before that. Properly to understand its implications it is necessary to go back in time to the beginning of things, when the ways of God first began to be made known to the sons of men.

Moses, at the time of the apostasy of the Golden Calf, during the Exodus, in face of this calamity, came to the Lord to seek, if possible, some amelioration of the penalty he knew must be inflicted. *"Oh, this people have sinned a great sin"* he said *"yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin . . . and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. And the Lord said unto Moses, whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book"* (Exod. 32.22). This is the basic principle, as is expressed in the final Book of the Bible in the picture of the Holy City of the future, the world that shall be. *"There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, . . . but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"* (Rev. 21.27).

This is not a literal book, laid up in some celestial library or records office, in which the identities of those destined for eternal salvation are recorded. Whether the expression is a metaphor for the Divine memory or some means whereby *"him that serveth God and him that serveth him not"* (Mal. 3.18) is identified is immaterial; the fact remains that there can be the possibility of some never entering the Holy City because they remain defiled after the proclamation of Rev. 22.17 is made *"Whosoever will may come"*. The plea of Moses in the days of Sinai recognised that fact but it was known and understood, albeit in imperfect guise, long before that.

The first man in the Bible spoken of approvingly as having a relationship with God was Enoch, seventh from Adam (Gen. 5.24). Genesis has nothing more to say about him, but Jewish legends have plenty. Distorted and

fanciful as they are, they must rest upon a foundation of fact; at the very least they must illustrate how early Israel viewed these matters. As enshrined in the First Book of Enoch (3rd century B.C.), Enoch is said to have read in the "heavenly tablets" the entire scope of the Divine Plan for mankind, from the primal fall into sin to eventual recovery therefrom, and the elimination of sin from all creation. *"I Enoch will declare unto you, according to that which I have learnt from the heavenly tablets."* *"In those days I saw the Head of Days when he seated himself upon the throne of his glory, and the books of the living were opened before him."* *"I have read the heavenly tablets and have seen the holy books, that all goodness and joy and glory are prepared and written down for the spirits of those who have died in righteousness, and their spirits shall not perish. Woe unto you, ye sinners, into darkness and chains and a burning flame shall your spirits enter."* The Book of Jubilees (2nd cent. B.C.) and other apocryphal writings of the period contain similar allusions indicating the state of Jewish thought at the time.

One interesting point in this is the consistent use of the term "heavenly tablets", indicating that these legends originated at a time before paper, parchment and goatskin were used as writing materials, and the only medium for such was clay, made into small tablets and baked. The same term "heavenly tablets" occurs in many of the Babylonian epics in their versions of the events surrounding their equivalent of Enoch and the Flood.

So the basic principle of the "Book of Life" is that the righteous shall live, and the unrighteous shall die—death being the antithesis of life. *"The dead know not anything, for the memory of them is forgotten"* (Eccl. 9.5). But there is one fundamental difference in the ancient writings; this penalty for sin is to be a Divine punishment, and that punishment is depicted in all the lurid terms of man's imagination. Says the Book of Enoch *"the years of your destruction shall be multiplied in eternal execration, and ye shall find no mercy"*. *"None shall seek for themselves mercy, for their life is at an end."* *"As straw in the fire, so shall they burn before the face of the holy; as lead in the water shall they sink before the face of the righteous, and no trace of them shall any more be found."* Death was not good enough; they must suffer for the evil they have done. It is

easy to see here the origin of the mediæval doctrine of Hell-fire, and it reveals a complete misunderstanding of the basic principle of Divine creation.

Genesis declares that at the beginning God made all things good, the earth capable of providing all things needful for the perpetuation of human life in harmony with the laws of Nature which are at the same time the laws of God. Transgression of those laws involves disruption of the orderly course of creation, just so surely as the perfect and harmonious operation of an intricate machine will go on uninterruptedly until someone throws a handful of sand into the gears and the machine grinds to a halt. But there is more to it than this; just as the orderly progress of Nature depends on the co-operation and labours of man, so continuance of man's life depends on, not only his harmony with Nature which gives him the environment in which he lives and the food which sustains his life, but on his continued union with God who is the source and fountain of life. And if the man, in face of full knowledge, deliberately refuses his ordained place in creation and Nature and his consequent relationship to God, he himself has severed his own life-line—he has no other source of life and so he must die. To adopt another everyday illustration, most houses in the Western world have a supply of water laid on, coming from a distant reservoir. The water is there, in the pipe, terminated by a "tap" which must be turned to obtain the water. The man must have water in order to live; that is his only source of water. If he deliberately refuses to turn the tap and take the water he will die—but that is not punishment on the part of the provider of water. It is suicide on the part of the man. The Lord God offers life; rich, full, satisfying life, but it is for the man to accept, or reject, the offer in the exercise of his own sovereign free-will. No other basis for continued life could there be consistent with man's sovereignty of his own self. Had it been otherwise men would be, as one thinker (Gatland in "The Inhabited Universe" 1957) puts it "*mere puppets which dance only at the call of the master.*" Therefore the utmost that the Lord can do is, as he said to Israel of old, "*I have set before you life and death . . . choose life, that thou and thy seed may live*" (Deut. 30.19). And he makes his own appeal, for appeal it certainly is; "*Why will ye die? I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye*" (Ezek. 18.30.31).

The sequel then is governed by one small word, "IF". If the man elects to align himself with the Creator and his creation, taking the place in that creation for which he is fitted, then his name is inscribed in the Book of Life and he advances into the eternity for which he was originally created. If he elects for the opposite and sets himself as a disorderly element, a source only of unhappiness to himself and his fellows, his name is not so inscribed and he fails of life at the end. The Book of Life is the symbol of that choice and that outcome.

But, in that case, does that mean that God has been defeated? If just one man fails of life at the last is the purpose of God in creation a failure? Or is it rather the glory of God that he allows the man to make his choice? Man did not ask to be created; it was the Lord who gave him consciousness and intelligence and showed him all the possibilities of life. If the man says he wants none of it and is content to return from whence he came is it not the goodness and understanding of God which permits him so to do. Would not life inside the Holy City be an intolerable burden to the man whose whole instincts and desires are irrevocably alien to its standards and its ideals? And in such case is it not better that God should let him go? The rich young ruler came within sight of the Kingdom of God, but he looked, and turned away from it—and Jesus let him go.

Do the Scriptures then afford any indication that the foreknowledge of God does see some who will fail to respond to the call of Christ and his Church at the end? "*The Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of Life freely*" (Rev. 22.17). The Water of Life is the River of Life of Rev. 22 and Ezek. 47. It is there for all, if they will but partake. But they must respond to the call. They may if they will, refuse. One school of Christian thought does claim that there can be none such, that God, having permitted evil to intrude upon humanity, is, so to speak, morally bound to recover all men from its effects and so grant them eternal life. But this admittedly very desirable outcome ignores the fact that the entry of sin into the world was, not by permission of God but by the deliberate act of man. The Eden story sets out the position very clearly; loyalty to God, or disloyalty. Had God curbed the disloyal act He would have curbed man's own free will and incurred the reproach hinted at by Gatland above. What He did do was to set in motion a

course of action, the Divine Plan, which would eventually undo the harm wrought by evil without infringing human free will. One might reasonably conclude that the prominence given throughout the Word of God to the final destiny of the unrepentant in contrast to the eternal felicity of the righteous might justify the conclusion that there might at the last be some such—otherwise one might expect a more definite leading in Holy Writ toward the total conversion and eternal felicity of all. Particularly is this true in the Book of Revelation, which, despite its vivid imagery taken largely from the Old Testament and the Apocrypha, not only depicts the age-old conflict between good and evil but also presents a picture of those who enter the Holy City and those who do not. Two major symbols occupy the final three chapters, the Holy City or new heavens and earth, in which is embraced all that is holy and good, destined to endure eternally, and the Lake of Fire, into which is cast as worthless all that is inherently evil and impervious to right influences, destined by reason of the very symbol to destruction. The Holy City picture is based upon the ideal Jerusalem, predicted eventually to be the home of redeemed Israel in the eternal state; the Lake of Fire upon the Old Testament story of Sodom and Gomorrah, utterly consumed by fire as unfit for continued existence. Thus the “beast and false prophet” of Rev. 19.20 are cast into the Lake of Fire by the Lord Christ at his Advent and the end of this world-age. The states of death and Hades are similarly treated at the end of the next, when “*there shall be no more death*” (21.4 and 20.14) when the “ages of glory” of the eternal future have their commencement, so that logically Hades, the death state intervening between Adamic death and the resurrection of the Millennial Age, is no more. Such as cannot be recovered from sin despite the appeal of the Millennium are said to “have their part” in the Lake at the end of that period (21.8). This incidentally is confirmed by Jesus in the parables of the Wheat and Tares, and Sheep and Goats (Matt. 13.40-42 and 25.41-46), where the tares and goats respectively are condemned to the fire as worthless and fit only for destruction, compared with the wheat and the sheep which are worthy of preservation. Further confirmation is the parallel passage in Rev. 21.27 where some are forbidden entry into the Holy City, not being written in the Book of Life. The Devil

himself, in Rev. 20.10 and Matt. 25.41, is pictured as rebellious to the last and meeting the same fate. Incidentally, the dread fate of the Devil indicated in the A.V. “*and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever*” is not correct. The italic “are” is not in the Greek; the meaning is that the Devil is cast into the Lake where the “Beast and False Prophet” have already been cast a thousand years previously, at the end of this present Age, and it is they who are thus “tormented”. (*Basanizo*, vexed, tossed about, frustrated, thus “tormented” in the A.V.) “unto the time of eternity” i.e. the time that the “ages of glory” have their commencement at the end of the Millennium. In other words, the Devil appears to share the fate of all other conscious unrepentant beings; the impersonal powers of this world are represented as lying impotent throughout the coming Kingdom Age and then vanish for ever out of the creation of God. The same idea is expressed in 18.21 where the great city (Babylon) shall be thrown down, “*and shall be found no more at all*”, and again in 18.14 where the ruined commercial aspect of great Babylon is thrown down “*and thou shalt find them no more at all*”

Twice in these Revelation passages this “Lake of Fire” is explained as being the “Second Death”. The first death, of course, is that which is the lot of all men, “Adamic Death”, from which all are to be raised in the Resurrection at the dawn of the Millennium to face their final opportunity for life or the reverse. “*They that hear shall live*” said Jesus; this into the ages of eternity. Those, if such there be, who refuse, are those whose names are not written in the Book of Life and who, to adopt the Revelation symbol, go into the Lake of Fire, which is the Second Death. There is one school of Christian thought which claims that the fire is not destructive but purificatory, that those who enter into this state at the end of the Millennial Age emerge therefrom purified from the contamination of sin and so fit to enter the eternal state. So all men are eventually saved and in this manner Christ becomes All in All. It could be asked that, in such case, why all the elaborate plans of God for conversion and reconciliation associated with the Millennial work? It were surely simpler to put all men into the Lake of Fire straight away and so ensure their ultimate salvation by that means. In fact, of course, it is not correct to describe fire as a purifying force; it is simply and solely destructive in its effect and in the

Scriptures describes the process of eliminating from Divine creation all that is out of accord with God and the standards of righteousness. When Jesus described the man who did not abide in him as a withered branch (Jno. 15.6) it is the withered branch that is burned. When Paul spoke of different men who erect different kinds of buildings only some of which can endure, it was those built of gold, silver, precious stones that endured; the ones built of wood, hay and stubble were consumed. It was fire that consumed them and there was nothing left. (1 Cor. 3). More cogently still, the final vision of the prophecy of Isaiah reveals a time to come when "all flesh" comes before God to worship and yet will then "go forth and look at the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be abhorring unto all flesh" (Isa. 66.24).

It is impossible to read the parable of the Lost Sheep without realising that the Lord will leave no stone unturned, spare no effort, to reclaim the lost one. If there is the slightest hope or possibility that the erring one will return, the Father will go out to meet him and bring him home. But there is one thing the Lord cannot do. He cannot coerce the man's own will. He made

man that way and He cannot deny himself. (2 Tim. 2.13). But that very Scripture also tells us that if we deny him, then He has no choice but to deny us. So the possibility is there. Once again we come up against that little word "IF". None of us can deny that if by the end of what God in his wisdom sees as the end of the Day of Grace all men have indeed repented then all men will be saved—and everyone who loves the Lord will rejoice with him, like the angels of heaven. But will they all repent? No man knoweth. Perhaps the Father does. But in face of the definite Scripture statements about righteousness and sin, the contrasting presentations of the Book of Life and the Lake of Fire, our definitive conviction that at the last sin and evil will be no more, and God will be All in All, we have to say that IF at the last there are those, or any, who say in the words of the Parable "We will not have this man to reign over us", He has sorrowfully to turn away and leave the man to his chosen fate.

For it must always be true, and must, for the continuance of God's creation, and because creation is what it is and must ultimately be, gloriously true, that "*HE THAT HATH THE SON HATH EVERLASTING LIFE, BUT HE THAT BELIEVETH NOT THE SON SHALL NOT SEE LIFE*" (Jno. 3.36).

#### Note on Jno. 11.26

Quite often one will see a message on a church bill board which quotes the words of Jesus, "*And whosoever lives and believes on me shall never die*" (John 11.26).

The graveyards are full of people who lived, believed on Jesus, and are now dead. How do we explain the words of Jesus since it looks like a contradiction? The Catholic Douay Bible translates that Scripture as follows, "*And everyone that lives and believes in me shall not die forever.*" This appears to be the correct translation. Jesus was not telling them that they would never die but was saying that their death would not be

permanent. One would not die forever.

The difficulty comes with the Greek phrase "*eis ton aiona*" which literally means "unto the age", mistranslated never." "*Vines' Expanded Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says that "*eis ton aiona*" should always be translated "forever."

The conversation that led up to Jesus' words included Martha's statement, "*I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*" The words of Jesus were in harmony with Martha's statement.

"*Berean News*" (U.S.A.)

#### Note on Deut. 7.9

"... *the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations*" (Deut. 7.9.)

How often does the eye skip over a statement such as that without realising the depths of meaning involved. A thousand generations; a very long time—and the reader passes on. But how long a time? A generation cannot be reckoned at less than twenty-five years. There have not yet been a thousand generations of Adamic men on this

earth. God's covenant and mercy is guaranteed in this text to extend into the distant future, a span of twenty-five thousand years at least. In other words, Divine care and protection is guaranteed all who are his throughout the whole of the history of sin and death and well into the illimitable future when sin has been done away and all who have at length attained the Divine ideal can stand before God in sinless perfection and need the protecting covenant and mercy no longer.

## THE LAST TRUMP

The Day of Judgment is to be announced to the world by the sound of "Gabriel's Trumpet", the Last Trump. That is orthodox theology, for little has been done since mediæval times to rationalise this vivid symbol of the manner in which God will apprise the nations that their time of rule—or rather, perhaps, misrule—is ended and He is about to intervene in earth's affairs for the institution of the Age of blessing and of world conversion. It is not realised as widely as it should be that the "Day of Judgment" is not for the purpose solely of passing sentence upon the unregenerate but also, and more importantly, to bring men to a full knowledge and ability to accept or reject Christ and the life that only He can impart. That is the work of a period, a long period measured against the scale of human history; "Gabriels Trumpet" will continue sounding throughout its duration and not be silent until all of God's creatures will have made their free and unfettered choice for good or evil, for life or death.

That the various allusions to the Last Trump are symbols is very generally accepted. This sophisticated Age is hardly likely to be either impressed or terrified by an audible sound from the sky, even if the heavenly messenger should be literally visible up amongst the clouds. The whole thing would be dismissed as a rather ingenious advertising stunt. The Scriptures have something important to tell us about the manner in which the imminence of Divine intervention in earth's affairs will be made known to mankind and this particular symbolic representation is one of the means.

There are three allusions in the New Testament which are relevant. One, in Rev. 11. 15-19, is a detailed picture of the entire process covered by the "Last Trump"; the others, in 1 Thess. 4. 16 and 1 Cor. 15. 52, are casual references intended to be understood in the light of the Revelation passage. The whole is based upon the use of the trumpet in Old Testament narratives as the summons to war, the alarm of approach of an enemy, and in a different sphere, to announce the accession of a king. Cases in point are Jud. 3.27, Zeph. 1.16, Joel 2.1 and Jer. 6.1 where the trumpet is both the signal of approach of the enemy and summons to prepare for battle. Two instances where the accession of a king was made known by the blowing of trumpets are

those of Solomon (1 Kings 1.34) and Jehu (2 Kings 9.13). A rather striking usage appears in Isa. 27.13 where the prophet says that in the day of Israel's regathering at the end of the Age "*the great trumpet shall be blown*", and Israel shall return from their dispersion to serve the Lord in a cleansed and sanctified Jerusalem. It is obvious that this "great trumpet" is synonymous with the "Last Trump" since this regathering is one of the processes that characterises the period with which that Trump deals.

Coming then to Rev. 11. 15-19 we have the culmination of a series of historical events symbolised by the preceding six trumpets expressed in the words "*and the seventh angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven, saying. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever . . . and the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged . . . and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake, and great hail*". All this is a vivid picture of commotion upon earth indicative of the final stages of human rule and the supersession of that rule by the Divine government which in many other Scripture connections is associated with the Second Advent of Christ. The mind is taken back to the prophetic visions of the prophet Daniel. In one of the most striking (Daniel ch. 7) he sees a procession of ferocious wild animals symbolising the successive great empire powers of this world and their coming into judgment before the Most High; their condemnation and destruction is followed by the appearance of the "Son of Man" who, with his saints, establishes an everlasting kingdom upon earth which shall never pass away. Succeeding revelations (chaps. 11 & 12) indicate that the powers of this world do not submit without a struggle but eventually the powers of heaven are victorious and the result is the suppression of all that corrupts the earth and the commencement of the Messianic Age, the purpose of which is to complete the Divine plan for mankind.

All this is not the work of a moment. There is a period of time envisaged during which the anger of the nations rises to a climax, the world of man disintegrates, and the invading power of heaven becomes more and more evident in the sequence of events. There are "voices in

heaven" which proclaim what is happening, voices of those who see what is coming and proclaim it abroad, unheeded at first but listened to at the end. Some of those voices were raised as much as a century ago; the seventh trumpet has been sounding since then and will go on sounding until what Paul calls "this present evil world" has utterly passed away and been replaced by the "world to come" in which dwelleth righteousness.

The next significant allusion is that in 1 Thess. 4.16 descriptive of the Advent; "*the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise—*". The trumpet here is associated with resurrection, the resurrection of the Church. This is confirmed by the association of the third allusion, that in 1 Cor. 15.51-52; "*we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed*". In these references the trumpet becomes the symbol of the summons to the church, faithful Christians of all generations, to enter into full union with their Lord through the gate of resurrection. None would take this literally; no trumpet blast can wake the dead; the resurrection and the "change" of the church to celestial conditions is effected by Divine power exerted in the realm of the spirit and there can be no outward evidence of this event in the sight of men upon earth. Nevertheless the trumpet that has been sounding throughout this "End of the Age" period is an indication that at some time during the sequence of events which comprise the period this great happening takes place, and before the end of that sounding. The same trumpet announces the revelation of the Lord from heaven accompanied by his saints in glorious manifestation (Matt. 13.43) and that must obviously follow the stage in this period that witnesses their resurrection to celestial conditions.

The general picture in all this symbolism is that the seventh trumpet announces and heralds the Advent of our Lord as earth's new king and draws attention to the various aspects of that Advent. This is no single catastrophic event in which He appears instantaneously in all the glory of his regal authority and the powers of earth immediately submit to him. His coming is a progressive one, running parallel with the continuing disintegration of earthly power and

marked by the emergence of those factors which are to constitute the salient features of his kingdom when it is established in power and universally accepted. These are the signs of his *parousia*, his presence, in whatever form that presence has reality—and we do not really know what that form is since it belongs to the world of the spirit and not that of the flesh. The worsening strife and tumult amongst the nations and the increasing inability of ordered government to arrest the forces making for disorder and disruption is one sign. The tottering financial and economic structure, threatening more and more an imminent collapse with all that means for world disaster, is another. The nuclear threat, the more menacing as its possession passes into the hands of more irresponsible powers, is another. World pollution, ever approaching nearer to the point of no return, is another. On the other side of the canvas, the very evident realisation of the prophetic programme in the restoration of the earthly covenant people, Israel, to the land which is to be the focal point of Divine government upon earth, is another, as is the tremendous increase of knowledge and enlightenment both upon the purposes and laws and character of God which has come as a result of Bible study and evangelical effort for more than a century past, and the equally remarkable progress in the understanding of Nature and Nature's processes over the same period which is laying the foundation for man's intelligent use of the earth's resources for his daily life in the Age to come. All this, and somewhere within this same period, the most momentous event of all, even though hidden from human perception, the resurrection of the "dead in Christ" and the change to celestial conditions of those who at this time are "alive and remain", preparatory to their joint union with Christ and association with him in the coming kingdom. This is why many thoughtful Christians, not confined to any one denomination, have seen and proclaimed, from the middle of last century onwards, that we are now living "in the days of the Son of Man", that, in a manner beyond our capacity to define or visualise in concrete terms, we have already entered into the initial stages of his Second Advent, stages that will become more and more influential in the earth until, as Isaiah predicted, "*he shall not fail or be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth.*"

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

### 5. The Pride of Babylon

At some time between the confusion of languages and scattering of the nations, and the times of Abraham, the project must have been revived and the Tower completed. It was there when Abraham was born. The Scriptures have nothing to say about it; in fact the Tower is never mentioned again in the Bible. But ancient history has a great deal to say and a general picture of its history even up to the present time can be sketched. Inscribed on clay tablets which have only come to light in the last century or so, they were written anything between five hundred and a thousand years after the events which they describe—although they do give evidence of being copies of more ancient and almost certainly more accurate records. Their testimony therefore has to be viewed in this light. But, as mentioned before in this account, they do insist that the Tower was built by the god Marduk assisted by the spirits of the heavens. Marduk was the chief deity of Babylon and the city was his special city.

But Marduk did not appear in the pantheon of gods until some time before the birth of Abraham. And the Tower and city were built long before that and before there were any false gods; as has been shown, its very name has indicated that. In the meantime Marduk had replaced Enki, the god of the earth, and he in turn had largely replaced An, the only and Most High God, and the question arises, what was the origin of Marduk?

The word "Marduk" is the English form of the Sumerian name Amaraduk or Namaraduk, meaning literally the "wild ox of God" where the term "wild ox" is used for a champion fighter. In later times, about the time of Abraham, the name became Amarad-utu, meaning the "wild ox of the sungod", the worship of which was beginning to be practiced. Round about the same time a temple at Lagash was dedicated, according to an inscription, to "Nimrur the god of Lagash". Prof. T. G. Pinches (1870-1940), considered the world's leading scholar of the Sumerian language, asserted that the Hebrew "Nimrod" is the transliteration of these words. The Nimrod of Genesis became, some seven hundred years after his death, the sungod of the legends. So the champion of God (*uk*) became the champion of the sungod (*utu*). It has often been remarked that many of the gods of

antiquity can be shown to have originated in the legends of notable men in much earlier times and Nimrod could be no exception.

A parallel fact in a different field of research, when set against the background of Genesis 10, is interesting in this connection. Many years ago there were unearthed in Iraq at various times a number of inscribed tablets which turned out to be detailed lists of the many kings of Sumer and Akkad who reigned from the beginning up to a time which corresponds to Abraham's youth in Ur of the Chaldees. These, of course, represent the historical records of the times. Known as the "king lists", the complete version, called the "Weld - Blundell" prism from the name of its discoverer, can be studied in "*Oxford Editions of Cuneiform Texts, vol.2*", Langdon 1923 (O.U.P.) in which both the Sumerian cuneiform and the English translation appear. Apart from the fantastic figures for some of the early reigns—due to the early translators' unfamiliarity with the Sumerian symbols for some time periods—the king lists are a valuable guide and in the present situation provide a clue. Genesis tells us that Nimrod's time was the beginning of the existence of four named "cities"—we would now call them towns. The earliest of these to be founded was, according to the histories, Uruk, the Erech of Gen. 10. The first recorded king of Uruk, first King of the First Dynasty, was one Meski-Aggashir who is stated to have been notable in two respects. One is that "*he crossed the sea and ascended the mountain*" which does not seem to have been a particularly remarkable achievement although when considered in the light of certain other legends combined with a look at the map could open up an interesting line of thought, but not one that has anything to do with the Tower of Babel. The other respect is that Meski-Aggashir is recorded as being the son of the sun-god, the son of Marduk. If there is any reliability to be placed on these historical lists—and all competent authorities do hold them to be generally reliable and confirmed by the discoveries made by archaeologists—this means that the first king of Uruk was the son of Nimrod so that Nimrod would be indicated as living just before the city-state of Uruk came into existence. Dating for events so far back in ancient history is not yet known with accuracy; the present state of knowledge would indicate

somewhere between the 27th and 29th centuries B.C. and if there is any substance at all in this deduction Nimrod must have lived something like two to three centuries after the time of the first leaving off to build the Tower. The fact that a number of cities existed before Uruk was built—Kish, Bad-tibira, Eridu, Shuruppak, Larak and others, not mentioned in Gen. 10, so evidently founded before the time of Nimrod, confirms the supposition. If the other epics declaring that Nimrod/Marduk was the builder of the Tower are given any weight then this would have been the time, and this the source of Josephus' statement to the same effect.

This would be at the time that Eber the ancestor of Abraham lived. A rather intriguing point here is that the Book of Jubilees (c 150 B.C.) recording many ancient Jewish legends, declares that Eber's wife was the daughter of Nimrod. (Jub. 8.7.) This would certainly confirm the supposition that Nimrod did have to do with the second building of the Tower and may point to the conclusion that Nimrod and Eber were contemporaneous, in which case Nimrod would have been the grandson of Cush which would be in harmony with Gen. 10. It is most unlikely though that a man of the line of Shem, an ancestor of Abraham and of the future nation of Israel, would permit himself to be joined in marriage with a woman of the line of Ham, and this allegation must be taken as probably a Rabbinic fable.

So the second and this time successful effort to build the Tower can be placed tentatively at about the time of Eber; of this no record appears in Genesis and is preserved only in Babylonian epics of nearly a thousand years later. The next episode in the history of the Tower, a little more reliable this time, is when the Semitic king Sargon of Agade, in the time of Serug Abraham's great-grandfather, took some of the sacred earth from the Temple enclosure wherewith to sanctify his own new city of Akkad, and because of the wrath of Marduk at this sacrilege, was compelled to repair and endow the building as penance. It would seem that so soon, only a few centuries after its erection, the great building was showing signs of decay. The kings of Babylon were forever repairing and underpinning and rebuilding the giant Tower and recording what they had done for the benefit of posterity.

Nothing more is known of the Tower for three centuries. About the time of Abraham's father

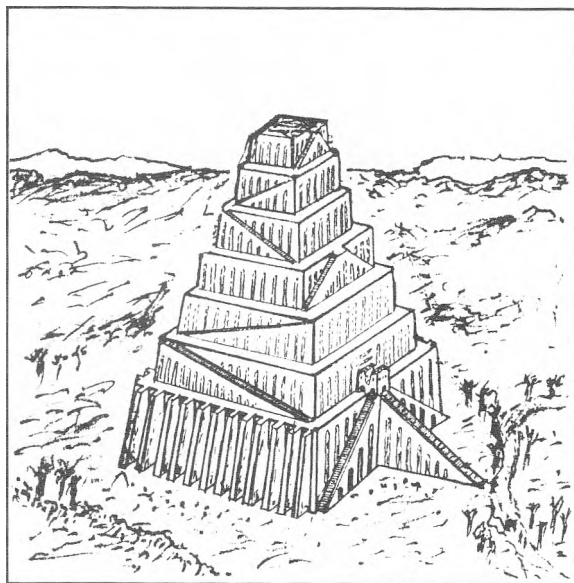
Terah, we find that Shulgi, king of Ur of the Chaldees, profaned the sanctuary of the Tower for which the god Marduk, the god of Babylon, slew him. At least that is what the history of the time declares; probably the priests of Marduk knew more about the matter of the slaying than is recorded. They were in process of becoming a powerful and influential body, for there is some evidence that long before this the Tower had become a centre of scientific and particularly astronomical knowledge and research. Our knowledge of that fact comes in consequence of the conquests of Alexander the Great nearly two thousand years later. The conqueror had, attached to his entourage, a Greek scientist named Callisthenes. When Alexander captured Babylon in 331 B.C., Callisthenes examined the written tablets stored in the vaults of the Temple and found records of astronomical observations going back to the year 2234 B.C., which was before the birth of Abraham.

There was more rebuilding soon after Abraham's birth, by Zabium king of Babylon. When Rebekah was on her journey from her father's house to be married to Isaac, there was further repairing in process, at the instance of Samsu-iluna king of Babylon. At the time Ishmael and Isaac were met together to bury their father Abraham, who at last had been gathered to his fathers, the Hittites were raiding Babylon, desolating the Temple and the Tower, and carrying away the image of Marduk in triumph to their own land. Whilst Israel was captive in Egypt, Gandash king of Babylon was repairing the damage done by the Hittites and sixty years later his successor Agum brought back the image of Marduk in triumph. So through the centuries the sorry tale goes on, with scenes of strife and bloodshed, frantic efforts to restore and preserve the crumbling edifice, seasons when the sanctuary and city lay desolate while the people and their gods endured subjection under the heel of a foreign power. What a biting commentary is this on the self-confidence of the people who at the first had said "Let us make us a name, that we be not scattered abroad upon the face of the earth"!

But despite all these vicissitudes of fate, the Tower remained. The city of Babylon and the Temple of Marduk were destroyed and rebuilt several times but the Tower was always there. It was probably much too gigantic to break down. And it may be that it was reserved by a higher

Power for a more spectacular destruction in later days. At any rate, we find the Assyrian king Sennacherib destroying Babylon and, after his defeat outside Jerusalem and his death, his son Esarhaddon rebuilding the city and paying special attention to the sanctuary. A century later came the days of Daniel and that Bible book which more than any other describes life in Babylon in detail. Nabopolassar, father of the famous Nebuchadnezzar, took the venerable Tower in hand and executed extensive repairs. This is what he says about himself in the inscriptions that have since been discovered: "At this time Marduk commanded me concerning E-temenanki (the Tower of Babel), which in the times before me had become weak, and had been brought to ruin; to key its foundation firm in the bosom of the underworld, while its top should stretch heavenwards". It is noteworthy how the old ideal is reiterated "its top should stretch heavenwards". The king went on "I deposited in the foundations under the bricks gold, silver and precious stones from the mountains and the sea. I caused to be made my own royal likeness and placed it in the foundations. For my lord Marduk I bowed my neck, I took off my robe, the sign of my royal blood, and on my head I bare bricks and earth. As for Nebuchadnezzar my firstborn son, the beloved of my heart, I made him bear the mortar, the offerings of wine and oil, in company with my subjects." Nabopolassar apparently did not finish the work, for Nebuchadnezzar himself spent much of his time and energy in rebuilding and beautifying the edifice. He also left an inscription commemorating what he had done "To raise up the top of E-temenanki that it may rival heaven, I laid to my hand all the peoples of many nations I constrained to work on the building of E-temenanki . . . the high dwelling of my lord Marduk I established on its summit." Daniel must have seen the work going on; perhaps he related the true history of the Tower to the king but if he did so the lesson fell upon deaf ears for the work proceeded. In the days of Nergal-Sharezer less than ten years later there was more activity. He is scathing in his comments on his predecessor's treatment of the Tower. He says that it had "sunk in its foundations, its walls were fallen down, its joints were loosened, and its base had become weak". It would almost seem, from the king's scornful description, that the ancient structure, now over two thousand years old, was on its "last legs". But the king goes on "Then my lord the great Marduk inspired me to

raise up the building . . . I dug up the ancient foundation stone and read its records". (In all Babylonian buildings a clay cylinder inscribed with details of its founding was buried within the foundations. If the one dug up by Nergal-Sharezer was the original one he might well have read the same story that we have in Gen. 11 but written from the point of view of the culprits) "On its foundation stone I based the building; its summit I raised like a mountain; I made firm its threshold and I fixed the doors in its doorway . . ."



Probable appearance of the Tower as originally built.

The king did his best, but the day of reckoning was drawing near. Daniel, living in retirement since the death of his master and friend, Nebuchadnezzar, might have sensed something of the approaching destruction. The end of the empire of Babylon was at hand; Daniel knew that. "Thou art this head of gold" he had told Nebuchadnezzar something like thirty years ago, and already in the East there was coming into public notice the figure of a man of whom Isaiah a century before had prophesied that he would deliver God's people from Babylon. Cyrus was a power to be reckoned with, and in the year 538 B.C., when the great Tower presented perhaps a more magnificent spectacle than ever it had done before, and seemed sure of standing for long ages yet to come, Cyrus captured Babylon and the dominion of the men of Babel came to an end. (To be concluded)

## RESURRECTION POWER IN JESUS

*"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life"—John 11.25.*

Resurrection power resides in our Lord Jesus; He was to redeem the world and restore it. This includes not merely an awakening from death, but also such vitalisation as would overcome the dying process and ultimately bring the revived one up to full perfection of being originally enjoyed by our first parents in Eden, forfeited because of disobedience under the sentence, *"The soul that sinneth it shall die."* (Ezek. 18.4). This is the most important feature of all the plan of God revealed, and if discerned assists in the understanding of every other feature of that plan. Death is the absence of life, the loss of life.

References to a future life imply a redemption from the sentence which came because of original sin. The cancellation of the sentence does not restore mankind, but it does remove the barrier to man's restitution to all that was lost. Hence it is that the Saviour's work is to follow. First, it is a redemptive work: the redemption was accomplished at his First Advent, though He has used this Gospel Age as the period in which to accept some of the redeemed ones as his Church, under him as their Head, to be his associates in the work of restitution which belongs to the next age.

Restitution is to be the Lord's work at his Second Advent, when the Church will be associated with him in glory. Then the work of the Redemption will be granted to mankind, by first awakening them from death, and then, under the disciplines of the Millennial Age, lifting them, in harmony with their own wills and co-operation, step by step, out of the sin and death condition into life, as they respond to these opportunities.

The words of the text, although specially applicable to our Lord in the future, at the beginning of his Millennial reign, when He will abolish death by lifting mankind out of its power and out of the weaknesses that are associated with the fallen condition, were applicable also in some degree at the First Advent. Our Lord's sacrifice was not finished until He died at Calvary, and the sacrifices of the members of his body would not be finished for centuries, but when our Lord at thirty years of age made a full consecration of himself to do the Father's will, to lay down his life, the Divine plan which He

there undertook to carry out included these subsequent features—the completion of his own sacrifice and that of his body, the church.

That the heavenly Father so regarded his sacrifice was evidenced by impartation of the Holy Spirit, which anointing constituted him the Messiah, the Christ. Since the Lord had never abrogated that covenant of consecration, and since the Father still so recognised him, it was proper for him to think and act and speak from that standpoint, which not only looked to the end of his own course with faith, but also looked down to the end of this Gospel age with confidence, and to the end of the Millennial age with assurance that all the good purposes of God would finally be accomplished in and through him. From this standpoint, therefore, He said, *"I am the resurrection and the life."* He knew that the sacrificial work that He had undertaken would secure his being the Life-Giver to the world, and that in the exercise of that right He would raise up out of death conditions up to perfection, all who would come unto the Father through him—all who would have the desire of heart to return to loving obedience to the Creator.

This present lesson follows the Sermon on the Mount—the thought evidently in the minds of Matthew and Luke being to show that He who had given wonderful teachings on the mount was fully attested by the miraculous powers shown to reside in him. He had returned to Capernaum, the home city of Peter and others, and now the home city of Jesus, since He had been rejected at Nazareth. Now our Lord, the disciples and a multitude of followers were approaching the little city of Nain, when from the gateway of the city came a funeral procession, a widowed mother and mourning friends, pall-bearers, and a litter on which lay a dead young man, the widow's only son. Our Lord was touched with compassion as he saw the widow's tears, and He said to her, *"Weep not"*.; the pall-bearers stood still; Jesus touched the bier and said *"Young man, I say unto thee, arise."* The dead man stood up and began to speak. In a manufactured story it would be considered the proper thing to suppose that the widow fell at the Lord's feet, praised him in a loud voice, and that the whole multitude would join in acclaiming him; but in the simple narrative of this lesson, *"there came fear upon all"*—a realisation that God was very

near to them. The multitude glorified God, not with loud hosannas, but with a reverential appreciation of the fact that a great Prophet, a great Teacher, was in their midst, and that God was with him, saying, "*God hath visited his people.*"

Jesus was that great Prophet, the representative of the Father. And yet how long the test of faith! How long the period necessary for the raising up of the members of the body of Christ, until the Father's plan should be fully developed and the times of restitution ushered in at the Second advent of the Lord. These works of healing and of awakening from death were fore-shadowings of the blessings coming to mankind through his obedience unto death as our sin offering. No wonder the message of Jesus and his work spread over all parts of the country!

A greater work was being accomplished by our Lord's miracles than was apparent at the time. One is inclined to be surprised that only about "*five hundred brethren*" were gathered during the Lord's ministry—that only that number were counted worthy of the privilege of meeting our Lord after his resurrection during the forty days. But it may reasonably be supposed that under the new dispensation, under the ministries of the apostles from Pentecost onward, a large fruitage was found to our Lord's ministry. It could be very probable that this widow of Nain and her son would become followers of Jesus, and that others in that multitude who witnessed the miracle would find a foundation to their faith in the Messiah. It cannot be doubted either that after "the middle wall of partition" had been broken down, and Cornelius the first Gentile convert had been brought into faith-fellowship, the centurion whose servant was healed, and who manifested everyway so noble a character, would be one who would be specially susceptible to the message of grace and truth. One lesson that may be learned from this is that we should not look for full fruitage of our own efforts in the Lord's service. We must be content to labour and to wait, and realise that the Lord himself is behind his Word.

Then scatter the good seed everywhere as we

have opportunity; we "know not which shall prosper, this or that." Sometimes that upon which we bestow the greatest zeal and effort proves fruitless, and sometimes that from which we expect the least proves fruitful. Remember that the Lord will reward according to our zeal or efforts, and not according to results; indeed the chief results He seeks are in ourselves, in the development of the graces of his Spirit, which will manifest themselves in so many ways in connection with our love for him, for his message, for the brethren, yea for the whole world of mankind.

Our Lord's ministries of healing lasted but a few years and reached comparatively few of the Jewish people, but since He ascended He has been carrying on a work of healing on a higher plane—through his disciples, "members of his body." (1 Cor. 21.27). Operating through these, many eyes of understanding have been opened, many deaf ears have been unstopped, many morally halt and lame have been cured, and many have been raised from the dead in the sense that the Apostle refers to when he says, "*You hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins*"; and again "*If ye be risen with Christ seek those things which are above*", and again, "*If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*"

If we are inclined to marvel that the Jews rejected Jesus after seeing his mighty works, what might be said of us, if for any reason we become doubters or unfaithful to him who has so clearly spoken from heaven, by whose stripes we have been healed, and who have realised him to be indeed the resurrection and the life? But we have more confidence in each other than to surmise such an unworthy ending to our call, such an unworthy response to the mercies and favours which we enjoy at the hands of him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood. Be faithful, remember that the resurrection work begun in us is to be completed by the grace of God in the First Resurrection, when in a moment of change we shall be like our Lord, see him as He is and share his glory.

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Importunity is of the essence of prevailing prayer. Never stop praying. At dawn, with David: at noon, with Daniel: at midnight, with Silas: in sorrow, as Hannah: in sickness, as

Job: in childhood, like Samuel: in youth, like Timothy: in manhood, like Paul: in hoar hairs, like Simeon: in dying, like Stephen.

## IT WAS AT EVENTIDE

What a day for the suffering souls in Israel that had been! The Priests and Pharisees may have found no place in their thoughts for this tender Healer who had come to Israel, but for the poor and afflicted He was the Man of the Hour. How they spread abroad from village to village the news of his coming and goings, and set every suffering soul aflame with expectation and hope that He might cross their path, and lay his hands upon them, or speak some healing word. Think of the arresting power that could send men hasting here and there throughout a whole region proclaiming "Bring along your sick—the Great Healer is here!", and of the gripping confidence that could say to him "Will you but let these ailing souls touch only the fringe of your robes?" (Matt. 14. 34.) A mighty surge of approbation had spread around the countryside concerning him, for nothing like these things had ever taken place in Israel before.

To be alone with his grief concerning John, Jesus had taken ship to a lonely place apart. "*But when the crowds heard it they followed him on foot from the towns.*" (Matt. 14. 13.) A great throng, with many sick in their midst awaited him, ". . . and He had compassion on them, and healed their sick". (v.14) And perhaps it was just these same afflictions that awaited him as he stepped ashore at the place of his retreat. "And they put them at his feet." (Matt. 15.30.) What a picture in these few words! All the wasted frames from the shadowed homes of the countryside lying side by side—and placed there "at his feet"! What would He do? Would he chide them by reminding them that there ought to be no sick in Israel—that were they faithful to their God He would heal them of their sickness? (Exod. 23.25; Psa. 103.3 and 147.3.) He could rightly have done that; instead He had compassion upon them all, and in the Name and power of God healed them one and all.

What a surge of gladness would sweep through the crowd as sightless eyes began to see, and speechless tongues began to speak, and palsied limbs began to move, and diseased bodies lost their pains! Truly it was a day most wonderful!

Time had passed, scenes had changed—and . . .  
*"Once more tis eventide, and we  
 Oppressed with various ills draw near;  
 What if thy form we cannot see?  
 We know and feel that thou art here."*

These various ills—what are they? Not the ills to which the flesh is heir, to be sure! These are to be borne patiently, like the illness of Epaphroditus, and the thorn of Paul (Phil. 2.27;

2 Cor. 8.10.) But there are ills and discomforts of the spirit that can be like a weight at the end of day. Indeed, in a world like this no day ought to go by without these ills and discomforts pressing heavily upon us. They are a part of our spiritual education, and contribute greatly to our development into the likeness of our Lord.

Spite of all the ecclesiastical organisation and ministerial service in this world, it is still as a flock without a shepherd—a flock astray in the ways of sin. The daily paper tells its story of tragedy and misery every passing day; the daily round brings each child of God into painful contact with the perversities of men; in the office, at the work-bench, in the street, and even in the home. The watchful eye and listening ear can see and hear the world's writhing pain and piercing groan, but no child of God can see and hear these things without being touched to the heart—or without joining in the groan! In proportion as the saint partakes of the spirit of him who wept over Jerusalem's perversity, so will he be inclined to weep with a world in anguish, waiting for it knows not what, waiting it knows not how long, but waiting in its chains of vanity for all that! Some day the hour of deliverance will come, but for this present season it must bear the anguish, and groan out its despair.

All this comes out in the daily life every day, and we who have been led aside, and let into the secret of Divine purpose in it all, can either look on nonchalantly or sympathetically. And, in proportion as our sympathies are touched, so will these things lie heavy on our souls. Moreover, we shall see even some we love touching much too lightly these Divine opportunities—never having loved him well, perhaps having lost the love they had. And that wounds most of all!

How do these things react back upon us at close of day—the sorrows of a world, the coldness of a friend! They who fain would serve him best are touched the most by all these wrongs without, within. What can we do about it all? Surely nothing less than they of ancient Galilee did with their sick—lay them down at Jesus' feet and leave them all to him, and his healing power.

How necessary, then, at eventide, that we should go aside with him and tell him all that has grieved and disappointed us through the day, reminding him.

*"Thy touch has still its ancient power,  
 No word from thee can fruitless fall;  
 Hear in this solemn evening hour,  
 And in thy mercy heal us all."*



# BIBLE STUDY MONTHLY

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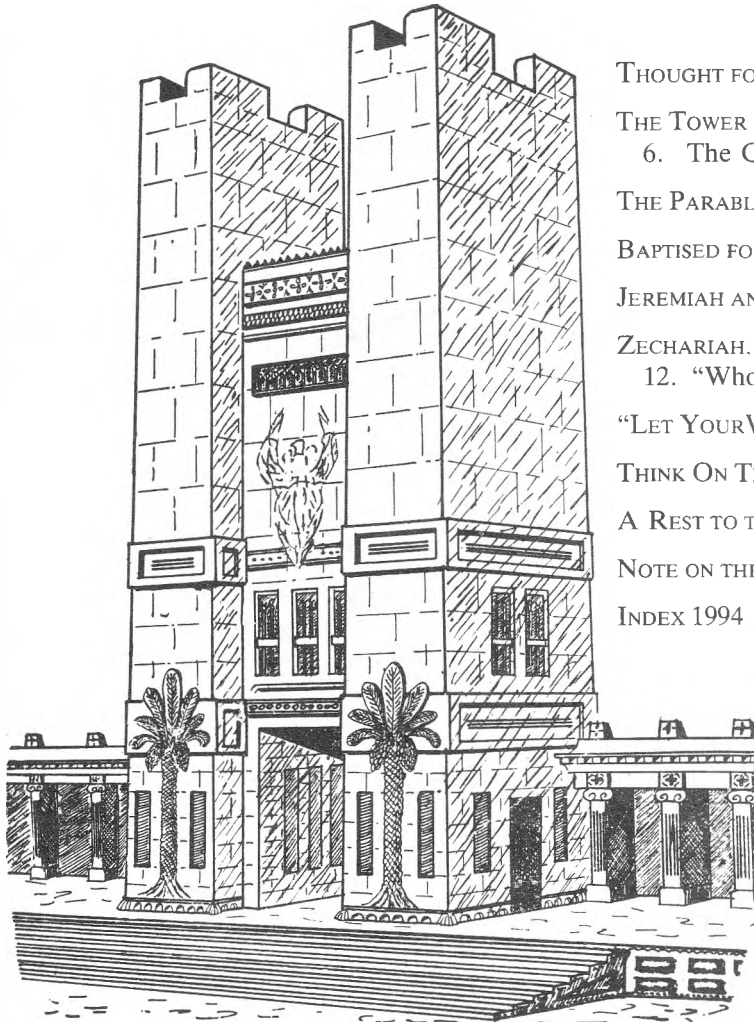
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Thou, therefore, endure  
hardness as a good  
soldier of Jesus Christ

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*Lift up your heads, O ye gates  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors,  
And the King of glory shall come in.*

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### THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

*"Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, and shalt gather little in; for the locust shall consume it" (Deut. 28.38).*

This was the penalty that Israel would have to pay if they ignored the Divine way of life. They did choose their own way, becoming at last, under Solomon, a commercially oriented nation of traders which brought them much of the luxuries of this world, and destroyed the original national attachment to the land and husbandry which gave them their early virility as a people. From tillers of the soil and breeders of cattle they became merchants and traders and builders and artisans, all for monetary profit. They left the villages for the towns, and the land died under them. Isaiah declaimed against their luxury and material wealth and prophesied the disaster that it would bring them. When Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem at the end he took from the Temple treasures the value of which at to-day's prices is estimated at four hundred million pounds, and left the sacred edifice a smoking ruin.

History repeats itself. Today we sow our seed in soil that is increasingly devitalised and polluted and reap the result in constantly decreasing or impoverished harvests. The food that does get grown is taken up by commercial interests and converted, treated, preserved, canned, frozen, packed in cardboard and polythene and coloured tinsel and made subject to all kinds of Government regulations regarding the extent to which harmful additives to conserve flavour and colour and so on may be included, and the resultant product is a caricature of the original. So much wasted effort and

the end is inferior to the beginning. The business man jets to the other side of the world in a few hours at the expense of a heavy consumption of fuel and energy and once there he has to rest for twenty-four hours before he is sufficiently adjusted to do his business. Great corporations swallow up their competitors and become so big that there are ten administrators to every one man who actually does the work. Schools in Britain have a thousand or more pupils and so much effort is needed to operate the centralised administrative machinery that the personal aspect of the children's education is submerged, with consequent repercussions on the efficiency of their instruction.

Men were not designed to do things in a big way. Anthropologists have noted that aboriginal tribes living near to Nature allowed their communities to grow to about fifty persons and then "hive off" to start new communities. Scientists have found—to their surprise and dismay—that the native peasant with one cow and a crude wooden plough produces his food with an energy consumption only one fifth of that demanded by all the intermediaries in up-to-date practice culminating in the modern combine harvester. In a world where sources of energy are at a premium, the big man with all his paraphernalia of large scale machinery uses five times as much energy to produce a ton of food as does the small man with primitive devices. Perhaps Isaiah "had something" when he foresaw the time when men will build their own houses and live in them, and plant their own vineyards and eat the fruit of them!

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

### 6. The Glory is departed

With the fall of the Babylonian empire at the hand of Cyrus the Persian, the glory of the Tower passed away. There was no more rebuilding or embellishment. The Persians, monotheists at the time, had little use for the many gods of Babylon, although Cyrus did pay lip-service to the most prominent of their gods, such as Marduk of Babylon and Nannar the Moon-god of Ur, as a matter of policy and appeasement of the conquered people. His famous Edict authorising the Jews to return to Judea and rebuild their Temple was in pursuance of the same policy. But from this time the Tower commenced to die slowly. For nearly two thousand years it had dominated the ancient world. In another five hundred it became a shapeless ruin. The Divine sentence pronounced upon it by Jeremiah fifty years previously became reality.

The city itself was not destroyed at once. Babylon remained a prosperous and populous city for another three centuries and even then it took another three centuries to die, a slow and lingering death. It was not until the early years of the Christian Era that the last inhabitants left the dying city and abandoned it to the jackals and owls of Jeremiah's and Isaiah's prophecies. The Temple of E-sagila, the Temple of the great God, remained, semi-ruined but with priests still serving the silent shrine. One of those priests, a learned and cultured man named Berosus, two hundred and fifty years before Christ, wrote, in Greek, an elaborate history of the Babylonians from the earliest times to his own. Only portions of it have survived to the present, and no part which may have related the history of the Tower. It is believed that many ancient records upon which he must have drawn still lie beneath the present unexplored ruins of the Temple, but if so they are at a depth of sixty feet below the present surface and quite inaccessible. It is known that during those last two or three centuries those priests served and worshipped a deity whom they called Anu-Bel, which are the Semitic names for the Sumerian names An and Marduk, the Most High God and the Sun-god. In some form or another acknowledgment of Noah's and Abraham's God, the Most High God, never did die out of Babylon, but by the year 29BC the surviving priests were no more, and the last vestige of worship departed from

the desolate city.

Sixty years after the fall of Babylon the Persian king Xerxes (the Ahasuerus of Esther), avid for plunder, stripped the Temple and the Tower of all their valuables, including the Temple's greatest treasure, the solid gold statue of the god Marduk, weighing about a ton and a half. Forty-eight years after that the Greek historian Herodotus visited Babylon and recorded that the Tower stood on a base equal to a Greek stade, 606 feet square, and that it was a stade high. The solid copper gates giving entrance to the Tower enclosure were still in position — probably too heavy for Xerxes to remove — (*Herodotus—Clio 181* onward). His fellow Greek, Strabo, the geographer of the time of Christ, repeated his description in more detail than surviving copies of Herodotus contain—he probably had access to more detailed originals than are surviving to-day. Says Strabo of the Tower "*It was a quadrangular pyramid of baked brick a stade in height, and each one of its sides a stade in length. Alexander intended to repair it. It was a great undertaking, and required a long time for its completion, for ten thousand men were occupied for two months in clearing away the mound of earth*" (meaning ruined brick rubble) "*so that he was not able to execute what he had attempted before disease hurried him rapidly to his end*". (*The Geography of Strabo, Book 16.1.5*). Prof. Koldewey's excavations in 1912 established the truth of Strabo's figures insofar as the foundations were concerned.

Herodotus' visit was in 430 B.C. A hundred years later Persian domination came to an end with the invasion of the Greeks under Alexander the Great. Alexander captured Babylon, took a look at the Tower, which was beginning to crumble, and decided to restore it to its former glory. His ten thousand men toiled for two months demolishing the Tower but were less than halfway through when Alexander, returning from his successful expedition to India, arrived in Babylon and suddenly died — in consequence, it is said, of a perhaps rather unwise drinking bout. The ambitious project was forthwith abandoned. It was not the will of the Most High that the Tower should remain.

The next clue to the history of the Tower comes at just a century after Alexander. The

early Assyriologist George Smith in the late 19th century discovered a clay tablet bearing what purported to be a representation of the Tower with its dimensions. Known now as the "Seleucid Tablet", it was roughly translated by George Smith, lost for a number of years, re-discovered in a private collection, more accurately translated during the 20th century and is at present in the Louvre in Paris. It bears a date in year 83 of the (Greek) Seleucid Era, which corresponds to 229 B.C. Beside a few incised lines representing a crude outline of some of the stages of the Tower, it bears a number of alleged dimensions of the stages. As far as the length and breadth of the base is concerned these dimensions were confirmed by Koldewey in 1912 by checking the foundations, which are all that now remain. The height dimensions indicated have been a subject of argument and dissension among the experts ever since. It is usually assumed by these same experts that the height given is that of the original building, and this is the basis of the some half-dozen or so "reconstructions" now to be found in the relevant literature. None of them seem to have realised that since Alexander's men had removed the top half of the Tower more than a century before the tablet was written it is unlikely that its writer knew what the original height had been. It is much more likely that it purports to give the height of the Tower at the time of the writing of the tablet, after its partial demolition. Since part of the engraving of the tablet has suffered obliteration during the passage of time even this is a subject of dispute although it does appear to indicate a figure of something over 300 feet or perhaps appreciably more.

There is, however, another means of estimating the height of the Tower after Alexander's workers had suspended operations. Koldewey investigated the great mound of broken brickwork they had accumulated some three-quarters of a mile from the site, and stated in his book that this amounted to some 300,000 cubic metres. It would appear that none of the eminent men who have theorised over the Seleucid Tablet have ever bothered to read Koldewey. On the basis that its architecture followed the usual methods of construction of Babylonian "ziggurats" it is possible to calculate how much of its upper portion was removed to account for this amount of brickwork. Assuming the general accuracy of Herodotus' and Strabo's

assessment of about 600 feet, it must be that the top 200 feet was removed, leaving some 400 feet standing, a little in excess of that indicated by the tablet, but certainly confirming Herodotus, who anyway is the only historian who actually saw the Tower, and recorded what he saw, in its original complete state. On that basis it might be concluded that something less than 400 feet of the Tower remained by the year 229 B.C.

A further rather nebulous confirmation of the 600 feet original height comes in about 140 B.C. by the appearance in Hebrew of the Book of Jubilees, compiled by some pious Jew from versions of the Hebrew Scriptures not now extant. Dealing as it does with the Books of Genesis and Exodus, it does include its own version of the Babel story. Here it appears to verge on the fantastic by asserting that the Tower of Babel was 5433 cubits high, which in English terms would be something over a mile. For this reason it appears never to have received serious attention. The fact is overlooked, however, that the author must have had some basis for his assertion; likewise could not have been conscious of its absurdity.

The writer of "*Jubilees*" lived when Judea was under Greek domination and the Jews were becoming increasingly accustomed to the Greek language and Greek literature. The writer might very well have been acquainted with the history of Herodotus and its assertion that the height of the Tower was one stade. In writing his account he would most naturally wish to express this figure in the measure more familiar to his own readers—cubits, used alike by Jews and Babylonians, and used extensively in the Old Testament. This in turn would involve his consulting tables of the Babylonian length measures, on which his own nation's measures were based although they had by now varied slightly from those with the lapse of time. He would almost certainly have been proficient in Greek, but on the other hand he may not have been so proficient in reading the old Babylonian cuneiform which anyway was more or less a dead language in his day. Cuneiform scholars in our own day are continually differing in their interpretations and decipherment of the tablets they study. Comparison with the ancient measures suggests that his 5400 cubits were not cubits at all. For a structure approximately 600 feet high the figure of 5400 can only refer to a very small unit of 1.2 inches called the "double-finger" (*su-si*). This in English measure is 648

feet, which is the Babylonian stade. The Seleucid Tablet does bear a note stating that its dimensions are in terms of the "medium cubit" (*kush-suk-lim*) and the number of such cubits to make up 648 feet is 540. The writer of "Jubilees" must have taken references in Herodotus and elsewhere to the "stade" as referring to the Babylonian stade of 648 feet instead of the Greek one of 606, and misinterpreting the cuneiform characters, lighted on the wrong name. The signs for the *su-si* and the *kush-suk-lim* are almost identical—one has two small wedges which the other has not—so that it is easy to mistake one for the other, and this is what the worthy priest evidently did—as though we stated a figure in inches and called it feet. This is at least another pointer to Herodotus' statement as to the original height of the Tower.

An appraisal which may be a little more definite comes in about A.D. 1200 when a Spanish Jew named Benjamin of Tudela—from the town of Tudela in Spain—embarked upon a journey through Bible lands to visit his fellow-Jews still there. Naturally he had to view the famous Tower. In his subsequent book of travels (English translation "*The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*", Adler, 1907, Oxford University Press, London) he records how he climbed what was left of the Tower and from its then top could see twenty miles to the horizon. The translator does not say whether he rendered Benjamin's figure into English miles or not. However the helpful Benjamin also says that he went to Hillah, the mediaeval town rising near ancient Babylon, (still there and now quite an important Iraqi city) and that Hillah was four miles from the Tower. On modern large-scale ordnance maps of the district it appears that the true distance, as the crow flies, is four miles to the present city border and four and a half to its centre. By way of the present Baghdad-Hillah motor road it is a half mile longer. Accepting the translator's figure of four miles therefore, the twenty miles view to the horizon can be accepted in like manner and then it is a simple matter to calculate the height above ground level where the redoubtable Benjamin was standing to admire the view. This amounts to 270 feet, appreciably less than the apparent height given on the Seleucid Tablet of fourteen centuries earlier.

But times were beginning to change. The cities of modern Iraq were being built and the builders began looking for a source of good

bricks. They found them in the ruins of Babylon and particularly in the enormous mass of the Tower. (Lane, the British civil engineer engaged by the then Iraqi government to survey and report on irrigation possibilities for the country, remarks in his book "*Babylonian Problems*", 1923, that at this time, the beginning of this century, the market price of brick recovered from Babylon stood at a considerably higher figure than modern locally made brick because of its very superior quality—a phenomenon which appears to be continuing with other products in our own day. In the year 1603, four centuries after Benjamin, an Englishman, John Cartwright, visited the ruins and came back to say that the Tower was as high as the stonework at the foot of the steeple of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, (not the present Cathedral, which was not built until 1675 following the Great Fire of London which destroyed the old one, but the one which is referred to to-day as "Old St. Paul's." This was a long building with an enormous steeple at one end). The base of the present Dome is 218 feet from the ground; that of the old steeple was a little less, something like 190 feet. If that was the height in Cartwright's time, those enthusiastic brick collectors had taken nearly another 200 feet from the top in those four centuries.

The Italian Pietra della Valle had a look at the venerable edifice in 1615, a few years after Cartwright, but without vouchsafing any useful information. Perhaps he distrusted his estimating abilities and had no head for heights. One or two other travellers had a look round later but no one said anything useful until Claudius Rich in 1811.

Claudius Rich was the East India Company's agent in Baghdad, and his duty there was to advance the commercial interests of his employers. In his spare time, however, he became an enthusiastic archaeologist, about the first of the many who have explored and dug and investigated in Bible lands ever since. In the year 1811 he had a look at Babylon, only forty miles from his headquarters. He reported that the Tower was 130 feet high; as a business man his figures can be taken as reasonably accurate. (He did add that in one corner a kind of peak remained up to 180 feet which rather confirms Cartwright.) During those intervening two centuries the indefatigable builders had got away with an appreciable haul of more bricks.

Then in 1899, less than a century after Rich,

the German professor and archaeologist Robert Koldewey arrived to conduct what turned out to be a twelve years' thorough investigation of the ruins of Babylon. (*"The Excavations at Babylon"*, Koldewey, 1914, Macmillan, London, is a mine of information on his discoveries relating to the palaces, the temples and the private houses of the inhabitants.) But when he came to look at what was left of the Tower,—it was no longer there! The entire area where it had once stood was now a flat, brick-strewn waste with one piece of wall about four feet high and forty feet long, and the three bottom steps of the main ascent stairway, all that remained of the great Tower whose top should reach unto heaven. Only the lines of the foundations, again confirming Herodotus, remained to show where it had once stood.

Those builders had done a good job!

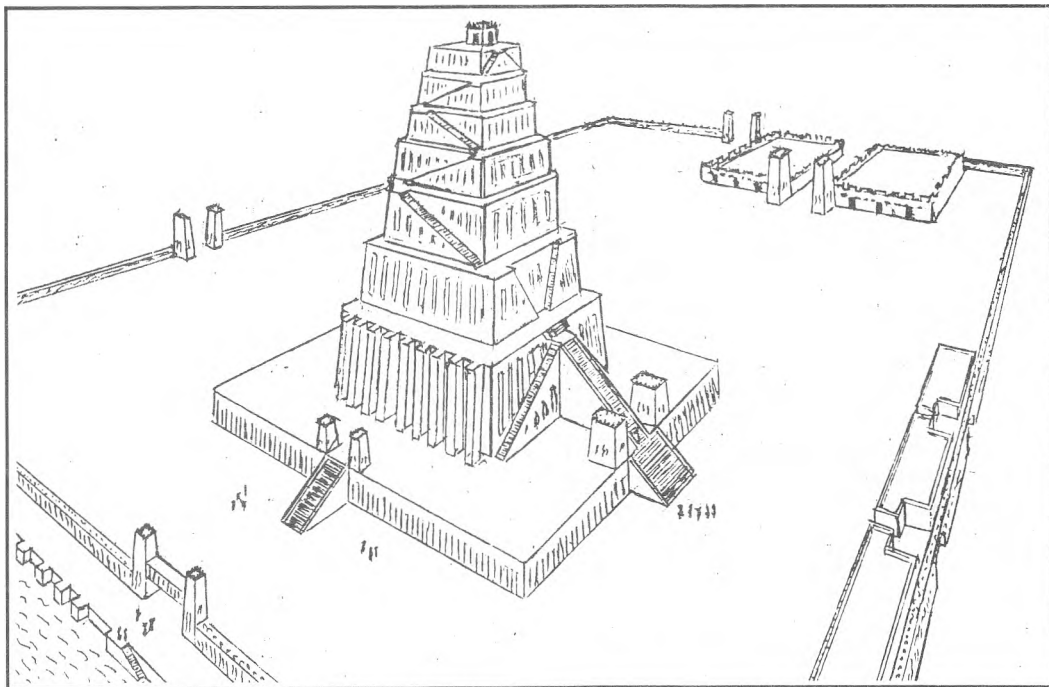
The Iraqi Department of Antiquities mounted a fresh exploration of the ruins in 1970 but failed to discover anything more of importance. Everything of value or of scientific interest had

vanished—only a wilderness of bricks remained. The authorities there have recently rebuilt the Gate of Ishtar, the chief goddess of the ancients, from the data obtained from Koldewey; they are at present excavating that part of Nebuchadnezzar's palace which Koldewey did not reach, and are rebuilding the palace as it is believed it existed in the days of the great king; this is for tourist interest. It is now possible to stand where Daniel stood at the time of Belshazzar's feast and see the replica of what Daniel saw. There is even a tea-house amidst the ruins for the convenience of those same tourists when the political situation permits.

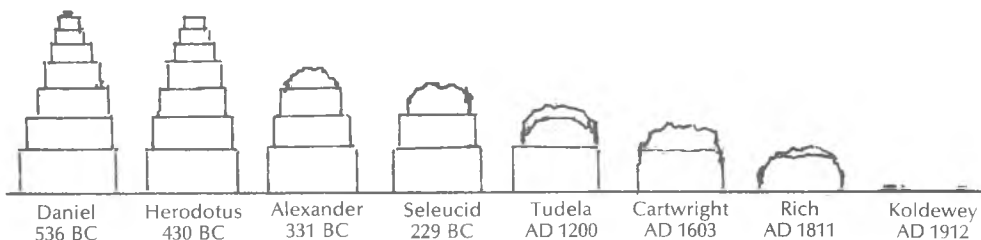
But the site of the Tower and its associated Temple, where the golden vessels of Solomon's Temple once reposed for the duration of the Babylonian empire, remains as desolate as it has been for the past two thousand years.

*"And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah."*

THE END



CONJECTURAL APPEARANCE OF THE TOWER OF BABEL IN THE TIME OF DANIEL



DISINTEGRATION OF THE TOWER SINCE THE TIME OF DANIEL

## THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET

*Matt 13, 47-50*

The thirteenth chapter of Matthew is a collection of six parables, and of these there are two, that of the Wheat and Tares and that of the Dragnet, which are so similar in their main principles although set against different backgrounds that they are frequently assumed to bear the same meaning or to have much the same application. This is not necessarily so. In both parables there is a gathering together of two classes, the worthy and the worthless, a process of differentiation and separation, the acceptance of the worthy for preservation and the rejection and destruction of the worthless. At a time when Christian theology insisted upon the final separation of all created beings at death into two classes, destined for heaven and hell respectively, there was not much room for discerning any difference between the two parables. It is now being increasingly realised that God is working in successive ages of earth's history to effect, first, the selection from amongst all mankind of a dedicated community, the Church, to be associated with the Lord Christ in his future work of world conversion, and second, the reconciliation to God of all of mankind who can thus be reached in the Age which has been ordained for that purpose. On this account there is latitude for the discernment of shades of difference and application in these two parables. Whilst they obviously both have reference to aspects of the Divine purpose in separating between that which is good and that which is evil, and ensuring the permanence of the one and the elimination of the other, it may well be that each parable is intended to have its impact upon one particular aspect of this two-fold Divine Plan.

The Kingdom of Heaven, said Jesus, is like a drag-net that, being cast into the sea, gathered a full haul of varied fish, and was drawn to shore. The fishers proceeded to sort out their catch, gathering the useful and good fish into their baskets and throwing the worthless away. Just so, said Jesus, will it be in the end of the Age; there will have been a great gathering of worthy and worthless; the time for the cessation of gathering will come; the angels will proceed forth and effect the separation, and the worthless will be cast into a furnace of fire where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The words are few and simple; the parable as

it is recorded is very brief; but there is deep dispensational truth hidden in its half-dozen sentences. This is obvious from the use of the expression "the end of the *world*" (*aion*, age, meaning an age in human history or in the development of the Divine Plan, not necessarily the end of all things terrestrial). There are four significant elements in the explanation which Jesus gave for his disciples' enlightenment and to understand the parable aright we have to consider, first, what these elements stood for in the minds of the immediate hearers, versed as they were in the theology and expectations of Judaism, and second, what the same elements imply when set against the background of our own Christian understanding of the Divine Plan as it has been revealed in later times by the Holy Spirit. These elements are:—

- (a) The end of the age
- (b) The angels
- (c) The separation of righteous and wicked
- (d) The casting of the wicked into the fire.

The physical picture which forms the substance of the parable must have been commonplace enough to the disciples. Fishers themselves, several of them, or closely associated with the fishing activities carried on around the Sea of Galilee as the remainder of them must have been, they would all readily have entered into the Master's thoughts. So often had they themselves assisted in just such an operation, going out in their boats to extend their long net, usually between two boats, over a wide stretch of water and coming steadily towards land, sweeping into its confines all living creatures in its path. Then the strenuous task of hauling the heavy net, with its living load, out of the water and up the beach to a place where they could sit down and begin to sort their catch. With what satisfaction and delight would they watch the growing pile of good fish in the baskets; with what contempt toss the worthless ones down the beach towards the water, not caring whether they went back into the lake or not, so quickly were they forgotten and the attention turned to the better specimens which were the objects of their quest. Not every variety of fish was suitable for their purpose, but everything in the water that could possibly be taken must be gathered in, so that no creature which could by any means be

found of use should be missed. The purpose of the operation was to gather in all the worthy, that only the truly and demonstrably worthless should be rejected.

But Jesus introduced a new set of ideas even while the disciples' minds were still busy with the picture He had drawn for them. Not the close of a day's work, but the end of an Age! Not fishermen, but angels! Not the casting back into the sea, but into a furnace of fire! These symbols belong to an altogether different range of thought; the simple story was, after all, only a means to an end; now they must perforce turn their attention to another background with which they were at any rate equally familiar, the knowledge and instruction that had been drilled into them from childhood concerning the coming Day when God would rise up to make an end of evil and evildoers, and usher the righteous into everlasting bliss. The usual tacit assumption of zealous Jews was that the separation at the Last Day would be in the main between Jews and Gentiles, the Jews, as the chosen people, to be ushered into eternal felicity and the Gentiles consigned to everlasting destruction. One of the purposes of this parable was to teach them that the distinction and the separation, when it did come, was not to be on the basis of racial origin but upon that of worthiness or unworthiness.

The disciples at the time knew nothing of that three-fold "end of the Age" which is so familiar to New Testament students to-day—the respective endings of the Jewish Age, the Gospel Age and the Millennial Age. They knew of one Age only, the Age in which they lived, and which they believed was to be brought to an end by the appearance of the Messiah and his holy ones, his angels, the destruction of all God's enemies in a furnace of fire, and the exaltation of his friends, his followers, to reign over the submissive nations of earth forever. That had been the expectation of Jewry for centuries past and when Jesus explained the parable in these terms this is how they must have understood those terms. They apprehended the matter correctly enough in principle but had only a very rudimentary conception of the reality towards which our Lord was pointing.

We should expect to see this parable in more detailed and possibly more accurate form than did the disciples for we have the advantage of a much more detailed knowledge of the ages and dispensations marked out in the Divine Plan.

That period of time which to the disciples was one Age, terminated by the "Last Day" and the destruction of all evil, has to us become three Ages, known generally as the Jewish Age, terminated by the ending of Jewish national existence forty years after the Crucifixion; the Gospel Age, terminated by the Second Advent, and the establishment of Christ's Kingdom upon earth; and the Millennial Age, terminated by the end of the incorrigibly sinful and the entry into everlasting life of all redeemed and perfected humanity. The expression "end of the world" (*aion, age*) refers sometimes to one and sometimes to another of these Ages. Thus Heb. 9.26 "*Once in the end of the world hath he (Christ) appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*" refers obviously to the end of the Jewish Age, the time of the First Advent. So also must 1 Cor. 10.11 "*They are written for our admonition (the early Church) upon whom the ends of the world (ages) have come*".

At the other extreme we have 1 Cor. 15.24. "*Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father*" referring undoubtedly to Jesus' surrender of his Millennial Kingship at the close of his Mediatorial work, at the end of the Millennial Age. Then there are such words as Matt. 24.3 "*What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?*" and Matt. 24.14 "*This gospel of the kingdom must be preached in all the world for a witness, and then shall the end come*" clearly, whether the disciples realised the fact or not, applying to the end of the Gospel Age and the time of the Second Advent. To which of these three Age-endings shall the judgment of the Drag-net parable be applied?

The nature of the story affords an indication. It is a picture of the taking of fish, and fish in large quantities at that. The "fishers" are the angels, the "holy ones" who appear with the Messiah in returning glory. The general setting therefore would seem to be after the Second Advent has taken place, when the "angels" are equipped and qualified for their work. But who are these "angels" who appear so often in association with the returning Messiah at his Second Advent? The word, of course, merely means messengers. To the disciples, who knew of no Divine messengers save the glorious beings who constantly wait on the presence of God, the words of Jesus could only conjure up visions of celestial visitants coming with him to do his work. It could only have been after Pentecost

that they realised the great truth that they themselves, if faithful, would be among that triumphant company that is commissioned to do the work of God upon earth during the next Age. This is an important matter. It is sometimes suggested that the angels of the heavenly courts are referred to in passages such as this, but that is mainly the consequence of traditional ideas regarding the angels of heaven, always engaged in what might be described as the extra-terrestrial works of God. When it is realised that the resurrected Church, "changed" to celestial conditions and fully equipped to engage, in association with the Lord, in the evangelistic work amongst men which is to characterise the Millennial Age, fully and completely meet the requirements of the parable, the term "angel" takes on a much wider significance. The Apostle Paul declared that "the saints shall judge the world". The Revelator speaks of the Church as living and reigning with Christ over the nations for the thousand years, which is a synonym for the Millennial Age. It is clear then that the "holy ones" who at our Lord's Second Advent and throughout the entire thousand years of his Mediatorial reign are executing all his work for and amongst men, will be the "called, and chosen, and faithful" of this Age, raised to the glory of spiritual being, resplendent in their celestial bodies. To men on earth, of course, they will be as angels; angels of the highest possible order, the constant companions of the Lord himself.

The universal gathering-in of the dragnet, therefore, well symbolises the world-wide evangelical work of the Messianic Age in which *"the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev. 22.17) None will then be able to escape the drawing power of Christ. He himself did say *"I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me"*. "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31.34). And the use of fish as a symbol of humanity in the mass is appropriate and Scriptural. *"Man also knoweth not his time"* says the Preacher in Eccl. 9.12 *"as the fishes that are taken in an evil net"*. God is said to "make man as the fishes of the sea" in Hab. 1.14, and Amos 4.2 has a somewhat similar allusion. And more impressive, because nearer home, is the well known expression of Jesus in Matt. 4.19 *"Follow me, and I*

*will make you fishers of men"*. It may well be concluded, therefore, that the towing of the dragnet through the sea pictures such a work in the future day, and its being brought to shore, with the consequent separation of good and bad fish, the final judgment upon each individual man and woman as to their worthiness of everlasting life in God's then sinless creation, or unworthiness through conscious and deliberate refusal to come into union with God and accept life from him, which refusal can only eventuate in the loss of life.

This latter alternative is pictured by the furnace of fire. What is this? Is it a refining and purifying fire, from which that which is thrown into it will be taken, cleansed and perfected? Or is it a consuming fire, burning until all that has been cast into it is consumed into ashes and is as though it had never been? Clearly the latter. There is no suggestion that the worthless fish are subjected to some remedial treatment that renders them acceptable and fit for use after all. They are already beyond hope of being put to any useful purpose, and they are cast out to be destroyed, utterly and without hope. Here again is another pointer to the interpretation of the parable. It is only at the end of the Millennial Age that what might be termed the "wastage" of God's creation suffers the penalty of its failure to come into harmony with the Divine ideals, and in consequence is utterly consumed. This is the fire of Divine condemnation on sin and sinners, and just as, in the picture, the fishermen cast the worthless fish away only when it was clear it could serve no useful purpose, so in the Age which God has appointed for the reconciliation of "whosoever will" among all men, none will be lost eternally until it has been abundantly demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt that the continued conscious existence of such could bring nothing but misery to themselves and to others. None will be cast out until God has exhausted every power at his command to bring them into harmony with those laws which are both the rules which God has ordained for life and the principles by which alone life can be sustained.

*"There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth"*. As in other New Testament instances where this figure of speech is used, it pictures the impotent rage and resentment of those thus rejected. It does not imply remorse or repentance; the same allusion in the Old Testament indicates the fixed enmity and hatred of the wicked for the

righteous. It is only a figure of speech; that which is cast into the fire is in no position either to wail or gnash teeth. It does serve to stress the fact that those thus barred from the light and life of the eternal state maintain their enmity and their rebellion to the last. Had there been any possibility of repentance and conversion in their hearts God would have waited, for an aeon if need be, to receive them to himself. But in these cases there is no such possibility, there is no hope, and the life that will not have God comes to its inevitable end. Some there are who maintain that there will be none such, that the drawing power of God will eventually succeed in reconciling all men, without exception, to himself, so that eventually all men will be saved. Should that indeed be the happy outcome all who love the Lord will rejoice, for that is the desire of the Father himself and no one of his

followers can desire less. But if so, it can only be because all such have in the exercise of their own free will and of their own volition come to him in full loyalty and dedication of life. The Scripture reveals the principles upon which God is working and the relative destinies of those who become righteous on the one hand and those who deliberately refuse to become righteous on the other; perhaps it will be found at the end that the number of those who steadfastly refuse to accept the appeal of the Lord Jesus is going to be very small, very small indeed. We can at any rate be sure that if God allows any of his created sons to go into darkness it will be because even He is powerless to keep him in the light—powerless in the face of the man's own will. For that is a fortress which God will never take by force; allegiance and loyalty must be of voluntary yielding or not at all.

### Baptised for the Dead

*"What shall they do which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptised for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?"* (1 Cor. 15. 29-30).

A strange passage! The majority of commentators are frankly uncertain of its meaning. There is no evidence that baptism in proxy for the dead was practiced by the Early Church. In any case, even if any such practice existed, it has no Scriptural foundations, and would in fact directly contradict Scripture doctrine. The baptism of a believer is a symbol of something already having taken place in his own heart, his own deliberate consecration of himself to God's service and discipleship of Christ. *"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."* (Rom. 6.4). No person can be baptised into Christ's death on behalf of another; the symbol performed under such circumstances would lose all significance. It is in the highest degree unlikely that the Early Church during St. Paul's own lifetime would develop so variant an understanding of the matter, and even if they had that Paul himself would countenance it in this manner.

Perhaps the key lies with the final sentence "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour". The argument is that those who are "baptised for the dead" base their position upon the veracity of Christ's resurrection. If He has not risen again, says Paul, why are we baptised for the dead and stand in jeopardy. Is it possible that he was thinking of the theme exemplified in his own words to the Romans, that those who are baptised into Christ's death are in fact being baptised on behalf of a dead world. The purpose

of our being "buried with Christ by baptism into death" is that we might "rise to walk with him in newness of life." One purpose of that new life is that the faithful of all ages, thus baptised and risen with Christ, may ultimately be glorified together with him and associated with him in his future work of blessing all nations of earth and reconciling "whosoever will" to God. The real hope of the world lies in the opportunity for life which will be afforded them by the Church in association with her Lord in the days of the Messianic Kingdom. In a very real sense, then, those who are now baptised are baptised for the dead world and will one day extend the fruits of their baptism to the dead world. Every baptised Christian stands "in jeopardy" every hour in danger of being enticed away from his calling by the wiles of the Evil One. Not until his call at the end of the way can he expect to hear the words *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joys of thy Lord"* and until then he stands in jeopardy. Why is he thus baptised, and why does he stand thus in jeopardy, asks Paul, if in fact Christ has not risen and no basis exists for the accomplishment of human salvation as promised in the Divine Word? The whole underlying principle of the Christian calling, the whole reason for the existence of Christians, is not that Christ lived and inculcated a new code of conduct, but that Christ died, and rose again, and is exalted to the right hand of God, from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. And when He thus comes, we, who have been baptised for the purpose, will be with him to share in that work of judgment. *"Know ye not"* says Paul in another place *"that the saints shall judge the world."*

## JEREMIAH AND JOSIAH

About 650 years before the birth of Jesus two boys grew up in Judah who were to have a profound effect upon the spiritual life of God's people. They were born during the long reign of Judah's king Manasseh. It was at a time when the pagan empire of Assyria greatly influenced the people of Israel. Sacrifices to idols became a major part of the worship of God's people. When Manasseh died, his son Amon did not reign for long and was quickly assassinated by men of the royal court. But ordinary folk of Judah were determined to keep David's family on the throne and by common consent the boy prince Josiah was made king (2 Chron. 33:21-25).

All this happened about the year BC 639 and Josiah ruled in Jerusalem for three decades. Just before this, in the town of Anathoth in Benjamin, Jeremiah was born and grew up in the traditions of a provincial priest. He was of the family of Abiathar. While still in his teen-years Jeremiah was called by God to become a prophet. At the beginning of his prophetic writings Jeremiah tells us that he felt too inexperienced to speak on God's behalf because of his youthfulness (Jer. 1:6).

As Assyrian influence in the Middle East started to weaken, the 16-year old Josiah began the process of reform and the cleansing of the land from foreign idolatry (2 Chron. 34:3). The young king, like Hezekiah before him, resolutely returned to the true faith of Israel in the steps of his ancestor David. The pagan altars and images were destroyed. The work of reform spread beyond the borders of Judah into the whole land of Israel. A century before, the Assyrians had captured Samaria and deported a large proportion of the Ten Tribes of Israel to Assyria (2 Kings 17:18-23). However, much of the social life continued in Israel because the King of Assyria colonised the land with peoples from Babylonia. These were the beginnings of the Samaritans about whom we hear in Jesus' day.

So radical was this reformation that Bethel, an ancient northern shrine was destroyed. It had possibly been used by Abram, (Gen. 12:7,8); and by Jacob (Gen. 31:13 and 35:7). Jeroboam converted these 'high places' to Baal worship. It was there that a man of God came from Judah and denounced the northern king's idolatry. It was there also that the man of God was buried along with the old prophet who had led him into

disobedience. The story is recalled in 2 Kings 23:15-18 when Josiah fulfilled the prophecy about the altar at Bethel one hundred years later. He gave orders that the men of God should be untouched while the rest of the high place was desecrated. No place or object or ritual remains sacred if it is abused by false worship.

While the purifying of the land proceeded, the Temple which Solomon had built was undergoing repairs. During the renovations the priest found an old document which later was identified as the Book of Deuteronomy. During the periods of unrest and foreign worship the ancient books of the Law had been forgotten or perhaps hidden. This was the book which required the worship of Israel to be central at Jerusalem. It began to take serious effect in the days of King David and later when the Temple was being built in the reign of Solomon.

Josiah was alarmed at the contents of the newly found scroll. He realised how far short Israel were in measuring up to the Law given by Moses. He told his courtiers to discover God's will in the matter. The request seems to have been communicated to the priests. They in turn consulted with the prophetess Huldah who was the wife of a court official (2 Kings 22:14). Her answer was not flattering to the people of Judah. She made it clear that God would judge his people because of their disobedience to his law and their outrageous idolatry. She in fact recalled what had been written in the books of the Law, and was to be reiterated again and again more specifically by Jeremiah throughout his time of prophesying.

Why was Jeremiah not consulted as the prophet of God? He was still very young. He had no court connections and his family background may have disqualified him from any favour from the Temple priesthood. But the words of Huldah, along with the prophecies of Jeremiah in the years to come, were confirmation; "out the mouth of two witnesses"! God's messages are not confined to the expected channels.

During the reign of Solomon, Zadok's family displaced that of Abiathar as High Priests. The young Samuel had prophesied that Eli's family would not be allowed to continue in that high office. A feud lingered between the two families and became more apparent at the time of Josiah. The family of Abiathar, like many other provin-

cial priestly families, must have lost their work during the reform period. It was to have serious consequences for Jeremiah.

Josiah was deeply concerned about the contents of the book which had been found. He realised how greatly Israel had sinned and broken the covenant with their God. The covenant relationship between the Lord and his people was to become the theme of Jeremiah's great prophetic speeches. How much the prophet and the king met and discussed the reform we may never know, but there are remarkable similarities in their outlook, obviously inspired by the same spirit.

Josiah's work of reform was not only negative in the pulling down of idols and altars. There is a very strong connection between the moral values of a nation and its religious attitudes. Israel's law which had been so badly neglected was very much about their relationship to God and to each other. Justice and kindness had been neglected and in their place cruelty and murder had developed.

Real reform meant that the people must learn how to behave in the manner that God wanted them to, so Josiah ordered the people to assemble and hear the Word of God read to them. To this was added the re-establishment of the covenant between God and his people. From this must come a desire to remember how God had redeemed his people. Thus, after many long years, they at last kept the Passover. These were all signal events of true reform. Knowing what God wants from us by studying the Scriptures and recalling the way he reconciles his people to himself are vital elements in practising the true faith. They provide a standard and pattern for God's people in every Age by which they must measure their own need of repentance. To these principles Paul drew attention when he wrote "*Let a man examine*

*himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*" (1 Cor.11.28.).

Whatever Jeremiah's part in the reform during the life of Josiah, he was to continue the work among the people of Judah long after the king was killed in the fateful battle against the Egyptians (2 Kings 23.29). Josiah's action against Neco is puzzling. God had made a promise by covenant with David and reinforced it in the triumph of Hezekiah. Many in Judah believed that however evil Jerusalem became, nothing could overthrow God's city, its Temple and its king. If Josiah became so arrogant that he thought he could tempt God, (Matt.4.7) he discovered his mistake too late.

In his "Temple" sermon, (chapter 7) Jeremiah told God's people the consequences of relying upon a material shrine like the Temple to save them, instead of genuine faith in God. Their worship was false, their religious ritual and sacrifice based on hypocrisy. True salvation produces right behaviour. Jeremiah was grief stricken at the hollow attitudes of Israel's piety. Religious observances and sacrifices have no value unless those who practice such things, really come to know their God. Evidence of this relationship is not demonstrated in academic knowledge but in the way people live. Thus Jeremiah was able to write of Josiah "*He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the Lord*" (Jer.22.16). The laws by which followers of Jesus to-day are judged are based on active justice and compassion: they spring from knowing God personally. When the father of lies and hypocrisy has no influence in the Age to come, those same principles will be the foundation of the judgment of all people. Such law is written not on stone tablets but on the pages of the human heart.

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He who will not be sweetly ruled by the Divine will is penally governed by himself; and he who casts off the easy yoke and light burden of love, must suffer the intolerable load of self-will. May I breathe under the light burden of love, and be not restrained by slavish fear, nor allured by mercenary desire; but may I be led by thy free Spirit, which may witness with my spirit that I

am thy child. For he who walks in the Spirit never remains in one state. His way is not in himself, but as the Spirit dispenses to him according to his good pleasure: now more faintly, now more eagerly, he forgets the things which are behind, and reaches forth to those which are before.

*Bernard of Clairvaux.*

## ZECHARIAH, PROPHET OF THE RESTORATION

### 12. "Who is on the Lord's side!"

From his description of the external forces gathering against regathered Israel in chap: 12. 1-9 the prophet now turns to view the attitude of the people in the land. Up to this point the nation has been referred to in general terms as the subject of Divine deliverance soon to be accomplished. but the extent to which the individuals comprising that nation are at heart loyal to God and trusting in his promise has not been declared. As a matter of fundamental principle God can only deliver where there is faith and trust and one of the reasons why it is so repeatedly said in the prophetic Scriptures that only the "Remnant" is ultimately delivered is surely because in all history saving faith is usually found only in the minority; the majority are found unable to pass the test. More than one Old Testament reference to these stirring times indicates that there will be a final purging of the unworthy from the nation on the very eve of Divine intervention and it is only to be expected that Zechariah's very complete foreview of the events should include some reference both to that purging and the turning in faith to God which is characteristic of those who are not thus purged.

This is where the next section of the prophecy, chap: 12.10 to 13.6, has its application. The first half presents a picture of what appears to be almost a universal conversion of the nation and wholehearted sorrow for its former blindness to the workings of the Almighty on its behalf; with that comes the swift response of God in establishing a means of cleansing so that they become acceptable in his sight and acknowledged as his people. But concurrently with this the prophet paints a parallel but darker picture; false teachers and idolatrous anti-God influences in the land, even whilst in the process of being done away, are still active. The false prophets are "ashamed" of their visions and they make excuses, but they give no evidence of repentance and apparently remain false prophets at heart. And there may yet be such among the people when at the final critical moment God stretches out his hand to deliver. So the stage is set for that seemingly strange paradox of the end of chapter 13 and the beginning of chapter 14 when in the very moment of deliverance some who are still in the land suffer deprivation and cutting-off.

At this momentous time, when the "governors

of Israel" of vss. 5-6, the Old Testament stalwarts or "Ancient Worthies", are beginning their task of organising the nation to meet the increasing threat, a strange and wonderful happening occurs. *"I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddon"* (chap: 12.10-11).

This "spirit of grace and of supplication" is obviously one of repentance and a throwing of themselves upon the Divine goodness. Like Daniel of old, they might well be saying *"we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies"* (Dan.9. 18). So many times there were in Israel's former history when because of their apostasy *"He brought down their heart with labour, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses"* (Psa. 107.12-13). Now the same thing is to happen again and for the last time. There will be no more apostasy. As Isaiah says (44.3-5), speaking of this same time and event. *"I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring . . . one shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel"*. This is definitely a widespread repentance within the nation, from the nature of the description a majority repentance. The dissentients and the unrepentant would appear to be in the minority, and this raises the question as to what has brought about this major reversal of national feeling. Is it inspired by the evidences of God's moving in the affairs of the nation, or the realisation, at last, of Israel's historic mission and that the time is at hand for its execution; or is it the effect of the reforming zeal of the heaven-sent "governors" and their evident control of the situation and constant exhortation to faith in God? Whatever it may be, there is no doubt that this is a sincere and lasting repentance. The following words show that. *"They shall look*

upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him". At long last, after so many generations of hard-heartedness, they will "look unto him", and be saved.

There is a certain amount of doubt as to the textual accuracy of "they shall look unto me". The speaker in this chapter is God himself and there is a measure of inappropriateness in thinking of the Most High being "pierced"; the word is *dagar*, meaning to thrust through as with a sword or spear, and implies the death of the subject. To think of God as being thus done to death, even in symbol, seems improper. Neither does the sentence read very grammatically; they shall look on *Me* and they shall mourn for *Him* without specifying who is the second person thus introduced. Some give "him" instead of "me", so that some modern translators, including the R.S.V., Moffatt and Ferrar Fenton, adopt "him", whilst the RV and Rotherham give "him" as an alternative. It is of course tempting to look on this verse as referring to the Crucifixion especially as John in ch: 19.37 quotes it in that connection, and his words are rendered in the A.V. "They shall look on him whom they pierced". It would appear to be true that on the basis of existing manuscripts there are more or less equal claims for either word. It has been pointed out, however, that the omission at an early date of one letter from the word could transform an original "him" to "me". The Hebrew word rendered "upon me" is a preposition in the first person singular masculine which by the addition of one more letter, the Hebrew *vav*, becomes third person, thus changing "me" to him. The following word in the Hebrew text, *AT*, is given by Gesenius as a demonstrative pronoun corresponding to the Greek *autos*, "this same", so that if the hypothetical correction is made the phrase would read "and they shall look toward him, this same who they pierced". Now the Greek of John 19.37 rendered literally would read "they shall look unto whom they pierced", the "him" being implied. It is possible therefore, that the "vav" was in the original text and dropped out at an early date, thus accounting for the alternative renderings in various manuscripts, and that what we have here is a prophetic picture of the repentance of Israel at the Time of the End, and their acceptance of the One whom their forebears crucified. "They shall mourn for him as one mourneth for an only son"; this was a term used to denote any unusually intense expression of grief and goes to

show how widespread and deeply felt will be that national contrition which will sweep the nation at that time. A similar expression occurs in Amos 8. 10.

Verse 11 colours the picture further. "In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddon". This is a simile which is not easy to understand at first sight. There is no other reference in Scripture to the "mourning of Hadadrimmon". Jerome in the 4th century suggested that it referred to a town called Rumaneh, near Jezreel, but no evidence that there ever was such a place is extant. Hadad in the Aramaic languages means The Mighty, and Rimmon is another name for the Syrian deity Adonis. The story of Naaman the Syrian captain healed by Elisha mentions the house or temple of Rimmon (2 Kings 5.18). The "mourning of Hadadrimmon" therefore may well mean the "mourning of the mighty Adonis". This was a well known ritual observed in the territory of Syria. The legend told how Adonis, the youthful god of Nature in her beneficent aspect, had been slain, and descended into the underworld. At his going the sun veiled its face, vegetation withered, the crops failed and the cattle died. The world became a cold and dark place in which there was no new life. Then Adonis rose from the grave and Nature smiled again and all was well. The entire myth was probably a picturesque story of the coming of winter upon the world and its succession by springtime. So, every year in early springtime, the festival was held. As soon as the river Adonis began to run red (this was due to the red clay banks crumbling in the sunshine and colouring the water) maidens ran about wailing and mourning the death of the god, whose blood was staining the water. The shepherds pointed to the red anemones blossoming in profusion over the fields—drops of blood from the veins of Adonis. The whole people gave themselves up to this ritual mourning for a week. Then on the sixth day, the note changed. Adonis was risen! Expressions of joy rose on every hand. The days of mourning were forgotten and all was well.

The same custom prevailed in Babylon and Chaldea where Adonis was known as Tammuz, and Ezekiel refers to it when, in describing the idolatrous practices of the Israelites of his day, he says he saw at the gate of the Temple "women weeping for Tammuz" (Ezek.8.14). So Zechariah was led to liken the mourning of

Israel in the Last Days for the "only son" who had suffered death and risen again to that ancient ceremonial with which it had so many elements in common.

The final aspect of this universal mourning in Israel is shewn in verses 12-14 of chapter 12. Each family will mourn in privacy and the womenfolk separated from the menfolk. This is reminiscent of the Mosaic laws respecting the ceremonial for cleansing from defilement caused by contact with the dead. (Num. 19 11-22: 5. 2-4; 9. 6-10). Seven days separation from their fellows, and purification by means of the "water of separation", had the effect of purifying the man or woman from uncleanness; so here, simultaneously with the great mourning there is a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness. (ch. 13. 1).

Four families are specified; the houses of David, Nathan, Levi and Shimei. Two names are well known, the other two not so familiar. About nine individuals named Nathan appeared in the O.T., including the famous prophet of King David's time, and eighteen named Shimei. There could be scope here for a number of interpretations based on any particular section; perhaps the most reasonable conclusion is that Nathan, the son of David by Bathsheba, and Shimei, the grandson of Levi, are intended. We then have David, the leading representative of the royal house of Israel, and Nathan, a minor member of his posterity, with Levi, the head of the priestly tribe, and Shimei, a minor member of his posterity. The combination of the four names would then picture this great mourning extending to all levels of the people from kings and priests at the forefront to the rank and file of the people below them.

It is probably true that the respective offices of kings and priests will be combined, in that day, in the persons of the "governors", the princes, but the meaning remains the same. From the leaders to the led there will arise a great expression of repentance for the past and acceptance of God and his ways for the future. This is where ch. 13.1 has its place. A cleansing stream makes its appearance and in the waters of that stream the sin and uncleanness of the past is washed away and the people stand ready to face their final ordeal, standing thus in the strength of their God.

A darker part of the picture now comes into view. Some there are in the nation who do not share the general spirit of repentance and

supplication. Idolatry is still present in the land and in ch. 13. 2 the Lord declares his intention of rooting out that idolatry and eliminating the false prophets. Idolatry in Zechariah's day meant the worship of false gods, Baal and Ashtoreth and Molech and others, representative of and associated with the powers of Nature and the more depraved aspects of men's minds. That kind of worship has long since disappeared, but its equivalent in more modern guise is with us now and to an extent will be present in the regathered nation until consumed in the fire of the final ordeal. Money, commercial gain, political power, control of the minds and lives of men, these are the modern forms of idolatry and these will have their devotees, the false prophets of this chapter, and to an extent their voices are heard in this nation so soon to be tried in the fire that it may be forged into an instrument for God's purpose. It would seem, though, that chapter 13 envisages a time when national sentiment in general is against them. The great repentance and mourning of chapter 12, the fountain for cleansing of ch. 13. 1, are having their effect, and in ch. 13. 3 a situation is described in which these false prophets are discredited and rejected when they speak. Again the symbolism of the Mosaic Law is invoked. The parents of the false prophet say to him "*Thou shalt not live, for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord*" and they thrust him through, i.e. put him to death. This was the penalty for idolatry laid down by Moses and recorded in Deut. 13: 6-11. The offender's nearest relative must execute the death sentence. Thus is indicated that the closest of ties will not interfere with the complete separation between the godly and the godless at this critical time. So the false prophets are more or less driven underground, as we would say today. They endeavour to avoid discovery, "*ashamed every one of his vision when he hath prophesied*" as Zechariah puts it in vs. 4, eschewing the distinctive garb of a prophet, the *addereth seir*, the mantle of goatskin or camel skin. They claim instead to be one with the people of the land, and when taxed with an enquiry as to the wounds in their hands they return an evasive reply. "*One shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends*" (vs. 6). The idolatrous priests were accustomed to cut themselves with knives and inflict various wounds upon their

bodies in the prophetic frenzy—the priests of Baal did this at the time of Elijah's challenge (1 Kings 25. 5-12)—and the possession of such injuries was another mark of a false prophet. But here in this case the men thus taxed deny the imputation and claim that they received their injuries within their social circle; this is the meaning of the expression "house of my friends". Either blood relatives or close companions are implied. The false prophets are at pains to make it appear that they are at one with the prevailing national sentiment of faith and loyalty toward God but in fact their hearts are far from these things. This passage relating to the presence of false prophets at this time is difficult to interpret and it is only because there are other Scriptural references to the presence of just such a class of men when the hostile nations advance to the attack that it is possible to elicit a meaning at all. Thus Zephaniah, speaking of this same time, of the Lord "rising up to the prey", gathering the nations for judgment preparatory to turning his "pure language" to the people (Zeph. 3. 8-20) goes on to say "*then will I take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride . . . I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord*". This "remnant of Israel" he says "*shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth*". The 5th chapter of Micah, devoted to the same events, pictured as the "Assyrian" invading the land, includes as an integral part of the Lord's deliverance the banishment of witchcraft, "*and thou shalt have no more soothsayers. Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine own hands*". Isaiah in his 66th chapter talks of retribution to come upon those who are following idolatrous practices at the very time He has gathered all nations of the world for the final battle; here again the "remnant of Israel" are the only

survivors in the land and they are then commissioned to take the knowledge of God to all nations. This is another way of picturing the "pure language" of the Zephaniah passage just quoted. The association of an unbelieving element with the faithful "remnant" in the land at this crucial time seems plainly to be indicated in these passages.

It will not have escaped notice that in all these prophetic foreviews the prevailing sin of the unbelieving element is idolatry—the worship of a rival god. It is perhaps only to be expected that in Israel at the final stage there will still be those whose minds and hands are given to the perpetuation of this present order of things, those who would advocate collaboration with the powers of this world rather than dedication to the service and the purpose of God. Perhaps in the Divine wisdom such will be allowed to continue their covert resistance to the reforming work of the "governors"—false prophets "ashamed" of their vision, but at heart false prophets nevertheless and hoping still that their policy will ultimately prevail. But the Lord has declared "*I know their works and their thoughts*" (Isa. 66. 18) and although their continued presence in the land may well be permitted to constitute a test and a refining influence upon the faithful—and this may well be the inference to be drawn from verses 7-9 of chapter 13—it is certain that all who come short of complete and whole hearted faith and loyalty towards God will find themselves excluded from the deliverance which God has planned for the people of faith. The fourteenth chapter makes it plain that when at last, the long expected onslaught takes place and Israel enters into the fire, some of the people are not delivered; they go into exile. That can only be because they are not the people of faith. They have yielded their devotion and efforts to the service of idol gods, and to their idol gods they will be abandoned.

*(To be continued)*

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"The idea that the consummation of all things given us in the New Testament is never that of our being carried away to a distant heaven, but is of a return of the Son of Man to recreate earth, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ."  
*(Bishop of Chichester, 1943).*

Every man is not a proper champion for the truth, nor fit to take up the gauntlet in the cause of verity. Many, from an inconsiderate zeal unto the truth, have too rashly charged the troops of error, and remain as trophies to the enemies of truth.

*(Sir T. Browne).*

## “LET YOUR WOMEN KEEP SILENCE”

*“Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but to be under obedience, as also saith the law”* (1 Cor. 14. 34-35).

The Apostle Paul has a reputation for being hard on the sisters in Christ, arising from his directions here and in 1 Tim. 2. 8-12. Whether the stricture is deserved is another matter; it might well be that the intention behind the words is not fully understood; the Authorised Version does not always convey the precise meaning intended and it has to be borne in mind that the Apostle was directing his remarks to peoples living in a very different Age and under very different social customs than ours and this has to be taken into account when considering the relevance to us of his words.

The importance of these two passages lies in the fact that upon them rests the age-old objection to women ministers in the Church, and, among some smaller but intensely earnest Christian bodies, the absolute prohibition of a female voice in the assembly. It cannot be disputed that if the statements as they appear in the Authorised Version are taken strictly literally, and without reference to the context, this position is abundantly justified. The words are concise and definite, and in the English language bear the meaning which is commonly attributed to them. The increasing tendency to admit women to the Christian ministry nowadays is not due to any denial of these facts, but rather to a growing conviction that whatever the necessity of the Pauline regulations at the time they were laid down, they are not relevant to modern times. The serious Bible student, however, is likely to require some solid basis founded on Scripture for this conclusion before deciding that Paul's words can safely be ignored.

Looking first at the Corinthian passage, the apparent command is that the voice of a woman may not be heard in the church meeting; if any woman desired enlightenment on what was said she must acquire it from her own men folk in the privacy of her home. Now this does not harmonise with the evident fact that Paul did provide for participation in the proceedings by the sisters here in Corinth. Chapter 11. 4-13 makes it plain that both men and women did habitually offer prayer, and “prophesy”, viz., exhort and expound their understanding of Scripture. Paul advises that whereas men in such

case should do so with uncovered head—unlike the Jews in synagogues, who prayed with heads covered—the women should never thus participate unveiled; they must always be wearing the habitual veil which completely concealed the face and head and covered the shoulders. Again in the 12th chapter Paul talks about the interdependence of the various members of the Christ community, the “Body”, without giving any indication that the bestowal of the “gifts of the Spirit” (vss. 4-11) was restricted to the male sex. (The A.V. rendering “every man” in vs. 11 is incorrect; the Greek is “distributing to each as it will” indicating every member of the Body without distinction of sex, nationality or social status.) To confine what is said in this chapter to the men alone is completely to invalidate all that Paul is saying respecting the work of the Holy Spirit.

It should be noted also that women are not the only ones bidden to “keep silence”. When in chapter 14. 27.30 a man feels led to speak “in an unknown tongue” but finds there is no interpreter present to translate his words, he also is bidden to “keep silence” and speak only to himself, and to God. Again, when the time comes for informal public prophesying in the meeting, it seems that one who has held the attention of the meeting awhile must “hold his peace” when another shows signs of readiness to say something. In each of these three instances the same Greek expression is used, one that occurs some eleven times in the New Testament and always with the meaning of *ceasing* to speak, of becoming silent, of quietening down. Typical instances are Acts 21.40 “when there was made a *great silence*, (Paul) spake . . .”, Acts 15.13 “after they had *held their peace*, James answered . . .”, Acts 12.17 “beckoning unto them with the hand to *hold their peace*, (Peter) declared . . .”, and Luke 20.26 “and they marvelled at his answer, and *held their peace*”. It seems that in all cases, that of the man with an unknown tongue and no interpreter (vs. 28), that of the prophet having too much to say when another was waiting his turn (vs. 30), and that of the sisters claiming a greater share of the praying and prophesying than propriety demanded (vs. 34), the same golden rule applied; let them “hold their peace” in deference to the dignity and general profit of the meeting. And so far as the sisters were concerned, anything further that

had to be said would be better said at home.

There is also another factor to be considered. The position of a woman in the social structure of ancient Greece was an invidious one. If she was a wife and mother and keeper of the home she remained very much in the background and took no part in public life; when she did appear in public she was, like the Jewish women, closely veiled. An element of Greek society, however, was another class of women who did appear in public, mixed freely with the men, and often attained prominent intellectual or social standards, claiming and exercising a freedom which was denied their more "respectable" sisters. In addition there were the pagan temple "priestesses", women consecrated to one or another of the many gods of Greece, and although their conduct was dictated by the nature of their religion it was completely obnoxious to the Christian community. These undesirable characteristics were more evident in Corinth than in any other Greek city; it is obvious that Paul was at pains to keep the Christian church at Corinth free from any suspicion of connection with such conduct or practices. Hence his warning against any undue exercise of feminine participation in the church service. It might well be that what he had particularly in mind was the ever-present temptation, probably stronger in a woman than a man, to immoderate exercise of the "gift" of speaking in tongues. This may be the true meaning behind his words "it is not permitted unto (women) to speak" "it is an indecent thing for women to speak in the church" (vss. 34 & 35). He had already referred without comment or objection to women praying and prophesying in the assembly (ch. 11.5.); it is notable that chapter 14, which deals exclusively with the subject of speaking in tongues, uses the word "speak" almost solely in that connection. If then Paul is counselling the sisters, who in normal life were rarely, if ever, seen or heard outside their family circle, to judicious use of the privilege of praying or prophesying, but virtually an absolute prohibition of speaking in tongues, the passage may be more easily understood. This "gift" of speaking in tongues, if exercised by a woman, could very easily be identified by the hearers, or by pagan outsiders, with the incoherent and hysterical "prophesyings" of the unveiled and often dishevelled pagan priestesses which formed an essential part of their behaviour. Paul's instruction that the sisters

should not "speak in tongues", and should be veiled when they did speak in prayer or exposition, and perhaps in reading of the Scriptures, would save them, and the entire church, from that loss of good repute which would accrue if their actions were confused with the disreputable behaviour of the priestesses or the *hetaira*, as the "emancipated" women of Greece were called.

In which case, of course, Paul's rule laid down in this passage has no application whatever to the present time since the social and religious conditions which called it forth no longer exist. In a modern assembly meeting where open discussion, reading, prayer or the giving of testimony is proceeding it is fundamentally no more indecent for a woman to stand up and speak than it is for man. The logical conclusion is that Paul was legislating for a condition peculiar to his own period and that it was not intended to be applied after that condition had ceased to be.

The admonition to Timothy (1 Tim. 2. 8-12) treats of a different aspect, the position of women as teachers in the assembly. Here again there is first of all tacit agreement that the sisters did in reality share in some features of the ministry. The men, says Paul, (vs. 8) whom he appoints to pray "*in every place*", in whatever church meeting it may be, are to do so lifting up holy—spiritually clean—hands, in a reverential spirit, not in one of rancour or debate. "*In the same way,*" or "*in like manner, the women also,*" he goes on; this expression indicates that they also are commissioned to pray as do the men and in the same attitude of mind, but, in addition, they are to be modestly and soberly appropriately attired, not flaunting jewellery or other typically feminine adornments, and known for their good works "*which is becoming for women undertaking the worship of God*" (vs. 10. *Diaglott*). There is much here reminiscent of the qualities required of those who were recognised as deaconesses in the church. But here Paul does express one definite prohibition which allows of no compromise. "*I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man*"—not "the man" as in A.V.—"*but to be quiet. For Adam was first formed, then Eve*" (vs. 12-13). That last remark affords the clue. No woman is to exercise the prerogatives of duties of an elder or minister in the church in the presence of a man, and that because the one who officiates as elder represents our Lord, the true Teacher. In the Divine order the man speaks on behalf of the

woman when standing before God just as Adam was first created and was held responsible for his wife in addition to himself. Writing to the Ephesians (ch. 5. 22-32) Paul explains that the husband is thus the head of the wife in the same manner that Christ is the head of the church and yet not in an oppressive or dominating manner but in the sense that the head and body of any human being is one entity but the head speaks for and represents the whole. So in the assembly, the Church, the one representing Christ the Head, the one exercising, by proxy as it were, the duty of leading and teaching the Church must be a man, must in fact, be one whom the Church has already recognised as marked out by the Holy Spirit as fitted thus to lead and teach. In this sense the woman may not "assume authority over the man".

Thus is the dignity of the Church and acknowledgement of Christ its Head preserved. Paul does not say, and there is nothing to suggest that he thought, that a woman is by reason of her sex necessarily unfit to teach. It might have been that the more secluded position of women in Paul's day rendered them not so suited for such a duty as would be the case today but this is not his point. There is no question of inferiority involved, It is the fact, unrealised by men in general at this present, but fully to be under-

stood and implemented in the world that is to be, that the man and woman together form a single unit in the sight of God, and the man is the spokesman. So in the church, the one who stands before the assembly to represent it in God's sight as prayer and praise ascends, and who conveys to it the heavenly instruction which comes from God by his Holy Spirit, must be a man.

As if to show that there are compensations for the denial of this particular form of service to God, the Scripture records the names of many women who were used mightily in the course of God's developing purpose and have become famous for their faith and their works. Miriam, Rahab, Ruth, Deborah, Huldah, Esther, Anna, Dorcas, Lydia, come readily to mind, and there are others. And to the everlasting glory of womanhood, when the men disciples at the trial of Jesus lost their faith, panicked, and dispersed, it was a small knot of women who in those dark days retained their faith and were first at the Tomb on the third day, and were honoured by being the first to know of the Resurrection and the first to see the risen Lord. In the final analysis we shall find that God has used and will use each one of us in that position and for the duty in his creation for which we each are best fitted, without partiality or favour, "*for there is no respect of persons with God*".

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## THINK ON THESE THINGS

The Apostle Paul in Phil. 4. 8 gives very good advice to the Christian believer. He tells us (see, for example, *Rotherham* and *Diaglott* translations of this verse) to think on the things which are true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, of good report. This does not mean just reading about these things, as we would read a newspaper or a novel, to keep abreast with the world's happenings, or to have an hour's entertainment. The Greek word '*legizomai*' rendered 'think' is defined by Greek lexicons as follows: 'To think upon, ponder' (*Bagster*); 'Think upon, consider' (*Robinson*); 'Consider, weigh' (*Souter, Abbott; Smith* are similar). The *Diaglott* therefore very aptly translates "*Attentively consider these things*". These things to which the Apostle is referring are worthy of our deepest and careful consideration. They are not things which are to afford us momentary consideration, and then to pass from the mind. They are to be considered, pondered over, weighed up. They are to be stored in our mind,

our memory, to be reflected upon. By this process they will become part and parcel of ourselves. We think this is what the Wise Man is referring to when he said—"As he (a man—or woman as well) *thinketh in his heart, so is he*". In this way our characters are formed—developed, for good or bad—for right or wrong. No wonder that the Apostle admonishes us to set our mind upon the heavenly things—for it is by the renewing of our mind (through heavenly knowledge—Col. 3. 10) that we are transformed into the Divine likeness. (Col. 3. 3 RV; Rom. 12. 2 with 2 Cor. 3. 18.)

In thinking of those things which are true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, our minds naturally and truly turn to our Lord Jesus, our great pattern and example. In him we truly find these things personified. Can we think of another character which so sets forth and exhibits to us the things that are true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely. The Apostles were indeed noble examples, for us, but they were

also, as we are told in Acts 14. 15, men of like passions as ourselves, and in that way fall short, as they themselves have acknowledged, of the glorious example and standard set before us in our beloved Lord. It is for this reason that the Master alone can speak to us and say "*Follow Me*". No one else can speak to us in this way. The Apostles never exhorted us to follow them. They did indeed say—see RV of 1 Cor. 11. 1—"*imitate us as we imitate Christ*", that is, follow our example—do as we do, follow the Master. So we have such good advice as "*Attentively regard Jesus*" (Heb. 3. 1 *Diaglott*). "*Looking away to . . . Jesus. Consider him attentively*" (Heb. 12. 2, 3 *Diaglott*). Looking away to Jesus suggests to us, (as some have pointed out) that we are looking away from all others, and looking unto him. "*They saw no one, save Jesus only*". This was of course very appropriate in the letter to the Hebrews, where the writer is drawing attention to the contrast between the old arrangement and the new. They were to look away to Moses, Aaron, and the other leaders of the past, and to realise that God's great Messenger now speaking to them was the Son "*This is my beloved Son . . . hear ye him*".

The word "consider" in Heb 12. 3 ("*consider him*") is the Greek word "*analogizomai*" which Bagster's Analy. Greek lexicon defines as meaning "consider attentively" and Robinson as "consider attentively—reflect upon". This calls for deep and reverent meditation. The word "consider" in Heb. 3. 1 is *katanoëoo* which is defined by Bagster as meaning "Observe, mark, contemplate". Robinson gives the further definition of "To mind accurately" while Abbott-Smith says "consider carefully" and Souter "Take in a fact about". This draws to our attention the importance of careful and accurate information concerning this great One who we are exhorted to observe or contemplate. This brings us into line with the requirements of Phil. 4. 8. There are many things which we may read about in a newspaper or a novel which may be neither true, or lovely; they may not be just. It is of course necessary for us to be acquainted with the things happening in the world, that we may note the things foretold in our Father's word of Truth, and where we are on the stream of time. But we do not, or should not, let our minds be filled with these things, that they become part and parcel of us. The things with

which we are to fill our minds and be transformed are the things which are true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, and of good report.

In thinking of our Lord as the exemplification of these things, let us see that we are conforming our pattern to the ideal. A thing may be true, and yet may not be pure, and it will therefore fall short of our ideal. It will therefore not be one of those things with which we should fill our minds. A thing may be lovely, but it may not be true. It, no less than the first mentioned, must also be discarded. The things which we learn about our Lord must not only be pure, and lovely, but they must also be true, otherwise they are not the "*katanoëoo*" knowledge which we have seen mentioned in Heb. 3. 1. We should note that first in the list of those things which we are to think upon and lay to heart, as some translations give Phil. 4. 8, are those things which are true. They may be pure, they may be lovely but if they are not true, they are not giving us an accurate knowledge of our beloved Lord and Master. They are not the things which we should think over and lay to heart.

All Christians will agree that the only accurate source of information concerning our Master is that given us in the New Testament, the pictures which the writers of the New Testament have drawn for us of him, what He said and did. The nearer we get to the thoughts of the original in which the manuscripts of the New Testament were written the better the opportunity we have for getting a fuller and more accurate knowledge of the Son of God. In addition to the New Testament writings, there have, of course, been many good books written to help us understand more fully and with accuracy the things which are true, and pure, and lovely, as portrayed in Jesus of Nazareth. Good men have concentrated their studies upon the New Testament, often in its original language, that they may seek to draw therefrom and faithfully portray the portrait and character of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Complete knowledge in all things is not given to anyone at the present time, and it must be frankly acknowledged that while much that is true and good has been set forth by such writers, they are not entirely free from errors. But as such they have indeed been on the right track, in seeking to ascertain from, and set forth, the New Testament teaching concerning the Man Christ Jesus.

## A REST TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD

*"We which have believed do enter into rest . . . there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." (Heb. 4. 3 & 9).*

Most Christian people—except perhaps the young and the naturally energetic—are conscious at times of a desire for rest. Rest from the eternal conflict; a cessation of the tiring struggle against unrighteousness and injustice and every form of evil. It were unnatural were it not so, for the Christian life was always intended to be a conflict and a struggle, and where those things obtain there must be at times a desire for rest. The traditional Heaven of mediaeval days was always depicted primarily as a place of rest. The well-known and probably completely unhistorical story of the epitaph carved on the tombstone of the poor old worn-out charwoman whose life had been one of unending toil "*Gone to do nothing for ever and ever*" is well-known only because it delineates a real trait in many Christian characters, the longing for rest. The oft-expressed hope of the early Christians was for rest from the wickedness of this world; in those days they had much more justification than have we for weariness on that score. And the secret of the intense longing felt by many believers, of more devotional turn of mind, for their Lord's return to take them to be with him, is largely their desire to be associated with him in what they picture as an eternal rest.

But the writer to the Hebrews is not speaking of any kind of possible future rest to follow the toils of this life. He is speaking in the present tense and the rest into which we are invited to enter is one that is ours *now*. Here is a very real sense in which we can cease to strive and struggle, and enter a condition of complete rest, yet without forsaking in any degree that life of service and activity which is ours and should always continue to be ours while we have any talents or opportunities whatever to expend for Christ. This rest we are strongly exhorted to attain. "*Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.*" (vs.11) is the word. A paradoxical statement, "labour" to "rest" but a profound truth lies behind the exhortation.

The world to-day knows no rest. "Peace, peace, but there is no peace" has become a truism. It is a condition of mind not to be envied. There is upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking to the things coming upon the

earth. So, said Jesus, would it be in the last days and to-day that word is true as never before. But Christians are to be a contrast to all this. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" is the Divine injunction and unless we can reach up to that level we are missing much of the real essence of Christian living. Faith has to play an important part in this; we have to develop a faith based upon a sure knowledge of God and his ways, a sure conviction that he is steadily working in the world of men to bring mankind to himself. It is when we come to that realisation we can endure with greater confidence the many circumstances of life which would seem to give the lie to any assertion that the world will yet be saved from itself. On this faith, and in the quietude of this rest, is Christian character developed and God's Will done in our minds and hearts.

What then is this rest?

Before trying to answer the question, look back to the words in Hebrews 4. The writer is talking about Natural Israel at the time of the Exodus. They were plodding through the wilderness on the way to a Promised Land, but they were suffering all kinds of hardships and misfortunes meanwhile. They had a "rest" offered them; an entry into a land "flowing with milk and honey", a land that would gratify their fondest desires. After the rigour and perils of the wilderness their life in that Promised Land was to be indeed a "rest". But they never attained it. A later generation inherited the land; the generation that left Egypt with such high hopes and sojourned in the wilderness forty years never entered in. Why? Hebrews 4 gives the answer. "*They entered not in because of unbelief.*" (vs. 6). That is a most amazing sequel to their pilgrimage. They had enjoyed every possible outward evidence of the Divine power and protection extended on their behalf—far more in a physical sense than we have to-day. The pillar of fire protected them by night and the cloud led them by day. The manna and the quails and the water from the rock all came at their times of greatest need. With an high hand the Lord delivered them from the Egyptians and brought them to himself. What more could they want or expect? The Promised Land was in front of them, waiting to be entered. True there was fighting to be done, but there was the definite promise of victory. Why then the failure?

"Because of unbelief." They sent the spies to search out the land. Joshua and Caleb returned with the heartening assurance "Let us go up, for we are well able to possess it", but they disbelieved. So came the sentence "Tomorrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea." That is the penalty of unbelief, the wilderness. There are two kinds of wilderness; the wilderness *with* God and the wilderness *from* God. It is good for us if we are in the wilderness *with* God; there we can learn of him and grow strong in his ways. It is hard for us if we find ourselves in the wilderness *apart* from God, but this is the penalty of unbelief.

So this rest is one into which we enter because of complete faith in and dependence upon God, and in this rest we find spiritual strength. It does not imply idleness or sloth; the vigorous activity of a full Christian life can be assiduously pursued in complete possession of this rest. The Bible itself gives us enough examples of that in its accounts of great things in early days; those historical narratives illustrate the various aspects from which we view this rest.

Consider the story of creation. Out of the chaos and clashing elements came the peace and calm of Eden. Then God entered into his rest, that seventh day on which He rested from all his works which He had made, a cessation of creative activity in relation to his Plan for mankind. Creation still continued, for God is ever a Creator, but at Eden He left his Plan for this earth to run its course, confident and restful as to its outcome. That was the rest of *knowledge*. He knew that his Will would be accomplished and what He had purposed would come to pass. We too need the rest of *knowledge*. We *know* and therefore are content.

Adam and Eve in the garden entered into rest. They had the Divine commission to till the ground and reap its fruits and that implied diligence and activity. They were bound to render worship to their Creator and that implied loyalty and obedience. But in that life they enjoyed a rest, the rest of *dependence*, dependence on God. We too need the rest of *dependence*. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Noah in the days of the antediluvian world was told an unheard of thing. A flood that was to come would destroy that whole order of things but by the building of an Ark Noah could save

himself and all who with him believed God. In the turmoil and confusion of that doomed world Noah achieved complete rest, the rest of *confidence*. In the power of that confidence he triumphed and was saved. So it may be with us. "*In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.*" "*Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.*" We must have the rest of *confidence*.

Abraham was called the Friend of God, but his life was a stormy one and he was called upon to pass through many strange experiences. His faith was tested to the uttermost; yet the story of his life reveals a calmness and serenity which declares in no uncertain tones that his life was lived in a condition of rest with God. His was the rest of *obedience*. He was obedient because he believed, and that belief earned for him the honour of justification by faith. We also, if we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and are obedient, also are justified by faith and we also enter in to the rest which comes from *obedience*.

The first disciples of Jesus, between his death and the Day of Pentecost, were disturbed and perplexed, but when they gathered "with one accord into one place" and the Holy Spirit descended upon them, they one and all entered into rest. All the best of the lessons of past men's lives was built into their experience; their rest was one of knowledge, of dependence, of confidence, of obedience; in the power of that rest they were able to go forth in all boldness to preach the Word and become known as the men who had turned the world upside down. They believed; therefore they entered into rest, and nothing could destroy that rest. That same rest is for us, if we believe. It is complete and unassailable, based on our relationship with the Father through his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Accepting Christ's finished work, at his hands, we enter into rest. This rest is our rightful inheritance; none can deprive us of it but we ourselves can throw it away. The Promised Land is before us; Jordan is held back; there is nothing in the way. There are enemies in the land, seeking to destroy our rest, but "greater is he that is for us than all that can be against us" and we have nothing to fear—except unbelief. Except we believe, we shall in no wise enter in.

"*Let us therefore fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.*"

## Note on the Creation of Man

*"My substance was not hid from thee" says the Psalmist in Psa. 139. 14-16 "when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, the days they should be fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."* That is a very striking passage throwing light on the creation of man. The Evolution theory declares that the human child in the process of its development before birth passes through all the evolutionary stages of its animal ancestors; the Word of God says that God planned the structure of man's body before any part of that body came into existence. There are similarities between the physical frames of men and animals; that is only to be expected since both live under the same outward conditions and have much the same physical needs; but this by no means demands that the one is descended from the other, and the Psalm above quoted states very definitely that God planned man as a special creation. There are two interesting statements by notable scientists of a past generation which are well worth repeating in this connection. Sir Richard Owen (1804-1892), a British naturalist, superintendent of the Natural History Dept. of the British Museum, a fellow of nearly every learned Society in Britain and America and recognised as one of the authorities in this branch of learning, said *"the recognition of an ideal exemplar for the vertebrated animals (animals having spines or "backbones") proves that the knowledge of such a being as man must have existed before man appeared. For the Divine mind that planned the archetype (first pattern) also foreknew all its modifications. The archetypal idea was manifested in the flesh under divers modifications upon this planet long prior to the birth of those animal species that actually exemplify it."* In other words, the fact that the animal creation exhibits a constantly ascending scale leading up to and culminating in man, the crown and glory of earthly creation, indicates that the knowledge of such a being as man must have existed in the

mind of the Creator when the first animals were brought into being, long before man was introduced upon earth. Louise Agassiz (1807-1873), an eminent Swiss naturalist and professor at Harvard University, U.S.A., and author of many books on Natural History, said in his *"Principles of Zoology"* (1848) "there is a manifest progress in the succession of beings on the surface of the earth. This progress consists in an increasing similarity to the existing fauna, and among the vertebrates (animals) especially in their increasing resemblance to man. But this connection is not the consequence of a direct lineage between the faunas (living creatures) of different ages. There is nothing like parental descent connecting them. The fishes of the Palæozoic Age are in no respect the ancestors of the reptiles of the Secondary Age, nor does man descend from the mammals which preceded him in the Tertiary Age. The link by which they are connected is of a higher and immaterial nature, and their connection is to be sought in the view of the Creator himself, whose aim in forming the earth, in allowing it to undergo the successive changes which geology has pointed out, and in creating successively all the different types of animals which have passed away, *was to introduce man upon the surface of our globe.* Man is the end towards which all the animal creation has tended from the first appearance of the first Palæozoic fishes".

Thus the same phenomena which has been explained by Evolutionists as an evidence of the descent of man from the lower animals was noticed by scientists years before the Evolution theory was promulgated in the *"Origin of Species"*, published in 1859, and was realised to be evidence of the Creator's orderly methods in creation, *"first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear"*. God commenced with very humble forms of life and went on with creatures of ever greater complexity and increasing similarity to man until at last man himself appeared, the last and final work of God's hands.

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We must always remember that the ministry of light does not terminate in us. The blessing of light upon us is given that it may shine through

us. Every sunbeam calls attention to the mighty source from whence it springs; every moment that it shines the sun is magnified.

