

The Berean Expositor

Acts xvii. 10, 11

“Study to show thyself approved unto God,
a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,
rightly dividing the Word of truth”

II Tim. ii. 15

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Dear Fellow-members,

We give thanks that by the grace of God we are able to issue another volume of *The Berean Expositor*. During the past two years reprinting of old bound volumes that have been out of stock for a long time has continued, and we are now pleased to report that the backlog of missing volumes has now almost been made up. We shall continue reprinting until a complete stock of bound volumes is available to our readers.

In addition, a new Index is being prepared for these volumes. As we wish to make this as comprehensive as possible it will involve a great deal of time in search and notation. Nevertheless, when ready it will provide an analysis of Bible exposition which we believe will be of considerable value to the earnest Bible student.

The level of distribution of the bi-monthly magazine has been maintained, and has shown a slight increase during the past two years. We take this opportunity of thanking all friends who have continued to help us actively, financially, and prayerfully in this work. Without this valuable help this witness for the “good deposit of truth” could not be maintained so well for so long. May we carry on as faithfully as we can to “redeem the time” as long as this age of grace lasts. To Christ be all the glory.

Yours by His Grace,

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“Freely ye have received, freely give”

Will you assist in this direction by purchasing an extra copy and introducing to a friend,
or sending us a request to do so? *Freely ye have received, freely give.*

Christian Attitudes

No.17. Loneliness.

pp. 10 - 12

“I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop” (Psa. cii. 7).

Introduction

Loneliness might be described as the condition of being alone. As a person becomes older, friends move to other districts, or pass away, and so an old person may feel isolated and friendless. Depression and despondency may follow. On the other hand, a person may be surrounded by many people and yet feel lonely. One may take a trip to London and stand at one of the busy junctions, such as the corner near the Bank of England, and see so many people rushing hither and thither, but they are all strangers and you are not recognized or noticed. “I watch and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop.” There is a feeling of loneliness if one is deserted by one’s friends, as is indicated by the Psalmist when he wrote “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psa. xli. 9), and these words apply also to the Lord Himself, when He was betrayed.

The Lord spoke of the sparrow as an example to show His love and care for all, including the lonely, and to give His assurance of the provision He makes for each one.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke xii. 6, 7. See also Matt. x. 29-31).

When we feel neglected and like a sparrow alone upon the housetop, let us remember that God is with us and He has not forgotten us. As he provides for the sparrow, He will provide for us. Remember, too, the promises made to Moses and Joshua, “He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed” (Deut. xxxi. 8; Josh. i. 9; Heb. xiii. 5). Christ did not forsake His disciples but made provision for them when He had to leave them. He sent the Holy Spirit to be their Comforter and guide them (John xiv. 16-18).

Elijah

The servants of the Lord frequently had experiences of loneliness. The O.T. prophets were sent with messages from the Lord, often with warnings and admonitions, and their task made them sometimes unpopular, and often lonely men. Elijah is an excellent example.

At first we read of the unpopular message “there shall not be dew nor rain these (three) years” (I Kings xvii. 1). He ran away to hide by the brook Cherith. Later he went to Zarephath. Read the full story in chapters xvii. and xviii.

The challenge of the 450 prophets of Baal is exciting. Let the God that answers by fire be the true God. Baal could not answer but God sent the fire, and later He sent the rain.

But the story as recorded in I Kings xix. is related to our study. Elijah's life was threatened, so he ran away with his servant. At Beersheba he left his servant and went alone into the wilderness. Under the juniper tree we hear Elijah saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers". He was very depressed. An angel gave him refreshment twice and he went for 40 days in the strength of that food. "What doest thou here Elijah?" asked the Lord. The Lord then revealed Himself to Elijah, not in the strong wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but in a still small voice. "What doest thou here?" asked the Lord again. In reply Elijah complained to the Lord that Israel had forsaken the covenant, thrown down His altars, killed the prophets, and Elijah himself was in great danger, "and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life". Elijah believed he had come to the end for he thought he was alone, and his life was in real danger. How hopeless was his case! How depressed was Elijah!

But what was God's answer to Elijah? The full answer is given in I Kings xix. 15-18:

He must anoint: Hazael to be king over Syria.
Jehu, to be king over Israel.
Elisha, to be prophet in Elijah's place,

and God added:

"Yet I have left Me SEVEN THOUSAND in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (verse 18).

Was Elijah really alone? He thought he was but many were following the true God. And God had His plans for the future of Israel. When we think all is lost, let us remember that God is in control and He has His own plans which will ripen in due course. God will not fail us nor forsake us.

Our Lord

Let us remind ourselves of the tremendous cost paid, and the sufferings endured by the Lord. When the final test came was He supported by the disciples, or was He alone?

"But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled" (Matt. xxvi. 56).

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matt. xxvii. 46).

"But He was wounded for our transgression, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah liii. 5).

The Apostle Paul

Paul often asked the brethren to be followers of him, and in I Cor. xi. 1 he writes, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ". He followed his Lord closely and suffered with Him. We have noticed how the disciples forsook Christ and fled. Paul had a similar experience. In II Tim. i. 15 we read:

" all they which are in Asia be turned away from me",

and in II Tim. iv. 16:

"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me",

but he adds in verse 17, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me".

If we endeavour to follow Paul as he followed Christ, we must not be surprised if we share, perhaps in a rather small way, in this kind of experience. If we try to "hold fast the form of sound words", some may turn away from us. We might be called to endure some loneliness. If we are able to have fellowship with those who share our faith let us be thankful, for it is indeed precious and helpful to enjoy such fellowship. But if we are isolated, may we be enabled to hold fast the form of sound words.

A last word

Are you one of those who feel lonely? You feel your need of fellowship? The Lord knows your need.

"But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. iv. 19).

No.18. Fellowship. pp. 29 - 32

"truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (I John i. 3).

The family were at home and auntie would probably call as she was expected to be in the district. She came and brought her friends with her. They looked around in the garden, but No! they could not stay for tea. They all came indoors for a chat and then they went. One of the ladies who was quite a stranger to the family said to the lady of the house, "Thank you very much for the fellowship". This remark caused a discussion in the family. Was this just a polite way of saying, "Thank you for receiving us"? Did the friend really think that wandering in the garden and polite talk inside the house constituted real fellowship?

We can ask ourselves some questions. What do *we* mean by fellowship? What is the meaning of the word, fellowship? What does the Bible tell us about fellowship?

Was the stranger right in thanking the family for their fellowship? When we speak of fellowship, we usually think of sharing spiritual things. If we speak to those who hold similar or identical faith and we rejoice together as we talk of those things, this is fellowship. The two disciples walking to Emmaus enjoyed the Lord's conversation about the Scriptures which concerned Himself and they said "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke.xxiv.32).

While fellowship may be greatly enjoyed between Christians who share their experience and their faith, is it not more important to have fellowship with the Lord? The whole of I John i. 3 reads:

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ."

Writing on the subject of true prayer and fellowship with God, Charles H. Welch says in *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 10, page 79:

"God forbid that we should ever regard prayer as a Christian act to be engaged in only when we *want* something, but rather learn, in a practical way, what day by day fellowship with the Father means, its wonder, privilege and joy. Just as breathing is the natural expression of physical life, so should prayer be the normal and continuous expression of our spiritual life."

Let us consider the meaning of the word "fellowship". We have assumed, so far, that fellowship is of necessity concerned with spiritual realities. Is this so?

If we look at the early chapters of the Acts we find that fellowship is related to having all things in common, and that meant material and spiritual things. Two references will illustrate this:

"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and *fellowship*, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts ii. 42, 44).

"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things *common*" (Acts iv. 32).

Again, we quote Charles H. Welch, who writes on Fellowship in *An Alphabetical Analysis*, Part 2, pages 24-28:

"The basis of the word fellowship is something that is 'common' like a 'common faith' or a 'common salvation'. The bulk of the references is of a practical nature, manifesting in deed, and by the sharing of expenses, the blessings which all shared alike in grace. The believer should be willing 'to communicate' (I Tim. vi. 18), which is used in that passage almost synonymously with readiness 'to distribute'. The Philippians, not only

knew about 'the fellowship' of the sufferings of Christ (Phil. iii. 10), they had fellowship with Paul in the gospel also (Phil. i. 5; iv. 15)."

When we consider the references in Acts and Charles H. Welch's comments we can see that it is not correct to restrict the meaning of fellowship. It certainly includes the sharing of spiritual things, and true fellowship must include prayer and communion with God our Father. Sharing material things must not be excluded. Paul had much to say about the gift made by the Philippians (see Phil. iv. 10-19), and when writing to those at Corinth he gave instructions about the orderly manner in which the collection should be made (see I Cor. xvi.). Because "having all things common" was in the Acts period, we cannot say that the principle of sharing with those who are in need does not apply to us. Paul told the Philippians that their gift was "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God".

We will not attempt to list every reference to fellowship, but the word *koinonia*, translated fellowship, is sometimes translated "communication", or "contribution", or "communion". In the touching letter that Paul wrote to Philemon about his runaway slave Onesimus, *koinonia* appears in the A.V. as "communication":

"That the *communication* of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus" (Philemon 6).

In Rom. xv. 26 fellowship is shown by a material gift:

"For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem."

In a negative sense we have a reference in Eph. v. 11:

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

If we are working on the A.V. with a concordance we shall find Eph. iii. 9 reads "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, Who created all things by Jesus Christ". But if we turn to the R.V. we find that instead of "fellowship" we have "dispensation". Some texts have the Greek word *oikonomia* instead of *koinonia*, and scholars hold the view that the R.V. is better than the A.V. Both Mr. Welch and Mr. Allen use the R.V. for this verse.

But the spirit of Ephesians is that our position in the Body does merit the word fellowship. If we turn to verses 6 and 7 of Eph. iii., Stuart Allen in *Letters From Prison*, page 60, quotes the Revised Version thus:

"To wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs and fellow-members of the Body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God which was given to me according to the working of His power."

So in Ephesians we have a strong and warm unity in Christ, being joints and bands, all working together and building each other up in the faith.

To conclude, let us remember the three references to fellowship in Philippians:

- i. 5. Your fellowship in the gospel.
- ii. 1. Fellowship of the Spirit.
- iii. 10. Fellowship of His sufferings.

Fellowship in the gospel will give plenty of scope for sharing in things material and spiritual. Fellowship in the Spirit should help us to be likeminded, the same love, of one accord, of one mind. Fellowship of His sufferings can only be endured by the power of His resurrection. But what a wonderful fellowship!

No.19. Distress. **pp. 49 - 53**

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous:
but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Psa. xxxiv. 19).

In this present life there are many things that affect all of us, whether we are Christians or not: we are by nature descended from Adam, and through his fall we are involved in its consequences. Everyone has to face life as it is. We read in Job v. 7:

“Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.”

In Matt. v. 45, when Jesus Christ was teaching the multitudes, He told them to love their enemies:

“. . . . that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.”

While it is true that both the just and unjust are subject to the trials and limitations of this present life, the invitation of Jesus Christ, extended to men while He was on this earth, promised relief and rest to those who came to Him. But He did refer to His yoke. In Matt. xi. 28-30 we read:

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”

In His earthly ministry Christ did not offer an easy life to those who followed Him. He said to His disciples:

“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. xvi. 24).

The apostle Paul did not tell Timothy that his life would be an easy one. He urged him to be strong, be faithful, and to stir up the gift that was in him; not to have a spirit of fear, and to hold fast the form of sound words. He wrote in II Tim. i. 8:

“Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.”

In verses 11 and 12 of the same chapter, Paul says that he was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. And he continues, “For which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed”. So he was an example to Timothy, but notice that Timothy was to share “the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (verse 8).

Whenever there is affliction, suffering, or pain, there is also strength given. When Paul wrote to the Philippians (iii. 10) and referred to the sharing of the sufferings of Christ, and being made conformable to His death, he mentions first the “power of His resurrection”, which is the enabling power by which we endure all things.

As Timothy was to follow the example of Paul, we may remind ourselves of his own experiences. In II Cor. xi. 22-33 we have a long list of Paul’s sufferings for Christ. There is also a shorter list in II Cor. vi. 4-10 where we note in verse 4 that Paul speaks of “afflictions, necessities, distresses”. In II Cor. xii. 10 he says:

“Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

Although Paul suffered distresses, he was not overwhelmed by them, for he writes in II Cor. iv. 8, 9:

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;”.

No doubt all of us experience trouble, for as we have seen in the book of Job, man is born unto trouble. But the experience of the faithful servant who suffers for his faith, who shares the afflictions of the gospel, and who partakes of the sufferings of Christ, is somewhat different. We *share* with Christ, and that means that He is with us and granting us help and strength by reason of which we may endure to the end. But in these present days, circumstances are different. It is possible that we may have to endure physical suffering as Paul did, for many suffer for their faith in Russia and other countries. In this country we have so far experienced no physical suffering, but if we suffer it is more likely to be mental distresses or anxiety. That is why this article is headed “Distress”. We may have been preserved so far from such pain, but who knows what may lie ahead. Let us be prepared for any trial that may await us.

Distress may be defined as anguish or agony. It may be due to physical or mental anguish and may be caused by poverty or misfortune, or other troubles. It is said that distress is a painful degree of suffering (physical or mental). Unlike anxiety, distress is caused by immediate, not future trouble. The cause is real and not imaginary. Thus,

distress is the more extreme and painful form of suffering. Anguish normally refers to mental suffering, but agony is the torture of the mind.

Agony occurs only once in the New Testament. It is the Greek *agonia*, and is found in Luke xxii. 44, where the agony of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane is described. He was subject to extreme tension, which caused mental agony and physical exhaustion.

Anguish occurs several times, and different Greek words are used. We have already referred to II Cor. vi. 4 and xii. 10, where the Greek is *stenochoria*, and the same Greek word occurs in Rom. ii. 9 and viii. 35. In Rom. viii. 35 it is translated "distress", "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?". Read Rom. viii. 35-39. Here is reassurance, confidence, and the promise of the Lord's enabling power. We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Before we close, let us turn to the Psalms, for David during the lifetime of Saul had much to endure. He was persecuted and frequently feared for his life, but God delivered him and consequently he wrote many Psalms of praise and thanksgiving. Psalms xxxiv. is an example. We will not comment on this wonderful Psalm, but ask the reader to read it right through. Another which is worthy of study is Psalm cvii. Its structure is both interesting and helpful, so we will give it below. Fuller detail will be found given in *The Companion Bible*:

Psalm cvii.

- A | 1-3. Praise.
- B | 4-32. Distress and Deliverance.
- B | 33-41. Judgment and Blessing.
- A | 42-43. Praise.

Further expansion of B | 4-32. Distress and Deliverance.

- a1 | b1 | 4, 5. Trouble.
- b2 | 6-. Cry.
- b3 | -6, 7. Deliverance.
- b4 | 8, 9. Praise.
- a2 | b1 | 10-12. Trouble.
- b2 | 13-. Cry.
- b3 | -13, 14. Deliverance.
- b4 | 15, 16. Praise.
- a3 | b1 | 17, 18. Trouble.
- b2 | 19-. Cry.
- b3 | -19, 20. Deliverance.
- b4 | 21, 22. Praise.
- a4 | b1 | 23-27. Trouble.
- b2 | 28-. Cry.
- b3 | -28-30. Deliverance.
- b4 | 31, 32. Praise.

b1. Refers to Wandering in the wilderness.

“They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses” (6).

b2. They rebelled against the word of God.

“They cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He saved them out of their distresses” (13).

b3. Fools — Iniquities.

“They cry unto the Lord in their trouble and He saveth them out of their distresses” (19).

b4. Wanderers on the Deep (at their wit’s end!).

“They cry unto the Lord in their trouble and He bringeth them out of their distresses” (28).

At the end of each section there is the refrain:

“O THAT MEN WOULD PRAISE THE LORD FOR HIS GOODNESS AND FOR HIS WONDERFUL WORKS TO THE CHILDREN OF MEN.”

And at the end of the Psalm:

“Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord” (Psa. cvii. 43).

So in both the O.T. and N.T. we have similar testimonies:

“Even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord” (O.T.).

“. . . . nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. viii. 39).

No.20. Boasting. **pp. 69 - 72**

“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (I Cor. i. 31).

In article No.4 (*The Berean Expositor*, Volume LI, page 192) we considered “joyfulness”, and we meditated on Phil. iv. 4 “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice”. There are many references to rejoicing and we have pointed out that Paul, despite his many intense sufferings, was always rejoicing. In Acts xvi., when Paul and Silas were beaten with many stripes and thrown into prison, their feet being made fast in the stocks, we read that at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God. There was an earthquake and they were delivered. The keeper of the prison was converted. But this is just one example how Paul rejoiced continually, although he suffered so much.

There are several Greek words that have been translated “rejoice” and one word is rather striking. It is *kauchaomai*, which means “to boast”.

In Proverbs there is the well-known statement “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (xxii. 6). As children, we were taught to adopt a humble attitude (are they still taught that way?), not to boast, nor to think more highly of oneself than one ought to think (Rom. xii. 3). To believe that boasting is entirely wrong is an extreme attitude. But we should ask what is the cause of the boasting? In what circumstances may it be permitted?

There are many warnings and exhortations about boasting. At this point we should mention that the Greek word *kauchaomai* is often translated “to glory”, and there is also a Hebrew word that is translated “to boast” and “to glory”. So when in Jer. ix. 23-24 we read “glory” we might equally read “boast”:

“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”

The wise, the mighty, the rich should not boast, for the true cause of boasting is in the knowledge of the Lord and in His lovingkindness, His judgment, and His righteousness.

The clever businessman may be pleased with himself when he concludes a big deal. The Eastern style of bargaining is rather different from our way of quoting a market price, although in these modern days we have ‘discounts’, which may cause us to ask “When is a market price not a market price?”. But let us visualize an Eastern market where the buyer says “Your goods are worthless”. He walks away and then returns to offer a very low price: “I will give you so much”. Prov. xx. 14 summarizes the transaction in the words:

“It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.”

He is proud that he has bought from the poor man who must sell his wares to obtain money for food, and paid him much less than the true value.

Again in Prov. xxvii. 1 we are warned against boasting:

“Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

James iv. 14-16 conveys the same thought:

“. . . . whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.”

Psalm x. 3 also speaks of the boasting of the wicked who persecute the poor. God is not in his thoughts and he believes he will not be moved. But the Psalmist calls on the Lord to arise and defend the humble and the needy.

Psalm xlix. 6 refers to the boasting of the rich man who trusts in his wealth, and Psalm lii. 1 refers to the boasting of the man who delights in mischief (evil or wrongdoing).

The tongue is a little member—but it boasts great things:

“Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire”
(James iii. 5, 6).

So we could examine the exhortations of Scripture and ascertain the kind of boasting we should avoid. We should search the Scriptures to find what boasting is allowed. May we boast in ourselves? Should we not rather make our boast in the Lord? We have the straight answer in Psa. xxxiv. 2:

“My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.”

It is right that we should be humble and realize our weakness and our need of the strength that the Lord alone can supply. As we acknowledge His greatness, we rejoice greatly and make our boast in the Lord. We have a similar thought in Psa. xlv. 8:

“In God we boast all day long, and praise Thy name for ever. Selah.”

And in Psa. lxiv. 10:

“The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and shall trust in Him; and all the upright in heart shall glory” (see also Psa. cv. 3 and cvi. 5).

Paul wrote about boasting both in the first and second epistles to the Corinthians. There are about thirty (30) references to boasting, sometimes rendered ‘glorying’, but in II Cor. xii. 1 he says it is not expedient to glory. In I Cor. i. 27 he says that God has chosen the foolish things to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the mighty things “that no flesh should glory in His presence” (i. 29). Again in I.Cor.iii.21, “Therefore let no man glory in men”. There is nothing in us to merit any boasting. Paul does not boast of himself, but he does magnify his office. He had authority given to him by the Lord. Also he loved the Corinthians, he praised them for their generosity and was prepared to boast about them to encourage others.

But the most important reason for Paul’s boasting was the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. When he writes to the Romans about this, quite suddenly he boasts (or glories) in tribulations. To quote all the chapter would take too much space, but we quote chapter v. 1-4 and 8-11:

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and *rejoice* in the hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we *glory* in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience

But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only so, but we also *joy* in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have now received the atonement.”

We rejoice (or even boast) in the wonderful work of our Lord, but all the praise and glory is His. We rely entirely on His work. Eph. ii. 8, 9 reminds us:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Also in Phil. iii. 3 we have a similar thought:

“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and *rejoice* in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

So we must not boast of our own works or praise the flesh, but we glory only in the Lord Jesus Christ. So we come to the text at the heading of this article, and another very similar one in the second epistle. After writing “That no flesh should glory in His presence”, Paul continues:

“But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, ‘He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord’.” (I Cor. i. 30, 31).

“But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth” (II Cor. x. 17, 18).

No.21. Doctrine. **pp. 90 - 95**

“Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine” (I Tim. iv. 16).

These articles are intended to help readers in their practical lives and we have therefore concentrated on ‘practical truth’. Would an article on Doctrine be helpful? We will endeavour to set out what the Scripture says about it, and perhaps such a study may form the background for a deeper study later.

There are two references in the O.T. worthy of mention before we proceed to the N.T.

The Song of Moses is recorded in Deut. xxxii., and we quote verses 2 and 3:

“My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto your God.”

Moses set forth his teaching concerning the Lord, His greatness, His perfect work, His truth and His righteousness.

There is an interesting reference in Prov. iv. Solomon is exhorting his children, as a good father, to study wisdom. The whole chapter is profitable reading, but we must content ourselves by quoting only extracts from verses 1-7:

“Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding” (1).

“For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law” (2).

“He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments and live” (4).

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom” (7).

Solomon says his doctrine is good and he followed his father’s example. A father passed advice to his children, and in this way the doctrine was handed down from one generation to another. But then he (Solomon) says that wisdom is the principal thing, and the children should make every effort to get wisdom. We may have thought that doctrine is the vital thing, so why does Solomon say that wisdom is the first in importance? As doctrine was handed down by word of mouth (note the many references to ‘words’) there was the danger that in repeating what a father said, some inaccurate statement might be made. A wise man would spot any mistake of this kind by comparing statements made by various people, and so wisdom is important in the safeguarding of the truth. In our day we have the Scriptures, and so can compare Scripture with Scripture in our search for the truth. So wisdom is, and was, necessary to make sure that it was indeed “good doctrine”.

In the N.T. we find a word *didaskalia*, which occurs 21 times and is translated:

doctrine	19 times
learning	1
teaching	1

	21 times
	=====

“Learning” appears in Rom. xv. 4, and “teaching” in Rom. xii. 7. Rom. xv. 4 says the Scriptures were written for our learning (doctrine). According to Young’s concordance, this word means ‘teaching’, but it does not follow that the teaching is sound or good. We have to distinguish between the good and the bad: (Hence the need for wisdom). This is emphasized by the following references:

“. . . . teaching for doctrine the commandments of men” (Matt xv. 9 and Mark vii. 7).

“That we be no longer children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. iv. 14).

“. . . . after the commandments and doctrines of men” (Col. ii. 22).

There are eight occurrences of this Greek word in I Timothy, all translated in the A.V. by the English “doctrine”. They seem to form a pattern, so we will endeavour to display it:

DIDASKALIA in I Timothy

- A | i. 10. Contrary to sound doctrine.
- B | iv. 1. Latter times—doctrines of devils.
- C | iv. 6. A good minister . . . of good doctrine.
- D | iv. 13. Give attention to . . . doctrine.
- D | iv. 16. Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine.
- C | v. 17. Double honour—labour in the word and doctrine.
- B | vi. 1. God and His doctrine not blasphemed (admonition to servants).
- A | vi. 3. Consent not to wholesome words . . . and to the doctrine . . .

At the beginning and end of this letter there is a warning that some will oppose sound doctrine. This is reinforced by chapter iv., which speaks of the latter times and seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. This is balanced by the admonition to servants to respect their masters and count them as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed.

In iv. 6 and v. 17 we have the picture of the good minister who himself is well nourished in the faith and of good doctrine, so encouraging the brethren in their spiritual lives. Such ministers are worthy of double honour because they labour in the word and doctrine. They conduct a teaching ministry and are worthy of financial support, for the labourer is worthy of his hire (or reward) (verse 18).

This leads us to the central references (iv. 13 and 16) where we have Paul's instruction to Timothy to be diligent in reading, exhortation, and doctrine (teaching). Do not let anyone despise your youth, he wrote. Be an example to all believers. Don't neglect the gift you have. Watch, or give heed to your own life and to the teaching. Conduct a teaching ministry.

To complete this study, we must record the occurrences in II Timothy and Titus:

DIDASKALIA in II Timothy

- A | iii. 10. Thou hast fully known . . . my doctrine.
- B | iii. 16. All scripture . . . inspiration . . . profitable for doctrines.
- A | iv. 3. They will not endure . . . sound doctrine.

The central feature in II Timothy is that ALL Scriptures is profitable for doctrine. If our teaching is to be sound, it must take account of the whole of Scripture, which is given by inspiration of God. Paul reminds Timothy that he already knew Paul's teaching, as well as his manner of life and the many afflictions he had suffered. Timothy, too, will suffer persecution but he must continue in the things which he had learned. He mentions Timothy's training from a child, when he was taught the way of salvation by his knowledge of the Word of God. Then follows the declaration of the inspiration and profitability of the Scriptures. Paul exhorts Timothy to preach the Word, but warns him that the time will come when men will not bear (or endure) sound doctrine.

DIDASKALIA in Titus

- A | i. 9. Bishop . . . able by sound doctrine to exhort . . . convince.
- B | ii. 1. Speak thou those things which become sound doctrine.
- B | ii. 7. Showing thyself a pattern of good works, in doctrine.
- A | ii. 10. Servants . . . adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.

In writing to Titus, Paul takes specific examples, giving advice to bishops, aged men and women, young men and women, and servants. Bishops should hold fast the faithful word so that they may encourage their hearers with sound teaching and also refute those who oppose it (N.I.V.). Servants should be obedient, honest and faithful in their service. By so doing they will “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things”, (they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive, N.I.V.).

The two central texts relate to the witness of Titus. In his preaching he must convey sound doctrine. In his personal and practical life he must set a good example, showing a pattern of good works. In his teaching he must show integrity, seriousness, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned. “Those who oppose you may be ashamed because they cannot find anything to say against you.”

We have so often said that we should search the Scriptures for ourselves, to see “if these things are so”. It is right that we should do this, but we must have an open mind, so that we may be led by the Holy Spirit. Christ spoke to the Jews, “Ye search the Scriptures for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me. And ye will not come to Me that ye may have life” (John v. 39, 40). Searching the Scriptures is good, but if the mind is closed and not receptive to the Spirit’s leading, no progress is made.

Philip joined the Ethiopian eunuch in his chariot where he was reading the Scriptures, but he was making little progress. In Acts viii. 30 Philip asks if he had understood what he read. He did not but wanted help, “How can I, except some man should guide me?” said the eunuch. There are times when we need a sound teacher to help us guide us. Paul was a teacher of the Gentiles. Timothy was to be a sound teacher, and Titus was to speak those things which become sound doctrine. Bishops, and even servants, were to make their contribution.

But any teachers that teach the commandments of men are unsound. We need wisdom to distinguish between the sound and unsound teaching. In Prov. xxvii. we found that wisdom was the principal thing. The need for wisdom and understanding to enable us to grasp the teaching is evident from the prayer in Eph. i. 17-23 which requests, “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know”.

We are all searchers of truth. We search the Scriptures because “Thy Word is truth”. It is only by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit that we can get the knowledge of that truth, and especially the truth for the present dispensation.

The advice to Timothy applies to us. We need to be on the alert so that we avoid unsound teaching. We need to take heed to ourselves and to the teaching. Or as the N.I.V. translates it, "Watch your life and doctrine closely".

The Enlightenment of The Holy Spirit

No.1. pp. 190 - 196

There can be no doubt that in recent years in Christian circles there has been a tremendous emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, so much so that the Person and work of Christ has been put into the background. It is not so much now “what think ye of Christ?”, as what think ye of the Holy Spirit? And some make it quite clear that they regard the work of the Spirit to be of more importance than any other Christian truth. There is only one way to settle this, and that is to ask another question, “what saith the Scripture?” for this is the only authority that can guide us and keep us from making mistakes. Some years ago we attempted to search the Scriptures and gather together its teaching on The Holy Spirit and His ministry. This was issued and entitled *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* and we commend it to all who value the Spirit’s work, that they should read and test it from Scripture.

Fortunately for us we have the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ on this great subject in the 16th chapter of the Gospel of John:

“. . . . He (the Holy Spirit) will bring glory to Me by taking from what is Mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is Mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is Mine and make it known unto you” (John xvi. 14-15, N.I.V.).

This is so important that the Lord repeats it “He will not speak of Himself He will glorify Me” (A.V.). And there can be no greater work than this than to magnify the Saviour. He will not glorify Himself, but He will glorify Me, said the Saviour. And how will He do this? “By taking from what is Mine and making it known to you” (14, 15). “He will testify about Me” (xv. 26). “He will guide you into all truth” (xvi. 13).

This must therefore be His chief work, for what can be more important than making Christ known to others? Is not getting to know Him Who is Saviour and Lord the most important thing for both unbeliever and believer? Did not the Apostle Paul sum up the whole of his aim by saying “. . . . that I might know Him” (Phil. iii. 8-11)?

Is there any higher and holier work than glorifying Christ? The Holy Spirit is not only the revealer of Christ, but He is the revealer of *all* truth. Not only is He the inspirer and author of God’s Word, but He is the only one Who can give illumination and understanding of its divine contents.

In I Cor. ii. 9-11 we read:

“. . . Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But *God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit:* for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God . . . even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”

The Holy Spirit, being God, can plumb the depths of God and is the only One Who can. What created being can search and discover God to perfection in all His fullness? What a mighty aid then we have in the Person of The Holy Spirit, the great Revealer of Truth so that “we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (I Cor. ii. 12). All this is conveyed to us by the Scriptures which are “words which the Holy Ghost teacheth” (verse 13). The Apostle asserts that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he get to know them *because they are spiritually discerned*” (verse 14). Unaided, man cannot get to know the things of God. Education and intellectual power will not avail here.

In other words we, as believers, are shut up to the revealing power of the Holy Spirit working upon the holy Scriptures, and it is by this alone that we get to know the truth lying behind the words contained in the Word of God, as we humbly read and seek divine illumination and understanding. So we have to pray with the Psalmist:

“Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law (the Word)” (Psa. cxix. 18).

Let us get this quite clear. God’s enlightenment cannot come from theological courses or by any special methods of study by themselves. It can only come from the Holy Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Eph. i. 13-19), the great Revealer of the truth He Himself has caused to be written.

If by grace we have come to know “the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” and the prize attached to it (Phil. iii. 14), then it is by the operation of the same Holy Spirit as Ephesians declares. Eph. i. is a marvelous revelation of the will of the Father (i. 3-5), the redemptive work of the Son (5-12), & the revealing power of the Holy Spirit (12-23). This gives us the divine basis for God’s purpose of grace for the Body of Christ from its beginning to the end when its hope is realized. The Holy Spirit seals us (13), which is a figurative way of emphasizing the complete security of each member of the Body of Christ. No believer can accomplish this eternal security by his own power or actions. God the Holy Spirit sets His seal upon the salvation of the believer at the moment of believing.

This work of the Spirit does *not* refer to some exalted experience subsequent to salvation, for the tense of the Greek verbs show that the believing and sealing take place at the same time. The A.V. “after believing you were sealed” is misleading and not true. This “sealing” is the culmination of the act of salvation on God’s part. It does not indicate where the sealed person will be blessed in resurrection. That is made known in other parts of Ephesians and Colossians. It is basic, not dispensational; and this is seen by the reference to the Holy Spirit’s seal in chapter iv., “grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed *unto the day of redemption*” (iv. 30). Nor is the sealing something that is confined to the great Mystery (Secret) of Eph. iii. and Col. i. If we turn to II Cor. i. 21, 22, we read:

“Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; *Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*”

So this sealing and earnest was part of the Acts church that was waiting for the repentance of Israel and the early return of the Lord Jesus, and this was before the dispensation of the Mystery (Eph. iii. 9, R.V.) had been revealed through the apostle Paul in his Roman prison.

Needless to say, those who were sealed in Eph. i. are those whom the Father had selected (or elected) “before the foundation of the world”, and the doctrine of election runs through the whole plan of God in the purpose of the ages. Israel were an elect nation (I Chron. xvi. 13; Psa. cv. 6; Isa. xliii. 20). The faithful remnant of Israel were elect too (Rom. ix. 11; xi. 5) and the Body of Christ is also elect (Eph. i. 3, 4). But let us not make wrong deductions. In a recent exposition of the Scriptures the author insisted that as this was so, every one of the elect from Genesis onwards must be in the Body of Christ!

God has a vast new creation in view, a new heaven and a new earth which is beyond our comprehension, and He has chosen just where He wants His redeemed children to be in eternity and He is Sovereign in this. Did not the Lord Jesus picture this figuratively when He likened the new universe to “the Father’s house” which has “many rooms” (John xiv. 2, N.I.V.)? These Christ is now preparing for His children. Yet the general Christian view is that God has *one* big “room” in the future where He will lump together all His children!* [* - Paul was caught away to the *third heaven* in a vision, so there must be at least three heavens!]

The newly created “new man” of Eph. ii. 15 is an elect company whom the Father wills to bless in the heavenly places “far above all”. Even now He sees them enthroned with the exalted Christ there (Eph. ii. 6), a unique sphere of blessing for any of the redeemed of God (and there are a number of other unique features too). No wonder its members are exhorted to seek and set their mind on “things above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God, and not on the things of earth” (Colossians iii. 1, 2), for this super-heavenly calling will be their future home in eternity.

Now all this is what the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of believers to see, and gives a measure of understanding which increases as we receive the Word by faith and ask for the Spirit of revelation. This is further emphasized in Col. i. 25-27 which tells us that God wishes or wills to make this secret known among the Gentiles, “which is Christ *among* you (A.V. margin), the hope of glory”. Paul’s aim was “to make plain to everyone the administration (dispensation) of this Mystery (Secret now revealed by God)” (Eph. iii. 8, 9). Of course he is not claiming to be able to do the Spirit’s work of enlightenment, nor did he believe that everyone then living in the world would see it. There is no word for “men” as in the A.V. rendering of these verses. The “all” obviously refers to all whom the Father has chosen (Eph. i. 4).

Some might imagine that this revealed truth is so wonderful that perhaps only a few choice people would receive it. But this is not true, for in the practical section of Ephesians (iv. 16) it is clearly taught that the growth of *all* the Body depends on “the working in due measure of *every part*, unto the building up of itself in love” (R.V.). And this must be true otherwise the Body would be lop-sided. “Every part” means every

member, and each one has a contribution to make in this new creation and its growth. So God wants this new truth to be made known; the Apostle Paul fervently desired that *all* the chosen ones should see it, and then *every single member* of this company in practice should contribute his share in its spiritual growth.

But what do we find in practice? Does every believer rejoice in the knowledge of the exceeding spiritual riches of this “high calling of God in Christ Jesus”? The answer is decidedly No! Ask the average Christian if they see and understand this great Secret and are aiming that other believers should receive it and know it for themselves (Eph. iii. 9). In all probability they will look at you with puzzlement or even amazement.

What can we conclude from this? Surely either one of two things: (1) the Holy Spirit has not done His revealing work well, for many, in fact the majority of Christians do not see “the dispensation of the Mystery” (Eph. iii. 9), and some even oppose it as serious error, or (2) God has more than one plan for His redeemed today. We believe from Scripture that this is true, and if so the great problem vanishes.

No one can work out in practice what has never been revealed to them, and God Who is righteous will never expect them to do it. We ask the reader to turn back to Vol.LII and read pages 105 and 106 of the article “The Good Deposit”. We cannot quote it in full here except to point out again that automatic membership of the church of the Mystery (Secret), the Body of Christ, makes *Paul’s object “to make all see what the dispensation of the Mystery is” (Eph. iii. 8, 9, R.V.) quite unnecessary*, for its members would be in it whatever their attitude was. And this would be true of any subsequent witness to the Mystery, including that of the present time.

How strange it is that some stress the Holy Spirit’s work as *Sealer* in Eph. i. 13, 14, but ignore the Spirit’s work as *Revealer in the same chapter* (verses 17 and 18) in connection with the new calling and its hope! He had already opened the eyes of the understanding of the Ephesian believer to some extent concerning this calling (note the past tense of the verb, “the eyes of your understanding *having been enlightened*”). So a measure of understanding of this great Secret had already been given by the Holy Spirit, but more was needed, as the prayer that follows shows.

We quote from the article mentioned above, “moreover without these ‘opened eyes’ how can one *guard* the good deposit of truth (I Tim. vi. 20; II Tim. i. 13, 14)? How can anyone *guard* what is not seen and understood? Timothy was warned that faithful guarding would result in suffering and enduring hardness (II Tim. i. 8; ii. 3). How is it possible to suffer and endure hardness for truth that is not known or appreciated?”. But at the same time let us remember that all the Spirit’s enlightenment does bring responsibility to the Lord which cannot be evaded. This responsibility, if our eyes have been opened, is to make God’s truth known as far as possible and then leave all the results to Him. He will not make mistakes. He knows just what He has planned for His redeemed family in the universe of the new heaven and earth; and all finally in resurrection life will be *satisfied* with the Lord’s appointments (Psa. xvii. 15) and all will be to His glory.

The Lord is not expecting 100% success with us, but *He is expecting faithfulness to the truth He has revealed to us by the Holy Spirit*. What happens if others disagree with us or even leave us? Do we then modify our beliefs or keep silent about them to avoid trouble? What did the Apostles do in similar circumstances? Read carefully what happened to Paul in II Tim. i. 15. He tells Timothy that “all in Asia forsook him”. Asia was a large province and note Paul does not say that *some* had forsaken him. *All* believers there had done so and this must have involved hundreds of Christians who had professed to be standing with the apostle in this new Truth. What a terrible blow this must have been, but did he give up? No! See what he says in II Tim. iv. 16, 17, and also note what he said to the Corinthian church concerning some who had turned away in division (I Cor. xi. 18, 19). Note also what the apostle John said *in a similar experience* (I John ii. 19).

Faithfulness certainly costs, and some are not willing to pay the price. And yet, at the end when we meet the Lord face to face, would it not be wonderful to hear Him say to us, (or its equivalent), “well done, good and *faithful* servant” (Matt. xxv. 21, 23)? Also carefully note I Cor. iv. 2 and II Tim. ii. 2 with its stress on *faithfulness*. If we have received the “good deposit” of truth, let us guard *all of it* as being precious, remembering that one day we shall have to give an account of our stewardship to the Lord.

No.2. pp. 214 - 216

In addition to the facts of the last article, there are other points to be considered. After Acts xxviii. and the laying aside in unbelief of Israel as a nation and their destruction by the Romans in 70A.D., what happened to Peter, James & John and their ministry which was primarily to Israel (Gal. ii. 7-9)? We say *primarily* to Israel advisedly, for Peter was instructed by the Lord to widen his ministry to include the Gentiles at Acts x., and its quite unscriptural to represent his ministry as being solely to Israel. The O.T. had made it clear that God’s earthly kingdom purposes included the Gentile nations otherwise it could never be world-wide, and the O.T. prediction that “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (Isa. xi. 9) be realized. All that happened during the Acts was in line with this and must have been a feature of the ministry of James and John as well.

While Israel as a nation sank deeper and deeper into unbelief and rejection of the great Kingdom offer given in Acts iii. 19-26, there was still a number of faithful ones who responded to their ministry. They were likened by the apostle Paul to a faithful remnant, a “remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. xi. 1-5). The doctrine of the remnant is an important one and runs through the O.T. as well, *for God never leaves Himself without a witness*, and this was always true in times of apostasy that the O.T. records, and it also includes the N.T.

But what happened to this remnant of grace at the end of the Acts and afterwards? It is obvious that the ministry of Peter, James, Jude and the rest of the 12 Apostles must have embraced a considerable number of people which lasted for some generations. Where do these come in the plan of God? They certainly could not have suddenly vanished after Acts xxviii. and the revelation of the Mystery that followed. Those who hold the theory of ‘one calling’ have an insoluble difficulty here. One of them has stated “there are not two groups after Acts xxviii. 28. There may have been two groups before, but not now”. He goes on to assert that “all the Gentile Christians of the Acts period and all the Jewish Christian of the Acts period have been brought together INTO ONE NEW MAN” (Eph. ii. 15, his emphasis).

When we turn to Eph. ii. we find no such teaching, for he has added the word “all” to what Scripture reveals. Eph. ii. 15 does not say that the “new Man” consists of *all* Jewish and *all* the Gentile believers of that time, but rather that God had now *created a new Man, out of Jew and Gentile (the “twain”)*. To “create” means a new beginning, not a continuation of something that had previously existed. Out of Jewish and Gentile believers God had made a fresh start by creating a new company of the redeemed, and these were elected (chosen) by the Father “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. i. 4). Nothing is said as to the *number* of those who are chosen. There is no clue given as to whether this is a small or large company, so this therefore we have to leave.

If we assume that what this writer says about ‘one calling’ is Scriptural and true, then we have the right to ask what happened to the faithful remnant of the Acts period? If there is only one calling today, then it means that Peter, James & John, and the other 12 apostles and all the Jewish believers they ministered to must have been suddenly transferred to the Body of Christ after Acts xxviii., and the ministry of these Apostles concerning the earthly kingdom must have ceased at this point and in its place they must have witnessed to the dispensation of the Mystery (Eph. iii., Col. i.) and all the revelation of Paul’s prison epistle. This is the only logical conclusion one can come to if there is now only ‘one calling’.

But we ask, where is the *Scriptural backing* for all this, and the answer is *there is none whatsoever*. That being so, the onus is on the ‘one calling’ adherents to say just where they place the Acts period remnant after Acts xxviii., and what happened to the earthly kingdom ministry of Peter, James, John, Jude and other of the 12 Apostles after this crisis. Guessing and human opinion will not do; we cannot have sound doctrine on such a basis. The more one examines this ‘one calling’ in the light of Scripture rightly divided, the more its fallacy is evident.

It may be understandable with those who believe that the church of the One Body began at Pentecost. But with those who profess to see the dispensational setting of the Acts period and the truth of the Mystery revealed after it, one calling is not understandable. It is a blow at the heart of “the good deposit” of Truth and the “dispensation of the Mystery” with all its uniqueness and wonder. It also makes unnecessary the revealing work of the Holy Spirit which Eph. i. stresses so much, and

makes Him indulge in favouritism in revealing this Truth to some and not to all the members of the Body.

Timothy was commanded to “guard” the good deposit of truth (I.Tim.vi.20; II.Tim.i.14) and the word “guard” means to watch over carefully something that is costly and precious. He was then commanded to pass this truth on to those who could be described as “*faithful* men who shall be able to teach others also” (II Tim. ii. 2), or as the N.I.V. translates it, “*entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others*”, and this clearly shows the importance that God puts upon this super-heavenly calling by the restrictions He has given and its great stress on faithfulness and reliability.

In this “good deposit” of truth is the great revelation of the creation of the New Man, revealed through Paul the prisoner who had received it by revelation from the ascended Christ (Eph. iii. 3). It now comes as a challenge to us today who have received it by faith and enlightenment. “The eyes of your understanding having been enlightened” (Eph.i.18, note the tense) is a necessary prelude to knowing the new calling and its hope, *as this verse insists*, for it is impossible to be faithful to something that is not known or understood. If all this truthfully describes our Christian witness, we can look forward to the Lord’s approval when we meet Him face to face. We cannot play fast and loose with the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. iii. 14) which has been entrusted to our care.

Practical Truth in EPHESIANS

No.1. “Be strong in the Lord” (vi. 10). pp. 109 - 113

In this series we do not pretend to cover the whole of our subject in detail. We hope to be able to pick out some features of the subject which will encourage our readers to engage in a more complete and detailed study. Of course, there is a tremendous amount of material in *In Heavenly Places* by Charles H. Welch, and there is the exposition by Stuart Allen in *Letters From Prison*. Stuart Allen deals with Practical Truth of Ephesians in pages 71-96 (chapter iv.), pages 97-105 (v.), and in pages 106-114 (vi.). As the author has a lucid style, we recommend his book *Letters From Prison*.

The first three chapters of Ephesians are devoted to Doctrine and the final three to Practice. In Charles Welch’s book there is a chart which demonstrates that in the structure of the epistle, Practice is shown to be the outworking of the Doctrine, so making a perfect balance. As Stuart Allen says in his book:

“. . . . but the truth of God is nothing if it is not *balance* from start to finish: not all doctrine and little or no practice: or all practice and little or no doctrine. By themselves, each of these would lead to lopsidedness.”

He goes on to explain that it is important to base Christian practice on sound doctrine.

We shall take Ephesians chapter vi. first because this balances with Eph. i. 1 - ii. 7. Actually, the balancing section is Eph. vi. 10-20. At the moment we are looking at Eph. vi. 10, but the reader may like to read Eph. i. 1 - ii. 7 as an introduction to our study.

In Eph. i. 19 there is the reference to the mighty power which was wrought in Christ when He was raised from the dead. We will quote part of verse 18 and verses 19 & 20:

“. . . that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.”

In Eph. i. 19 we have the “greatness of His power to us-ward”, and the “working of His mighty power”, while Eph. vi. 10 reads:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.”

These are not words that would be addressed to children. Indeed, the Scriptures tell us of the growth that should take place. Eph. iv. 14 says “. . . . that we henceforth be no longer children”, while Philippians expresses the growth in terms of a race or contest. Phil. iii. 12-14 read “Not as though I had already attained, either were already

perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended: but this one I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus”.

To encourage us, he adds that if in any thing we are “otherwise minded” God will reveal even this to us. So there is much encouragement for all who no longer wish to remain as babes or children, but wish to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Christ Jesus.

The instruction “be strong” reminds us of Josh. i. 6, “Be strong and of a good courage”. Joshua was not a babe; he was a full grown man and indeed to be strong to lead the children of Israel into the promised land. He had to face enemies outside and doubters within the circle of the children of Israel. So we must be ready to face opposition, from any quarter, and taking the analogy of the soldier, we must endure hardship and continue right on to the end. But our strength is insufficient for such a task, so we must be strong *in the Lord*. It is not *our strength*, but the *power of His might*. Remember also Paul’s word to Timothy, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love and of a sound mind” (II Tim. i. 7).

Also Paul gave Timothy advice which is in line with Eph. vi. 10:

“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. ii. 1).

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (II Tim. ii. 3, 4).

We conclude therefore that (1) the instruction is to a fully grown man who is able to bear the heat and burden of the day, (2) he is like a soldier whose life is wholly committed to his duties, and (3) like the athlete who must keep to the rules of the game. He must realize that we face an enemy who is powerful, sly, and cunning, and he cannot deal with such an enemy in his own strength.

The Greek word that is translated “be strong” is *endunamoo*, and it appears 8 times in the N.T. It is sometimes translated “strengthen”, or “in strength”, or “enabled me”. We will list the eight passages for easy consideration:

“endunamoo” (N.T.).

“But Saul increased the more *in strength*” (Acts ix. 22).

“He staggered not but *was strong* in faith” (Rom. iv. 20).

“Finally, my brethren, *be strong* in the Lord” (Eph. vi. 10).

“I can do all things through Christ which *strengtheneth* me” (Phil. iv. 13).

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, Who *hath enabled* me” (I Tim. i. 12).

“Thou therefore, my son, *be strong* in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. ii. 1).

“Notwithstanding the Lord and *strengthened* me” (II Tim. iv. 17).

“. . . . out of weakness were *made strong*” (Heb. xi. 34).

Charles H. Welch in his book *In Heavenly Places* devotes a paragraph to this Greek word and its eight occurrences. We cannot do better than end this article with his remarks which are set out on page 404.

The power of His resurrection.

No other writer in the N.T. uses the word which is here translated "be strong" except Luke, who in Acts ix. 22 uses it of Paul himself. The exception but proves the rule. The word is peculiar to the teaching of Paul and his own experience of the risen Lord. The eight occurrences of the word *endunamao* speak of resurrection, and the seven occurrences in the epistles are worth a moment's attention.

***Endunamao* in Paul's epistles.**

A		Rom. iv. 19, 20. Strong, not weak, in faith.-- <i>O.T.</i>		
B	a	Eph. vi. 10. Strong in the Lord.--WAR.	\	
	b	Phil. iv. 13. Strong in Christ.--ENDURANCE.	\	<i>After</i>
C		I Tim. i. 12. Christ Jesus.--MINISTRY.	}	<i>Acts</i>
B	a	II Tim. ii. 1. Strong in grace.--WAR.	/	<i>xxviii.</i>
	b	II Tim. iv. 17. Strong in the Lord.--ENDURANCE.	/	
A		Heb. xi. 34. Strong in faith, out of weakness.-- <i>O.T.</i>		

The first example, that of Abraham, is a strong witness for "the power of His resurrection", for it is said that "he believed God Who quickeneth the dead". The words of Eph. vi. 10 look back to Eph. i. 19. In vi. 10 we have *endunamao*, "be strong"; *kratos*, "power"; *ischus*, "might". In i. 19 we have *dunamis*, "power"; *ischus*, "mighty"; *kratos*, "power".

The believer is turned back to the risen and ascended Christ as the source of the power whereby he may stand the shock of battle. There is no other power at present either available or sufficient. All believers, whether conscious of it as an experimental fact or not, "have the sentence of death in themselves that they should not trust in themselves, *but in God which raiseth the dead*" (II Cor. i. 9).

No.2. The Spiritual Armour (vi. 14 - 18). **pp. 136 - 140**

In the doctrinal section we learn of the great and wonderful spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. By faith we enjoy them now, but the full realization is future. Now, we have the earnest, or foretaste, a pledge of the blessing to be enjoyed later.

We read of the will of the Father, who chose us and adopted us into the family with an inheritance in view. The work of the Son is set out, the redemption through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the forgiveness of our sins according to the riches of His grace. The witness of the Spirit includes the sealing with that Holy Spirit of promise, and in the A.V. we have the phrase “after that ye believed”. Eph. i. 13, 14 reads in the N.I.V., “And you also were included in Christ when ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of His glory”. No wonder the apostle Paul exclaims in verse 3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”.

Satan is in opposition to God’s plan. We believe that Satan is a defeated enemy, but the war is not yet over. We are subjected to attacks by the enemy, and we are unable to withstand the wiles of the devil in our own strength. We must rely on the power, the mighty power, that is given to us, and remember what Christ has already done. So the apostle Paul write in Romans:

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus” (viii. 37-39).

The extent of the victory of Christ is wider than we often think. He is victor over death and the grave, and that is indeed wonderful for it leads us to think of the resurrection power, but in the passage quoted above we see a long list of those things which cannot separate us from the love of God. In Col. ii. 15 we see another viewpoint, the victory of Christ over principalities and powers:

“And having spoiled the principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (A.V.).

“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (N.I.V.).

Let us now look at the spiritual armour. We must emphasize that the armour is “spiritual”. Paul says in II Cor. x. 4 “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds”. In Rom. xiii. 12 he refers to the “armour of light” and in II Cor. vi. 7, the “armour of righteousness”.

On Page 414 of *In Heavenly Places*, Charles Welch sets out the sixfold armour of Eph. vi. 14-18 in the form of a structure, which we quote:

The sixfold armour.

- A | The GIRDLE. Truth or faithfulness.
- B | The BREASTPLATE. Righteousness.
- C | The SHOES. Gospel of peace.
- A | The SHIELD. Faith or faithfulness.
- B | The HELMET. Salvation.
- C | The SWORD. The Word of God.

In connection with the girdle, we observe that Charles Welch writes “Truth or faithfulness”, and we may ask why he adds faithfulness. The Greek word *aletheia* is translated “truth”, but Charles Welch points out that the LXX translates “faithfulness” by *aletheia*, and quotes as an example Isa. xi. 5:

“Faithfulness (shall be) the girdle of his reins.”

It is interesting to note that there is a link with the sixfold armour in other passages:

“For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation upon his head” (Isa. lix. 17).

“How beautiful are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace” (Isa. lli. 7).

Truth is absolutely vital to the Christian. There is a link between truth and faithfulness. The follower of Christ must be sincere, speak the truth and defend the truth at all times. If there is any doubt in the heart, the enemy will use that uncertainty to undermine faith, and ultimately the Christian may be deceived. Satan used this method to sow the seed of doubt when he spoke to Eve in the garden of Eden. So she was persuaded to eat the forbidden fruit and she disobeyed.

In view of the importance of truth in the life of the Christian, it may be helpful if we look at all the references to truth in this epistle. We found that in Eph. iv. 24 the A.V. reads “and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”. The margin has a note which reads “the holiness of truth”, and it appears that this gives the literal translation. We therefore include this in our list, and so there are seven references to “truth” which we find form a pattern, which we give below:

Truth in Ephesians.

- A | i. 13. Heard the word of truth.
- B | iv. 15. GROW UP. Speaking the truth in love.
- C | iv. 21. PUT OFF. Taught by Him, as the truth in Jesus.
- D | iv. 24. PUT ON. Righteousness and the holiness of truth.
- C | iv. 25. PUT AWAY. Speak every man truth.
- B | v. 9. FRUIT. Goodness and righteousness and truth.
- A | vi. 14. Loins girt about with truth.

It will be seen that in the context of truth, we have the doctrine in chapter i. (which we need to hold faithfully), followed by instructions which affect not only our faith, but our daily life. We must be sincere, truthful, in our dealings in business and in our social life, as we speak to our 'neighbour'. There are references to "grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ", also to the "fruit of the Spirit", or as translated in the N.I.V. "the fruit of the light", which follows the injunction of v. 8 to "walk as children of light". There are the practical injunctions of putting off the old man, putting on the new man, and putting away lying, so that we speak truth with our neighbour. This is practical truth for today.

We find there are eight references to faith in Ephesians which might be in the form of an introversion, like the structure of the references to Truth. We will however just list the eight references, and leave the reader to test and seek for the structure himself:

Faith in Ephesians.

- "Heard of your faith" (i. 15).
- "By grace are ye saved through faith" (ii. 8).
- "Access by the faith of Him" (iii. 12).
- "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (iii. 17).
- "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (iv. 5).
- "Till we all come in the unity of the faith" (iv. 13).
- "The shield of faith" (vi. 16).
- "Peace love with faith" (vi. 23).

In connection with the "shield of faith" in vi. 16, Charles Welch puts forward the question, is this a reference to our faith, or the Lord's faithfulness? He then draws attention to Psa. xci., as follows:

"He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday" (Psa. xci. 4-6).

The next pair in the structure of The Sixfold Armour, under **B & B**, is The Breastplate—righteousness, and The Helmet of salvation. Charles Welch links these as "heart" and "head". From a doctrinal aspect, salvation is essential. We were by nature without Christ, having no hope, and without God in the world. But it is by faith we are saved. In his book *Letters From Prison*, page 111, Stuart Allen suggests that the breastplate of righteousness does refer in the first place to imputed righteousness, but that it also has practical implications. It refers to righteousness *in action*. Stuart Allen also points out that the head stands for thinking and planning, so the helmet of salvation has doctrinal and practical implications.

The third pair in the structure, **C & C**, relating to the feet and hands, is "The Shoes—gospel of peace" and "The Sword—The Word of God". There are four references to gospel in Ephesians, i. 13, iii. 6, vi. 15 & vi. 19 and eight references to

peace, bearing in mind that in the Greek “peace” occurs twice in ii. 17. We venture to set out these passages in a structure:

Peace in Ephesians.

- A | i. 2. Grace and peace.
- B | ii. 14. He is our peace.
- C | ii. 15. Of twain, one new man, so making peace.
- D | ii. 17. Peace—those far off.
- D | ii. 17. Peace—them that were nigh.
- C | iv. 3. Endeavour to keep unity—bond of peace.
- B | vi. 15. Preparation of gospel of peace.
- A | vi. 23. Peace and love with faith.

The practical aspect of peace is shown in this structure. The need to keep the unity of the Spirit is so important, and yet how difficult this can be. We should be ready to declare the good news of peace, and witness to our faith at all times.

The Sword of our Spirit, which is the Word of God, is our only offensive weapon. All the others are defensive. As we read of the temptation endured by our Lord, we see how He used the Scriptures to great effect. In order that we should be ready to use the sword, we need to read and study the Scripture continually. Let us remember Col. iii. 16:

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

No.3. “and having done all, to stand” (vi. 13). pp. 149 - 153

We have considered chapter vi. 10 (Be strong), and verses 14-17 which describe the spiritual armour. Now we study the conflict described in verses 11-13. The fact that there are only three verses does not mean that this is not important: how profound are the statements contained therein, and we must add, how real is the foe! Because we cannot see the enemy we may tend to forget him and ignore his existence. Satan does not always go about like a roaring lion. He can, and frequently does, work so quietly that we fail to appreciate what is happening. Possibly, when we wake up to the situation, it is too late to take effective action.

There are numerous references to Satan in the Scriptures and he is given various titles. Let us search and see what the Scriptures say about him.

The first time we read of Satan’s activity is in Genesis, where we read about the fall of man. He is not called Satan but the serpent. The A.V. reads “Now the serpent was more

subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord had made” (Gen. iii. 1). Satan whispers “Hath God said”, and so the seed of doubt is sown. Disobedience followed. This is mentioned in Ephesians:

“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. ii. 2).

Here we find another title, “the prince of the power of the air”.

Other titles are given in Rev. xii. 9:

“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world.”

When our Lord was on the earth He called Satan “the prince of this world”, and the battle with Satan is clear when we read the references:

“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out” (John xii. 31).

“Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John xiv. 30).

“And when He (the Comforter) is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John xvi. 8, 11).

Paul uses another title, the “god of this world”, and he warns the Corinthians that the god of this world deceives and blinds the eyes of those who will not believe:

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, Who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (II Cor. iv. 3, 4).

As we think of the activity of the Deceiver, may we join with Paul in his prayer that we may receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened (Eph. i. 16-18).

Paul describes Satan as an angel of light and Peter in his warning describes Satan as one who goes around like a roaring lion:

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness” (II Cor. xi. 13-15, N.I.V.).

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (I Pet. v. 8, 9, N.I.V.).

In I Tim. iii. 6 there is a warning against pride which was the cause of the devil’s downfall. Christ was very outspoken about the devil when he addressed the Jews; He

said they were of their father, the devil. He was a murderer from the beginning and he did not abide in the truth. He is a liar and the father of it (John viii. 44).

In Hebrews we read that Satan had the power of death, but Jesus Christ shared flesh and blood, that through death, He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb. ii. 14-18).

We must also include a reference to the parable of the tares. In Matt. xiii. 24-42 the devil is described as the enemy who sowed tares in the field after the farmer had sown good seed. Good and bad grew up together and one could not tell which was good and which was bad. So it is in the world where there are children of the Kingdom and children of the wicked one. How difficult it is for us to know who is a child of the evil one! Only at the last day shall the good and bad be separated. What wisdom we need lest we are led astray by one who pretends to be a leader but who is not truly sent by God.

Now we must turn to other aspects. In Eph. vi. 12 (A.V.) we read “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood”, and it is interesting to look at other translations:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood” (N.I.V.).

“For we are not contending against flesh and blood” (R.S.V.).

Paul frequently writes about contending and he prefers to use the figure of the athlete, although he does refer to the soldier. He uses the Greek word *agonizo*, which means to agonize or contest publicly (Young’s Analytical Concordance). It occurs in Luke xiii. 24 and John xviii. 36. We quote four references taken from Paul’s letters. We should mention that *agonizo* is translated “strive” or “fight”, and in one place “labouring fervently”:

“And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (I Cor. ix. 25).

“Epaphras always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col. iv. 12).

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life” (I Tim. vi. 12).

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (II.Tim.iv.7).

Our struggle is with principalities and powers. What do we know about them? There are about 400 references to angels: over 200 in the O.T. and about 188 in the N.T. They are heavenly messengers. The number of passages of Scripture that mention principalities and powers are few. It appears they are the heavenly aristocracy. Some of them accept the Lordship of Christ but others were in opposition to Him. Let us collect the references and learn what we can about these heavenly beings.

Romans viii. 38 tells us nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, not even principalities and powers.

Ephesians i. 20, 21 speaks of Christ being seated at His (the Father’s) right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power.

Ephesians iii. 10 is a most remarkable verse so we quote it in full. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."

Ephesians vi. 12 "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places".

Colossians i. 16 tells us that all things were created by Him and for Him (the Son). Principalities and powers are specifically mentioned.

Colossians ii. 10 says that Christ is the head of all principality and power.

Colossians ii. 15 "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it" (R.S.V.).

In the R.V. of Eph. vi. 12, instead of "the rulers of the darkness of this world", it reads "the world rulers of this darkness". Stuart Allen in his book *Letters From Prison*, page 109, makes very interesting observations on the activities of the spiritual world. Space does not permit us to quote his remarks.

We must conclude this article by referring to the "mighty power inworked" and "the mighty power worked out". The mighty power which was wrought in Christ when He rose from the dead, is the mighty power "in-worked"; i.e. it is the resurrection power and is to us-ward who believe (Eph. i. 19, 20). Another verse which speaks of the power that works in us is Eph. iii. 20:

"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

The mighty power that "worketh in us" should be balanced by the "mighty power worked out". The A.V. of Eph. vi. 13 does not make this clear. It reads ". . . . that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand". The phrase is the Greek *katergazomai* and should read literally "having worked out all". It appears also in Phil. ii. 12 where we read "*work out* your own salvation with fear and trembling".

We are engaged in a great conflict. A great power is ours by faith, the resurrection power, and it is by God's help that we are enabled to stand, despite the pressure we experience. We have the power and we have the spiritual armour.

We are not instructed to attack the enemy or to advance into his territory. We are just told to stand. If we experience the battle of the evil day, we are to withstand and having worked out all, to stand.

We may experience many assaults of the enemy, and we need wisdom when we are under pressure resulting from the "wiles of the devil". Our stand must be to safeguard the truth committed to us and to hold fast the form of sound words. May we receive strength so that we may stand firm whenever the truth is being attacked.

**No.4. “Praying always and for me” (vi. 18, 19).
pp. 170 - 173**

In the doctrinal section, Paul stops for a while after setting out the Will of the Father, the Work of the Son, and the Witness of the Spirit. It is as though he had placed before the Ephesians such a comprehensive volume of doctrines, that he must pause, and give them an opportunity to digest what he had written, and best of all, he prays for them. In the doctrinal section we have Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians, and in the practical section Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for him.

The introduction to Paul’s prayer is quoted:

“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks to you, making mention of you in my prayers” (i. 15, 16).

Then follows the prayer in verses 17-22. We will consider it later, but let us see the other references to prayer first.

In chapter iii. there is another prayer where Paul begins: “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. For some reason he does not say “I pray to the Father”. He uses a Greek word *kampto*, which means to bend, and it occurs four times in the N.T. All four are in the epistles written by Paul, as follows:

“. . . . seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal” (Romans xi. 4).

“For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom. xiv. 11).

“For this cause, I bow my knees unto the Father” (Eph. iii. 14).

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. ii. 10, 11).

Paul had written in chapters i., ii. & iii. of so many wonderful things, and intertwined was the reference to the greatness of God, the Creator, and the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. He must have been humbled at the thought that we, who by nature are quite unworthy, have been chosen by God, given an inheritance, and that even now the manifold wisdom of God is being made known by the Church to principalities and powers in heavenly places. No wonder he bowed his knees in submission to the will and purpose of God in humility and thankfulness. He then wrote that marvelous prayer which is recorded in verses 16 to 21.

In chapter vi. we have the two verses which are the concern of our study:

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. vi. 18-20).

In I Tim. ii. 1 Paul exhorts that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men”. In the verses we have quoted above the Ephesians are exhorted to pray with all prayer and supplication, and this follows after the description of the spiritual armour. So, at first, Paul is referring to their stand against the enemy, which should then be buttressed with prayer and supplication. As they pray they must “watch with all perseverance”, and he adds “and supplication for all saints”. So prayer and supplication, which is continual as the enemy exerts pressure on the saints, must be extended to include “all saints”. Prayer and supplication is thus extended to intercession for others who are equally involved in the conflict. But Paul adds, while you pray for others, please include me. I am in prison, in chains, an ambassador in bonds, and I need your prayers so that I may be given a door of utterance, that I may open my mouth boldly (as I ought to do) to make known the mystery of the gospel. It may surprise us that Paul urgently needed their prayers, but let us remember that even the advanced preacher or teacher is in need of prayer support. This work of intercession was vital for Paul, and it is still vital today. Here is a most important work that each one of us may do. Let us share the burden of the ministry, of leadership, by praying for those who carry the responsibility; but as we remember Paul’s instruction to Timothy, may we widen our prayers of intercession to include all men. Pray for those in authority, and all who are in distress or in need of any kind.

Before we leave these observations on references to prayer, may we very briefly look at Colossians and Philippians:

Prayer in Colossians.

“We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith” (i. 3, 4).

“For this cause we also do not cease to pray for you” (i. 9).

“Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying for us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ as I ought to speak” (iv. 2-4).

“Epaphras always labouring fervently for you in prayers” (iv. 12).

The quotations are similar to those we have seen in Ephesians, and it would be interesting to compare the two epistles. To follow such a study see *The Testimony of the Lord’s Prisoner* by Charles H. Welch, especially pages 11, 205 & 206.

In Philippians there are three references to prayer. We will not comment on them as they speak for themselves.

Prayer in Philippians.

PAUL’S PRAYER FOR THEM: “Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy” (i. 4).

THEIR PRAYER FOR PAUL: “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (i. 19).

THEIR OWN PRAYER: “. . . . but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God . . .” (iv. 6).

Now let us consider the two prayers, the first in Ephesians i. 17-23, and the second in Eph. iii. 14-21. In the first prayer Paul asks that God may give (1) the spirit of wisdom, (2) revelation, and (3) in the knowledge (or acknowledgement) of Him. Then he continues, “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened (lit. ‘having been enlightened’)”, that ye may know (1) what is the hope of His calling, (2) what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints (holy place), and (3) what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe. We need wisdom to understand all that is written in the doctrinal section, and we only know what the Holy Spirit reveals to us. It has been said that we only get to know the truth by divine enlightenment. It is indeed the work of the Holy Spirit. As we receive light we have a greater responsibility to put what we learn into practice, and so acknowledge the truth which will cause us to increase in our knowledge of Christ, and to acknowledge Him. This is the way we should grow in grace.

The second prayer in Eph. iii. 14-21 has three main points:

(1) “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;

(2) that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

(3) that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.”

In the space available it is impossible to comment adequately on these two prayers, so we refer our readers to the following items of supplementary reading:

In Heavenly Places, Charles H. Welch, pp. 148-188 and 310-320.

Letters From Prison, Stuart Allen, pp. 33-43 and 65-70.

An Alphabetical Analysis, Part 10, Stuart Allen, pp. 75-90.

We conclude by giving a comparison of the two prayers:

THE TWO PRAYERS	
i. 15 - 19.	iii. 14 - 21.
THE PRAYERS ARE ADDRESSED TO	
The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.	The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
THAT HE MAY GIVE	
A spirit of wisdom and revelation.	Strength by the Spirit in the inner man.
THAT YE MAY KNOW	
Hope, riches, power.	Love that passeth knowledge.
SOMETHING "EXCEEDING" (hyperballo).	
Exceeding power.	Knowledge-exceeding love.
THE MEANS	
We in Christ.	Christ in us—"The inner man".
THE POWER IS	
The power wrought in (<i>energeo</i>) Christ.	The power that worketh in (<i>energeo</i>) us..
THE MIGHT (<i>ischus</i>) IS	
The might exhibited at the resurrection.	The might necessary to comprehend with all saints.
THE GOAL IN EACH CASE	
The fullness of Him that filleth all in all.	That ye might be filled up to the fullness of God.
HEAVENLY POWERS MENTIONED	
Every name that is named.	Every family in heaven and earth is named.

No.5. The New Creation (v. 1 - vi. 9).
pp. 233 - 237

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph. ii. 10).

In the structure of Ephesians, as set out by Charles H. Welch (see *In Heavenly Places*), item ‘C’ is described as “The New Creation”:

- C | ii. 8-10. Walk of the new creation.
(shortest Doctrinal passage)
- C | v. 2 - vi. 9. Walk of the new creation.
(longest Practical passage—applying to every department in life)

Let us consider first the Doctrinal section, and to do this we show an outline of that passage, using again Charles Welch’s work:

C | ii. 8 - 10.

- A | For by grace are ye saved through faith
 - B | a | Not of yourselves
 - b | The gift of God
 - a | Not of works lest (*hina*) any should boast FAITH
- A | For we are His workmanship, created
 - B | a | Unto good works
 - b | Foreordained of God
 - a | That (*hina*) we should walk in them WORKS

Salvation is by grace, and is received by faith. Some have thought that faith is the gift of God, but Charles Welch explains that by studying the Greek and taking account of the rules of grammar (e.g. the gender of the words used) it becomes evident that “the grace by faith salvation” is the gift of God. (a full explanation is given on page 216 of *In Heavenly Places*.)

Another point brought out by Charles Welch is that the Greek for gift is *doron*. This word conveys the idea of an oblation; that is, something offered. This is further evidence that the gift of God cannot be faith, for in what sense can faith be regarded as an offering made by God? But to realize that salvation is something that God offers us, in other words an ‘oblation’, is a humbling experience. We can only accept it with heartfelt thanks and gratitude. The comment that Charles Welch gives on page 217 is most appropriate, which we quote:

“What can we say however when we learn that in this calling it is God Who makes the oblation, it is God, not the humble worshipper, Who brings the offering; it is God Who comes out with both hands full of blessing, and pours them out at the feet of the worthless and undone. Salvation by grace through faith is the gift, the oblation of God. Let us

close our lexicons, let us put aside for a moment our grammars, let us rather bow our heads in worship as we say out of full hearts:

Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.”

In verse 10 the word “workmanship” is the Greek *poiema*, which may mean anything made, hence workmanship. It occurs only twice in the N.T. The other occurrence is Rom. i. 20 where it is translated “things that are made”. An alternative translation is “handywork”. The Greek used the word to convey “poem”, and Charles Welch comments that it is wonderful to think that the Church of the One Body may be regarded as “God’s Poem”.

This same verse tells us that we were created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of carrying out good works, that God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. So here is another wonderful thought! The Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, and God also before ordained that we should serve Him by good works. We accept His will in grateful humility.

The word ‘create’ occurs 7 times in the Prison Epistles, and of these four are in Ephesians, as follows:

***Kitzō* (“create”).**

- A | ii. 10. God. The Church His creation.
- B | ii. 15. The New Man doctrinally considered.
- A | iii. 9. God. “All things” His creation.
- B | iv. 24. The New Man practically exhibited.

It will be seen from the structure that there are several references to God as Creator. He created all things by Jesus Christ (iii. 9), and we read of the New Man created by Christ Jesus. This we hope to consider in our next article. At the moment we are rejoicing in the fact that we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, with the object of producing the fruit He desires; even the completion of the plan He prepared long before we were born. Is it not wonderful to contemplate that God chose us, and planned for us, and God was willing to wait so long until we appeared on this earth. Then, we trust, He sees His plan being worked out in our lives.

We have used some space to consider only three verses which are the doctrinal section, but the truth contained therein demands careful thought, as well as praise and thanksgiving for all that the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ have done for us. We must now turn to the practical implications.

The practical section (New Creation, item “C” in the structure) commences at Ephesians v. 1, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children”. Notice the word “therefore”. This links with the last verse of the previous chapter, so we will quote that verse and Eph. v. 1, 2 from the N.I.V.:

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of

love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph. iv. 32 - v. 2).

Living a “good life” is not the way of salvation. We have seen that it is by grace we are saved; it is not of works lest any man should boast. But we are created in Christ Jesus “unto good works”. If we are to walk according to the will of God, we should imitate Christ. He has loved us dearly; we should so love Him in return. He has freely forgiven us our sins: we should forgive others, if they have done us any wrong. Christ sacrificed Himself for our sakes; are we willing to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others? When we consider how far Christ went for our sakes (see Phil. ii. 5-8) we feel that we fall far short of His standard. Christ’s great love for us should evoke so great a response that our lives should be a reflection of His love, as we love Him and express our love to our fellow men.

As we read Eph. v. 1-21, we notice that this passage falls into three sections:

The threefold walk

Section	Key text
Verses 1-7	v. 2. Walk in love.
Verses 8-14	v. 8. Walk as children of light.
Verses 15-21	v. 15. Walk circumspectly, as wise.

Having given instructions about the kind of walk that should characterize our lives, it is remarkable that Paul gives a warning about the kind of life that is unacceptable and unworthy of our calling. Having told us to walk in love, he speaks of uncleanness and other evils, and says “let it not be once named among you”. He mentions foolish talking (or uncleanness in word) and says that it is not fitting or consistent; rather we should give thanks. Further, he warns that uncleanness may result in a loss of an inheritance. Col. iii. 24 reads “Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance”, and Col. ii. 18 “Let no man beguile you of your reward”. Thus it seems that uncleanness can result in a serious loss and Paul does not hesitate to write clearly on this important subject.

Again, in the second section, where we are enjoined to walk as children of light, we are warned against “the unfruitful works of darkness”. The fruit of the light (A.V. spirit) is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. The light reveals what may be hidden in the darkness, and Paul says it is a shame even to speak of those evil things.

The third section tells us to walk circumspectly, or accurately, as wise but not as fools. The days are evil so we should redeem the time, or literally “ransoming the time”. Stuart Allen translates it “buy up the opportunity” for Christian witness (*Letters From Prison*, page 100). There is a sense of urgency. We have at the present time an opportunity to witness: how long shall we be allowed to have this privilege? We have work to do for the Lord, but for how long? May we treat the business of the Lord as urgent. We are reminded of David when he said “the King’s business required haste” (I Sam. xxi. 8).

The remainder of the section, Eph. v. 1 - vi. 9, is taken up with three types of personal relationships:

- (1) Wives and Husbands
- (2) Children and Parents
- (3) Servants and Masters

In Eph. v. 21, after having reminded the Ephesians of the need to give thanks to God for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 20), Paul tells them to submit themselves to each other in the fear of God. This humility must be worked out in every personal relationship.

The relationship between husband and wife should reflect the relationship between Christ and His church. As Christ is the Head of the church, so the husband is the head of the wife; and for this reason Paul says that wives should submit themselves to their own husbands. But he turns to the husbands and tells them to love their wives even as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. When Christ gave Himself for the church, we remember how He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. How many husbands love their wives with so great a love that they are willing to sacrifice themselves, even as Christ gave Himself for the church? If a husband so loved his wife, would it be a great hardship for her to submit to such a husband? When there is so great a loving relationship, the wife, while submitting to her husband, is able to talk about all things and to exert a good influence in making suggestions, even though the final decision is in the function of the husband.

Those who knew Charles Welch, say 30 years ago, will remember that he had a sense of humour, and would make his point in a way that would make us smile. When explaining the relationship between husband and wife he insisted that the husband is the head, but he recognized how helpful a wife can be to her husband. So he concluded, the husband is the head, but would it be unreasonable to suggest that the wife is the neck? After all, it is the neck that turns the head!

Children should obey their parents in the Lord. This again brings out the principle of submission. Paul quotes the commandment “to honour thy father and mother”, and adds that it is the first commandment with a promise (of long life). Fathers must be patient and should bring up the children in the instruction and training of the Lord.

Servants should obey their masters (submission again), and their service should be rendered as to the Lord. They should be conscious of doing the will of the Lord and doing it with the whole heart. Finally, masters should behave themselves, not threatening their servants, remembering that they have a Master in heaven.

So, in all things we must seek to do which is acceptable to the Lord. It reminds us of Micah who said that we should “walk humbly with thy God” (Micah vi. 8).

The Fourth Gospel

A Study of the Gospel according to JOHN

No.1. Introduction. **pp. 126 - 130**

The four inspired records which we call the Gospels give us the basis of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are historic facts, His birth, death, resurrection and ascension, and are fundamental to the Christian faith. In them we find recorded His words, work and witness, and presented in four different aspects. Doubtless God could have inspired a single complete account of that life and ministry, but He has not seen fit to do so.

The character of each Gospel determines for whom it was written. It is evident that Matthew was written for Jewish believers as witness its references to prophecies fulfilled, to the “city of the great King”, to David, and so on. Mark and Luke had Gentiles in view; Mark specially for Romans, and Luke for Greeks, Mark emphasizing the ideal of power, and Luke the ideal of perfection.

As the Hebrews, the Romans, and the Greeks were the three great representative peoples of the world, we may ask for whom John could write. The answer is found in a consideration of the author, the date of the Gospel and its contents. It is certain that this Gospel was written after the other three and that the writer was acquainted with them.

There were aspects of Christ’s ministry which had not been recorded by the Synoptic Gospels. John omits much which the Synoptists record, and records much that they omit. He is often full where they are concise and concise where they are full, and this gives the impression that the Evangelist intended to supplement the other Gospels. This is borne out by the early Fathers. Clement of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius, says, “last of all, John, observing that in the other Gospels those things were related that concerned the Body (of Christ), and being persuaded by friends, and also move by the Spirit of God, wrote a spiritual Gospel”. The witness of Papias, Irenaeus, Jerome, and Augustine is to the same effect.

Date and Place of Writing.

The consensus of reliable testimony points to the close of the first century as the time the Gospel of John was written. The evidence for an early date is poor and unreliable.

Dr. R. V. G. Tasker writes in *The New Bible Dictionary* on John the Apostle and ends his quotation in this way:

“Westcott concluded that nothing is better attested in early church history than the residence and work of St. John at Ephesus. It is true that Westcott wrote before evidence

for John's early martyrdom had accumulated, but, as we have seen, *the evidence is not adequate enough or reliable enough to confute the definite statements of the man who occupied the See of Ephesus at the close of the century*" (i.e. John the Apostle) (our italics).

Dr. John A. Robinson in his recent book, *Redating the New Testament*, quotes a 9th century monk, Georgius Hamartolus, who asserted John's early martyrdom and says, "he is of interest because he claims to base the martyrdom of John on a statement made by Papias (one of the early church fathers), *but this is notoriously doubtful*" (page 158). Dr. Robinson further writes "it is necessary at this date to expose once again the *weakness of the evidence for an early martyrdom of John, for it has ceased to be considered seriously as a factor in assessing the authorship or date of the Gospel (of John)*" (p.258 our italics).

Dr. A. T. Robertson writes "*there is no early martyrdom for the Apostle John*" (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, p.xii) and calls it "a worthless legend". "There is the theory that John died as a martyr at an early age, *but this is rightly rejected by the majority of scholars*" (Dr. I. H. Marshall, Aberdeen University, *New Bible Dictionary*).

Dr. Donald Guthrie (who was once head of the London Bible College) writes, "the cumulative effect of this evidence is very small, while the individual links in the chain become even weaker on examination" (*New Testament Introduction*, p.237). He further states that the monk Georgius Hamartolus "clearly did not take the Papias report seriously since he also speaks of the *Apostle John's peaceful end*". He adds, "the notion of John's early martyrdom may therefore be regarded as purely legendary".

The dating of John's Gospel.

Dr. Guthrie states "the majority of scholars are inclined to accept a date between 90A.D. and 110" (p.258). Dr. C. K. Barrett of Durham University, a scholar with a great reputation, gives a time between 90A.D. and 100 (ibid. p.263). Dr. J. H. Bernard in his *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, states concerning the Gospel of John, "the use made of the fourth Gospel by Christian writers before 175A.D. enables us, therefore, to fix the time of its appearance within narrow limits. *It is hardly earlier than 90A.D. and cannot be later than 125A.D. Probably the year 95 is the nearest approximation to its date that can be made*" (p.lxxviii).

Dr. J. A. Robinson, as we have seen, suggests an earlier date in his *Redating the New Testament*, namely 65A.D., but as an honest scholar he feels compelled to write first of all quoting Kummel, "*the assumption that John was written in the last decade of the first century is today almost universally accepted*". Dr. Robinson proceeds, "*the span of 90A.D.-100 is agreed by Catholic and Protestant, by conservative and radical, by those who defend apostolic authorship, by those who believe that John used the Synoptists (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and those who do not. It includes virtually all those who have recently written commentaries on the Gospel, not to mention other interpreters. Indeed, many commentators scarcely bother to discuss the issue of dating*" (p.261 our italics).

And remember that this weighty statement was written by a scholar who wants to establish an earlier date for the Gospel!

Dr. Graham Scroggie states “the concurrent of testimony converges on the close of the first century as the time this Gospel was written, and we may regard the reasons for this belief as conclusive it is safe then to assume *this Gospel was written in the last decade of the first century and probably about 95A.D.*” (*A Guide to the Gospels*).

Professor F. F. Bruce in his work on the Gospel writes:

“If, as seems probable, the Gospel was published in the province of Asia *some sixty years* after the events it narrates” (p.2).

“But it is a reasonable inference from the growth of the report that the beloved disciple lived on to an advanced age, probably surviving Peter by many years” (p.215).

Dr. Robinson also writes:

“C. H. Dodd ascribes the Gospel to an Ephesian elder writing between 90A.D. and 100” (*Redating the New Testament*, p.263).

Thus we can safely say that the *majority of antiquity was against an early date for John’s Gospel and the majority of present scholarship is also against it*. There is uniformity of testimony of a late dating, and those who base doctrine on an early date are on a very insecure foundation.

Occasionally Mark x. 39 and John v. 2 are used to support an early date, but these texts, when rightly regarded, do not do this. Concerning Mark x. 39, the Lord Jesus not only said that the disciples would drink His cup, but also they would be baptized with the baptism He was baptized with, and this latter phrase speaks of *suffering*, not death, so either suffering or death would fulfil this prophetic statement. Dr. Tasker writes “not again does the reference to the sons of Zebedee drinking the cup, and being baptized with the baptism of Christ *necessarily imply that they both were destined to come to a violent end*” (*New Bible Dictionary*, p.602).

In John v. 2 the present tense is used of the verb to be, “there *is* at Jerusalem a pool”, not “there *was* at Jerusalem a pool”, but this does not support an early dating, because it refers to *the time of the action being described*, not the time when the Gospel was written. It was the time when the infirm man wanted to get into the pool for healing.

Even if we accept Dr. Robinson’s earlier date for the Gospel, 65A.D., there was still five (5) years to run before the Romans destroyed the Temple and city in 70A.D., and yet the Gospel would have been written *after the period covered by the Acts* (Acts xxviii. is 62A.D.).

To whom was the Gospel addressed?

This can only be decided by considering the internal evidence of the Gospel. There are key words in it such as life, light, witness, glory, abide, world. The last word world

(*kosmos*) occurs no less than 79 times and is therefore of great importance. It can mean the world as the sum total of everything here and now, the orderly universe (the foundation of the world), the earth on which we live. Sometimes it refers to the world system that is ruled temporarily by Satan, the prince of the world., the whole world lies in the power of the evil one (I John v. 19). It is used in the sense of everyone, “the world has gone after Him” (John xii. 19). But in the majority of occurrences in this Gospel it means *mankind as a whole*, and when it is used by the Lord, each statement is of great importance and should be carefully and prayerfully weighed over by the reader. We give some examples:

“ The *world* knew him not” (i. 10).

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the *world*” (i. 29).

“For God so loved the *world* that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (iii. 16).

“For God sent not his Son into the *world* to condemn the *world*; but that the *world* through Him might be saved” (iii. 17).

“Light is come into the *world*” (iii. 19).

“ we know that this is indeed the Christ (Messiah), the Saviour of the *world*” (iv. 42)

“For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the *world*” (vi. 33).

“ My flesh, which I will give for the life of the *world*” (vi. 51).

“I am the light of the *world*” (viii. 12).

“ whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the *world*” (x. 36).

“I came not to judge the world, but to save the *world*” (xii. 47).

“But that the *world* may know that I love the Father” (xiv. 31).

“ that the *world* may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (xvii. 21).

“ that the *world* may know that Thou hast sent Me” (xvii. 23).

“He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the whole *world*” (I John ii. 2).

One thing must be clear from the above references, that Christ’s earthly work and witness cannot be restricted to Israel or any one nation. Some will quote Matt. xv. 24 “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel”, but to get the whole picture we should read Mark’s account which records words that Matthew omits. Christ said “Let the children (i.e. Israel) *first* be filled” (Mark vii. 27). The children, Israel, were to be first in God’s kingdom purpose, but not first *and last*. The kingdom of heaven upon earth can never be finally restricted to Israel or Israel’s land; it will be world wide and this was clearly implied in the first revelation promise, that Israel’s seed should one day be a blessing *to all families of the earth* (Gen. xii. 3), and this was also stressed in the N.T. by Paul at Antioch when he quoted to the Jews Isa. xlix. 6 which refers both to Messiah and Israel, “I have set thee to be a *light to the Gentiles*, that thou shouldest be *for salvation unto the ends of the earth*” (Acts xiii. 47), and with this agrees the Lord’s resurrection commission to the Twelve “. . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in Judaea, and in Samaria, and *unto the uttermost part of the earth*” (i. 8). Otherwise how can a prophecy like Hab. ii. 14 be fulfilled, “*for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea*”, and many other

prophecies likewise? Once this is grasped we can understand why this emphasis on the world is given in the Gospel of John which records part of the Lord's earthly ministry to Israel. The Jew had forgotten the Divine reason he had been chosen. He finally imagined that God's kingdom purposes were restricted to themselves. Instead of being willing to be a channel of blessing the world over, they despised and hated the Gentile nations.

Christ's ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth gives a good example of this. At first the listeners were charmed with His words (Luke iv. 22), but when He widened God's purpose to include Gentiles (verses 25-27), their attitude immediately changed. They were filled with fury, seized him and tried to murder Him by throwing Him headlong from a cliff nearby. From this we can see that Israel, left to themselves, would never minister to the world at large. What a corrective the Lord's ministry as recorded in John must have been to them, stressing His love and purpose for the world of mankind, as well as themselves, so that His Kingdom could one day be realized over the whole earth and the prayer of Matt. vi. 10 become a reality.

No.2. The Author---John i. 1, 2. pp. 145 - 149

The claim that John the Apostle was the author of the Gospel has overwhelming support from both external and internal evidence. Professor F. F. Bruce writes, "from Irenaeus onwards there is virtual unanimity in the church on the canonicity and authorship of the Fourth Gospel". Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Eusebius who had access to many works which are now lost, all affirm that John the Apostle wrote the Gospel.

The internal evidence proves that (1) the author of the Gospel was a Jew; (2) that he was a Jew of Palestine; (3) that he was an eye-witness of what he describes; (4) that he was an Apostle, and (5) that he was the Apostle John. The argument in support of this by Bishop Westcott is massive and conclusive and the reader is referred to his work if further details are needed.

We shall therefore conclude from all this evidence that the Apostle John was the beloved disciple whom the Lord Jesus loved. He does not mention his name throughout the work, but then nor does Matthew, Mark or Luke. This was probably due to John's modesty and the wish not to be confused with John the Baptist, and also to avoid the too frequent use of the personal pronoun.

There are clearly three main sections of the Gospel: the Prologue i. 1-18, the Body of the Book (the external witness i. 19 - xii. 50, the witness of His own and finished work, the eight signs i. 19 - xx. 31), and the Epilogue chapter xxi. The purpose for which John wrote the book is clearly stated in xx. 30, 31: "Jesus did many other

miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written *that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His Name*". The Evangelist avoids the normal word for miracles. He always calls them "signs"; in other words they all signified a message of truth and we shall find as we consider them that they were given with this object in mind all through, and in each case they led to a belief in Christ and a knowledge of salvation and eternal life (xx. 30, 31).

John's main object then is basic, not dispensational. Sin and death are not dispensational, they affect the whole human race. God's remedy for them is salvation and eternal life which by no means can be regarded as dispensational or be kept to any particular time or calling. It is quite amazing how some who profess to value true dispensational teaching, have never learned to distinguish between what is basic or foundational Scriptural teaching (i.e. sin and salvation), and what is dispensational (relating to the various callings of the redeemed). Consequently what is basic is confused with what is truly dispensational with disastrous results. There are those who by doing this go so far as to say the Gospel of John is not for today, but for the next age—the millennium! However, the facts of experience are against them, for the Holy Spirit has been using this Gospel all through this age of grace to save sinners. How many have been saved by responding to John iii. 16 is known only to Him, but it must be a very large number. All of us are sinners under condemnation and death. Therefore all need salvation, forgiveness and eternal life, and this is just what the Apostle John reveals right through His Gospel, to be found only in the Lord Jesus Christ and received personally by faith in Him.

The nation of Israel needs this just as much as the far-off Gentile, and this has been man's need ever since the fall of Adam. *God has only one way of saving sinners*, whoever they are, and this is through the redemption work of His beloved Son. We can therefore without hesitation proclaim John xx. 29-31 as being truth for today, and this is essentially the same as the gospel of grace and salvation made known later on through the Apostle Paul.

The Prologue.

In the prologue to the Gospel (i. 1-18) we have the purpose of the whole work disclosed, the making known of the great eternal God and His glory through the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. To begin with, we must recognize that with God, the Source of divine truth, there are no categories of time and space, whereas we human beings can think only in terms of time/space relationships. The Gospel commences like Genesis, "in the beginning", but we must remember that with the eternal God there is no beginning of time nor space.

As someone has said, He is not a creature who must consult watches, clocks, calendars, yardsticks or other space and time measuring devices. Because the human mind cannot grasp the concept of unlimited time and space, John, through the Holy Spirit's guidance, accommodates his writing to our human limitations. He takes us back

into the past unto a point arbitrarily called “the beginning” and it is immaterial how many millions of centuries we recede into the past before we mark a point on the calendar and say “this is the beginning of time”. The next word is the verb “to be”, “was”, and here John is guided to use the imperfect tense (*en*), which gives the concept of continuous existence in the past, and goes back before any point of time. Men can delve into history as far as they like, mark a point of time and call it “the beginning”, only to find at that moment the Word had already been in a continuous state of being. He existed *before* the beginning, since He always has existed. With Him there is no beginning, for He is eternal and everlasting.

John describes Him as the Word (*Logos*) and it may come as a surprise to learn that contemporary philosophers used this word frequently as the intermediary agent of creation, who stood between the non-material God and the material world. Such was Philo, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, and his writings give us the clearest views of what the development of Judaism was and aimed at. For Philo, to predicate any quality of God is to reduce Him to the sphere of finite existence, and so He could have no active relationship with the material world.

Philo was forced to say that the world was a *kosmos*, i.e. an orderly world, governed wholly by that which is reasonable, which is to say, natural law. The world is material, and since this is subject to qualification, is a negation of all true being. If this is correct, then God could not walk about, as Christ did, in human flesh, since to be human, one must be material. In order to determine the origin of evil, Philo, and contemporary philosophers, concluded that all matter is evil, since God is both immaterial and good. To them *Logos* must be non-material, so when John wrote that the *Logos* became flesh, he was committed to a view that neither Philo nor any of the Gnostics could accept.

For them *Logos* was a principle, not a Person, and this made the vast difference between the Greek and Alexandrian philosophies and the Christian revelation of God manifest in the flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ. This being so, we can see the divine wisdom that withheld this contribution to the New Testament literature until Gnosticism had arisen in the latter part of the century to challenge the central fact and foundation of the Christian faith. John’s writings confute Gnostic contentions from all angles. The title *Logos* for Christ does not occur again in the Gospel.

While we have the principle of reason and order immanent in the universe stressed by some Greek philosophical schools, we should not assume that these schools form the background to John’s conception of truth. Professor F. F. Bruce states “the true background to John’s thought and language is found not in Greek philosophy but in Hebrew revelation. The ‘word of God’ in the O.T. denotes God in action, especially in creation, revelation and deliverance”. He draws our attention to the beginning of Genesis where we read repeatedly “God said and it was so”; also to Psa. xxxiii. 6 “by the word of the Lord were the heavens made”, and this opens the way to personify the “word of the Lord”.

“*The Word was with God.*” “With” is a translation of the preposition *pros*, which with accusative means “near to”. It presents a plane of equality and intimacy, face to face with each other. In I John ii. 1 a like use of *pros* occurs “we have a Paraclete *with* the Father”, and in I Cor. xiii. 12 there is a triple use of *pros*, *prosopon pros prosopon*, “face to face”.

Dr. Basil S. C. Atkinson in his *The Theology of Prepositions* states that *pros* gives the sense of *home*. “I will arise and *go home* to my father and he arose and *went home* to his father” (Luke xv. 18, 20), “now I *go home* unto Him that sent Me” (John xvi. 5) . . . the idea of ‘rest at home with’ is found in the great *Logos* passage at the opening of John’s Gospel. “The Word was in God’s home” (p.19). This stresses again the closeness and intimacy between the Word and the Father.

“*And the Word was God.*” We have exact and careful language here. The subject is made plain by the article (*ho logos*), and the predicate without it (*theos*). The emphatic position of *theos* (God) demands that we translate, “the Word was God”. Only people who are not versed in Greek grammar and do not believe the deity of Christ sometimes translate “the Word was *a* God”. John is certainly not saying as Jehovah’s Witnesses do that Christ was only one of many gods. He is saying just the opposite. Christ, *ho logos*, is God in the sense that no one else is or ever could be. He is, as Paul describes Him, “our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ” (Titus ii. 13, R.V. and N.I.V.).

For those who can appreciate N.T. Greek we append the following note. Some years ago Dr. E. C. Colwell of the University of Chicago pointed out that “a definite predicate nominative has the article when it follows the verb; it does not have the article when it precedes the verb”.

In the lengthy appendix of the Jehovah Witness *New World Translation* which attempts to justify their rendering “a god”, they quote 35 other passages in John where the predicate noun has the definite article in the Greek. These are attempts to prove that the absence of the article in John i. 1 requires the translation “a god”; *but none of the 35 instances are parallel*, for in every case (bearing in mind the rule stated by Dr. Colwell) the predicate *noun standing after the verb*, properly has the article. Furthermore, the additional references quoted in the above translation from the Septuagint, *are exactly in conformity with the rule* and show its accuracy. Other passages which they quote are not properly relevant to the question. Their evidence turns against themselves. Moreover they are completely inconsistent. In John i. 14 we have “the Word became flesh”. Why not “the Word became a flesh”? or I John i. 5, “God is light; why not “God is a light”?

“*He was with God in the beginning*” (i. 2). This reinforces what has already been said, for before the beginning He existed in close relationship with the One Who is called the Father. He shared the nature and being of God. The N.E.B. renders the phrase “what God was, the Word was”, a paraphrase which brings out the meaning of the words. Professor C. K. Barrett sums up in this way:

“John intends that the whole of his Gospel shall be read in the light of this verse. The deeds and words of Jesus are the deeds and words of God; if this be not true, the book is blasphemous.”

So when the heaven and earth were created, the Word of God already existed in close association with Him and partaking of the essence of God. No one can ever say with truth that there was once a time when He was not.

No.3. i. 3 - 14.
pp. 161 - 165

“Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made” (i. 3, N.I.V.).

The Evangelist goes back to the beginning of creation and states, both positively and negatively, that the whole creation came into being through the almighty power of Christ. John frequently uses such antithesis throughout his Gospel. If we take the witness of Scripture as a whole regarding creation, then we shall have to say that this gigantic work came into being through the co-ordinate relation between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Other Scriptures also refer to creation through the Son (Col. i. 16, which not only reveals this, but states that creation was *for* Him as well. Heb. i. 2 is another reference). As the Creator God is the origin of the whole work, and not only this, the whole creation depends on Him (“in Him all things hold together”, Col. i. 17, N.I.V.). “He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psa. xxxiii. 9). Some say that all this requires too much faith, but the only alternative is eternal matter, and how is this easier to believe? The holy Scriptures reveal God as the eternal Creator of non-eternal matter and He is sovereign over it.

The Evangelist continues:

“In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it” (i. 4 & 5, N.I.V.).

He continues to use the imperfect tense of the verb ‘to be’, and this conveys the concept of continuous existence in eternity past. Thus life is associated with Him, Who is eternal life (I John i. 1, 2). The Word shares that self-existent life with the Father and thus can impart life to others, and this life has special importance for the human race for it was and is “the light of men”. The natural illumination of reason and spiritual illumination which accompanies the new birth, come from this light, but it is only the latter that can dispel the darkness of sin and unbelief. Life comes only from life. In creation there is no such thing as spontaneous generation, despite the views of evolutionists.

This light abolishes darkness. In the Genesis account, “darkness was upon the face of the deep” (Gen. i. 2) until God called light into being. In the same way the light of God’s Word is the only force that banishes spiritual darkness:

“For God, Who said, ‘let light shine out of darkness’, made His light shine in our heart to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (II.Cor.iv.6, N.I.V.).

The meaning of the verb *katelaben* can only be decided from the context. It can mean “comprehend” as the A.V. and N.I.V., or “overcome” or “master” (R.S.V. and N.E.B.) and this suits the argument better. Light is stronger than darkness and darkness cannot prevail against it and John could say in his first epistle, “the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining” (I John ii. 8). Here, and in many other contexts, light is synonym of goodness and truth, while darkness is a synonym of evil and falsehood.

“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him *all men might believe*. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (i. 6-9, N.I.V.).

The Baptist came as a forerunner, to be a witness of the One Who is the light of the world. Christ described him as a “burning and shining lamp” (v. 35). He himself was not that light but was a true light-bearer. Christ is the Word, but John claims to be only “a voice” (Matt. iii. 3), yet what greater service can be rendered than that which is expressed in this verse? A voice to make the Word known, and a lamp through which His light may shine, a finger raised to point Him out as the Lamb of God! Faithful witness is one of the characteristics of this Gospel. It reveals the witness of the Father (v. 32, 37; viii. 18), of the Son (viii. 14, 18), of the Holy Spirit (xv. 26), the witness of the works of Christ (v. 36; x. 25), the witness of the Scriptures (v. 39), the witness of the disciples (xv. 27) and of the apostle John himself (xix. 35; xxi. 24).

The purpose of all this witness is given in i. 7, “that all might believe” (see also xx. 31). When all John’s statements are taken into account, it is clear he is not restricting the Lord’s ministry to Israel and this is further emphasized in the next verse:

“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (i. 9).

The phrase “coming into the world” can be attached grammatically either to “light”, or to “every man”, but as this phrase is repeatedly applied to the Word in this Gospel it is better to render it as the N.I.V. does rather than the A.V. J.N.Darby comments here that “Christ’s light is to every man, not enlightens, but sheds its light upon all”. The testimony of the Lord is conclusive:

“I have come into the world as a light, so that no-one believes in Me should stay in darkness” (xii. 46, N.I.V.).

“This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (iii. 19, N.I.V.).

A person can be in the light, and yet be unenlightened. There are some who refuse to come to the light (iii. 19). They choose to be in darkness and ignore the Light of the world; and yet this light is provided for all mankind and is for all without distinction.

We now come to the centre of the Prologue which makes known the great dividing of the ways, reception or rejection of the Saviour of the world:

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him” (i. 10).

Someone has said “the most stupendous fact of human history is the fact that the Creator of the world paid it a visit”: and yet it appears that comparatively few recognized this and gave Him a receptive ear. Man, capable of higher heights than the animals, is also capable of descending to deeper depths of atrocity and blasphemy and unbelief. When men had the opportunity to accept the Creator of the universe, they spat upon Him instead, and laughed at Him while He died.

“He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (i. 11, 12, N.I.V.).

The first “His own” is linked with the neuter plural *ta idia*; the second “His own” is attached to the masculine plural *hoi idioi*, hence a difference must be made in translation. When Christ was born at Bethlehem “he came to His own”, for the land was peculiarly His, “the land shall not be sold for ever, *for the land is Mine*” (Lev. xxv. 23). At the same time He came to His own people, for we read, “the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself” (Deut. vii. 6); and as the special people they had special revelation in law, prophecy and promise such as no other nation experienced (Psalm cxlvii. 20). Yet in spite of this great privilege, God’s message was ignored again and again by them. He could say with truth:

“From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again, I sent you My servants the prophets. *But they did not listen to Me or pay attention.* They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers” (Jer. vii. 25, 26, N.I.V.).

In spite of this there were some, a faithful remnant, who did receive and trust Him when He came to this earth, otherwise the great plan of redemption would have failed:

“Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (i. 12, 13, N.I.V.).

Professor F. F. Bruce’s words here are apt to the point:

“These blessings and privileges which His coming was designed to impart are summed up in this, that they were admitted to membership in the family of God. To enter God’s family one must receive His Word—in other terms, one must believe in His Name. The name is much more than the designation by which a person is known; it means the real character, or sometimes, as here, the Person Himself. To receive Him Who is the Word of God, then, means to place one’s faith in Him, to yield one’s allegiance to Him and thus, in the most practical manner, to acknowledge His claims.”

John's word emphasize that birth into the family of God is quite different from physical birth and his statements dispose of the idea that every human being is automatically in the family of God. This is never realized by blood-relationship. One "becomes" a child of God by receiving His Son by faith. One does not "become" something that he is already. Spiritual birth, which is elaborated in chapter iii., is the only way of entry and depends upon the receiving by faith of Him Who God has sent.

"The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only (Son), Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (i. 14).

The Apostle John now considers the great mystery (secret) of Godliness, "God was manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. iii. 16). The Logos added to His deity by taking perfect humanity. This, declares Paul, is a great secret and beyond our human comprehension. The Lord's incarnation is the Christian answer both to pantheism, which conceives God as totally immanent in creation, and to deism, which sees Him as totally transcendent from it. Without the incarnation redemption would be impossible, for death was the penalty for sin and this price had to be paid. God is immortal and cannot die, but the incarnate Son could become the Lamb of God and give His life a ransom for many.

Yet, at the same time, we must remember that no created being, however exalted, could be the sacrifice for sin and God has never entrusted this supreme work to archangels, angels, or any created being. "I, even I, am the Lord (Jehovah); *and beside Me there is no Saviour*" (Isa. xliii. 11). Thus only Jehovah can save and thus it was essential to blend deity with perfect humanity. In the early church it was not so much the deity of Christ that was the subject of attack, but rather His humanity. Today the pendulum has swung over to the other extreme, and the humanists have insisted on the essential humanity of Christ but they obscure or deny His deity. Neither the deity or humanity of Jesus Christ can be understood separately, and those who do so have a mutilated Christ Who could never be a Saviour of sinners in the Scriptural sense.

It is clear that John combats the false teaching of those who held docetism. They denied that Christ assumed bodily form. It only *appeared* to be real, they maintained. Hence the Evangelist in this Gospel and in his epistles warns those who denied that Christ had "come in the flesh" and disunited the earthly Jesus from the heavenly Christ (cf. I John iv. 1-3). It was a blow against Gnosticism which only accepted an impersonal Logos and looked on everything material as evil. In no sense could they accept that Christ took upon Himself a human body for his reason. The Lord Jesus said:

"The bread that I will give is My flesh, which *I will give for the life of the world*" (John vi. 51),

and that body was specially prepared by God. "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, *but a body hast Thou prepared Me*" (Heb. x. 5). "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He *reconciled in the body of His flesh through death*, to present you holy, unblameable and unproveable in His sight" (Col. i. 21-22).

No.4. i. 15 - 28.
pp. 186 - 190

The Word came to the earth in “the *likeness* of sinful flesh” (Rom. viii. 3; note not “in sinful flesh”), and “dwelt among us” (John i. 14). The word “dwelt” expresses the meaning of the Hebrew *shaken*, “to dwell as in a tabernacle or tent”: “He pitched His tent among us”, and the Evangelist asserted. “we have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only (Son), Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth”. The thought of the Tabernacle takes us back to the O.T. and the journeying of the children of Israel. There the Tabernacle or Tent was erected by the command of God, so that He might *dwell with His people*. He said, “Then have them make a sanctuary for Me, and *I will dwell among them*” (Exod. xxv. 8, N.I.V.), and His presence, symbolized by the cloud over the Tent by day, and the fire by night, was manifested among them. Now in a fuller sense God has again resided on earth in the Word made flesh.

Not only this, but John declares that “we have seen His glory”. It was the glory of an only Son who came from the Father and was full of grace and truth. The word “glory” is very difficult to expound, for this is something outside human knowledge and experience. The word and its verbal form is found frequently in John’s Gospel and is one of its key-words. In what sense did the Apostle see Christ’s glory? He was not enshrouded with blazing light as He walked this earth, although intense light is sometimes linked with the glory of God. What he witnessed was the whole earthly career and ministry of the incarnate Word, His speech and His actions, as day succeeded day: *fulfilling the will of the Father*. In the high priestly prayer of John xvii., we read His words, “I have brought you *glory on earth by completing the work you gave Me to do*” (verse 4, N.I.V.). Here is the Lord’s own explanation of glory—the complete fulfillment of the Father’s will, concluding with the great sacrifice on the cross. This is what glory is all about. The believer in the N.T. is constantly reminded and urged to carry out the Lord’s will in his life. It is in this way only that we can glorify our Saviour and Lord. There can be a lot of religious activity, but unless this is a true reflection of His will, whatever it costs, it cannot glorify or please Him.

The word *monogenes*, “one and only” is used of Isaac (Heb. xi. 17), of the only son of the widow of Nain (Luke vii. 12), of the only daughter of Jairus (Luke viii. 42). In the case of Isaac (Gen. xxii. 2), the fact that he was an “only son” does not mean that Abraham had no other children, but rather that he was specially loved and unique, and so the Septuagint recognizing this renders the Hebrew by *agapetos*, dearly loved.

The Lord Jesus was “full of grace and truth”. In this gospel the word “true” often means what is real and antitypical in contrast to the shadow of the law, and this included more than the law could express, namely all the goodness, love and faithfulness that were found in God Himself so abundantly (Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6).

“John testifies concerning Him. He cries out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, He Who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me’.” (John i. 15, N.I.V.).

Note the present tense, “testifies”, which shows that the Baptist’s witness, although he was long dead by the time this Gospel was written, still remained and would always do so. Likewise the perfect tense “has cried” shows that while his proclamation was a past event, the substance of what he proclaimed was permanently true. When Christ appeared in public, John was able to point Him out and say “this is the One I have been talking about, He preceded me”; for He had existence before His earthly birth, and this is recognized by the N.E.B.’s translation, “for before I was born, He already was”.

“From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another” (i. 16, N.I.V.).

“One blessing after another” is the N.I.V. translation of the words “Grace for grace”. Inasmuch as the N.T. consistently teaches that the antitype is greater than the type that illustrates it, the phrase could mean “the grace of gospel realities in place of grace of types and shadows”. But the context stresses that this grace comes from God’s *fullness*. This is indeed a rich and inexhaustible supply which has no limits and is placed at His people’s disposal in Christ. So it could also mean that one supply of grace is being constantly replaced by a fresh one, hence the translation of the N.I.V. The Apostle Paul proved the truth of this when undergoing a special trial he had the assurance “My grace is sufficient for you” (II Cor. xii. 9).

“For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (i. 17).

There are references to Moses in this Gospel (i. 17, 45; iii. 14; v. 45, 46; vi. 32; vii. 19, 22, 23; viii. 5; ix. 28, 29). God’s law given through Moses has a very important place in His dealings with Israel. It failed, not because it was faulty in itself. It was indeed “holy, just and good” (Rom. vii. 12), but the standard was too high for sinful human nature to keep. It was weak because of the sinful flesh (Rom. viii. 3) and so had to be superseded. Nevertheless, grace and truth were found in it because it came from a God Whose character was “abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Exod. xxxiv. 6, and see Psa. lxxxvi. 15). But the fullness of this revelation awaited the coming of the incarnate Word and the better things that flow from His ministry which are summed up in “grace and truth”, and are abundantly shown in His words and works which the Evangelist sets forth.

“No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only (Son), who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known” (i. 18, N.I.V.).

God is spirit and therefore invisible (I Tim. i. 17), yet the Old Testament declares in Exod. xxiv. 9-11 that “there went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: and *they saw the God of Israel they saw God*, and did eat and drink”. Is this a contradiction? No, before time began, the invisible God expressed Himself in a form of glory and became *the Image* of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation, because he created all things in heaven and earth (see Col. i. 14-18). It was in

this likeness that Adam was created (Gen. i. 26). The Word was then the visible God and was the God of Israel seen by Moses and the 70. The invisible God humbled Himself by taking visible shape. But even then His glory was veiled, for unveiled it was too much for the human body to endure. Read Ezekiel's description in chapter i. of this God of glory and how he was at a loss to describe it—there were no human similes to set forth the vision. He could only say He looked like this, or like that, in earthly terms which utterly failed to represent Him adequately.

Moses too asked God to show him His glory; but unmediated, this was impossible, for God said “man shall not see Me and live” (Exod. xxxiii. 20). He added, “I will cover you with My hand until I have passed by; then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen” (Exod. xxxiii. 22, 23). Instead of the word “back”, one translation beautifully renders it, “you shall see My after-glow”, that is after it had passed by, which must have been wonderful indeed.

In the fullness of time the One Who was the Image of the invisible God, left all that glory, stooped down and humbled Himself by becoming man and the obedient Servant of the Father, carrying out His will in every respect. Not only this, He stooped further and died the death of a criminal by crucifixion. Was there ever such humbling on the part of anyone? But all this was necessary for the penalty of sin to be paid and put away and salvation achieved.

In our context the weight of textual evidence favours the reading *monogenes theos*, “God only-begotten”, or “the only begotten, God”, and this agrees with John i. 1 that the Word was God, and no one who respects the inspired Word of God will ignore it or seek to explain it away. The incarnate Son is “in the bosom of the Father”, and this is similar to iii. 13,

“No one ever went up to heaven except the One Who came down from heaven Whose home is in heaven” (iii. 13, N.E.B.).

The translators have supplied the word “home” to make the meaning clearer. Christ, as the Son of man has gone back “where He was before” (John vi. 62), and it is as the only-begotten Who is in the bosom of the Father that John i. 18 now speaks of Him. He has taken back all the glory that He left to come to the earth (xvii. 5) with all the evidence of redemption accomplished. The only other reference to “bosom” in this Gospel is in xiii. 23 describing the disciple whom Jesus loved, leaning on Jesus' bosom (as they reclined at the table). This was not only a place of warm affection, but one where confidences could be received.

The incarnate Word has declared the Father (i. 18). *Exegeomai* is used only by Luke elsewhere, and means to tell or narrate. He is the true “interpreter” of God to man. He came from heaven to show us what the invisible God the Father was like, and as He said “He that has seen Me, has seen the Father” (John xiv. 9). Now we know what the love of God is, because we have seen it manifested in Christ. We know the patience, the peace, the mind, the will of the Father, for the only-begotten Son has given a complete exposition of Him. He is the One Who has shown us the Father.

The Prologue has now accomplished its purpose, and the Gospel which follows gives us the Son's manifesting, revealing, interpreting the Father to His children.

The Beginning of the Ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, 'I am not the Christ'." (i. 19, N.I.V.).

John's witness is now given in more detail. A deputation had come from the religious establishment at Jerusalem to discover who he was. There was a general expectation at this time. Pious Israelites were "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke ii. 38). "The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ" (Luke iii. 15). So the deputation asked him to explain himself. His reply is in i. 19 and is stated to be part of his witness. He said definitely "I am not the Messiah". They pressed him further—"Who are you then?". He might have been the prophet Elijah who had been promised in Mal. iv. 5, and he certainly bore the marks of Elijah in his appearance and dress (Mark i. 6), and at his birth it had been declared that he would "go before Him (Christ) 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 a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke i. 16, 17). Anyone could imitate John's dress, but his ministry was peculiar to himself. Are you Elijah? they asked him and his answer was "No" (John i. 21). Yet Christ said he was. "Elijah is come, and they did to him whatever they pleased" (Mark ix. 13). In Matt. xi. 7-14 the Lord added a condition to His statement, "*If* you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come". There is no "it" in the original. It could just as easily mean "if you are willing to accept Me". And had the nation done so, the Baptist would have been counted as the Elijah of Malachi's prophecy.

The deputation pressed John still further, for they said they must have an answer to those who sent them (i. 22). Having told them he was not Elijah as foretold in Malachi, he referred them to Isa. xl. 3 and declared he was nothing more than a voice preparing the way for none other than the Lord (John i. 23). Note he was just "a voice", not "the voice" as the A.V. The Baptist had no inflated ideas of his own importance, yet Christ declared he was the greatest of the prophets (Matt. xi. 11).

What was his authority for baptizing? The Pharisees who regulated the religious life of Israel were anxious to know. John explaining that his baptism was only an introductory ceremony. He was the forerunner of the Lord of Isa. xl., and of the Lamb of Isa. liii., and his ministry was to prepare the people for His reception.

No.5. i. 29 - ii. 11.
pp. 207 - 214

John the Baptist not only denied that he was Elijah or the Messiah, but also that he was the specially promised Prophet of Deut. xviii. 18 (John i. 21). His ministry and his baptism were unique. He gives the reason for the baptism. It was that He (Christ) "*might be revealed to Israel*" (i. 31). This was its main reason and we shall be wise if we keep it in this setting:

"Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on Him. I would not have known Him, except that the One Who sent me to baptize with water told me, The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He Who will baptize with the Holy Spirit'. I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God" (i. 32-34, N.I.V.).

Up to this point John did not know who the Messiah was. But God had told him of the enduement by the Holy Spirit, and having seen this, he now was certain and stood before the One Whose sandal he was unworthy to unloose.

"Look", he said, "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world" (i. 29). Note the singular "sin", not personal sins (plural). The enduement of the Holy Spirit was given the Lord at the commencement of His public ministry. This was in line with the prophetic statements of Isaiah. Christ was the ruler of David's line marked out in Isa.xi.1-5, "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him". He is the divine Servant of Isa.xlii.1, "I will put my Spirit on Him", and also Isa. lxi. 1, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me". Peter's words in Acts x. 38 confirm this, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power". Thus He was now ready to accomplish the will and work of the Father in making Him known to men.

The calling of the first Disciples.

There follows now a witness given on four consecutive days, the record of which was as it were a spiritual diary:

1st day. The testimony of John to those sent to him from Jerusalem (i. 19-28).

2nd day. John's testimony to all who attended His baptism at Bethany beyond Jordan. The Lamb of God. The Son of God Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (29-34).

3rd day. John's further testimony. The Lamb of God. The Messiah and Andrew (35-42).

4th day. The witness of Philip and Nathanael. Him of Whom Moses wrote. The Son of God, Son of Man and King of Israel (43-51).

John's commenting and pointing to the Lord as the Lamb of God, was heard by two disciples who were following Him (i. 37). He knew that their interest was quickened, so He turned round and asked them what they wanted. Hardly knowing what to say, they

asked for His address. “Come”, He replied, “and you will see”. So they went where He was staying and spent the remainder of the day with Him. One of them was Andrew and the other was possibly John the Apostle. Andrew, keen to share the great discovery, goes to find his brother Simon in order to tell him. He said “we have found the Messiah (that is the Christ)”. The Evangelist translates the Aramaic Messiah into Greek, as he does with other Jewish words, such as Cephas (i. 42), Siloam (ix. 7), Rabboni (xx. 16) and Rabbi (i. 38), and this was for the benefit of his Gentile readers, for no Jew needed to be told the meaning of these words for they were his own language.

Andrew and John had made the greatest discovery of the ages, their Messiah, Saviour and King! And wisely they sought to pass the tremendous news to others. What an example to all of us! When Simon came to Christ He looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, being interpreted, is Peter). Cephas is Aramaic (meaning rock). The word is *Kepha*, to which a final ‘s’ is added to adopt it to the Greek tongue. This name is applied to Peter only by this Gospel and the apostle Paul (I Cor. i. 12; Gal. i. 18, etc.).

We then read in i. 43 “The next day (the fourth) Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, He said to him, ‘Follow Me’.”. Where did Philip come from? Most likely from the activity of Andrew who had already brought his brother to the Lord. Philip, in his turn, passes on the thrilling message to Nathanael. One after another shares the news with someone else. This is the finest way of making disciples and spreading the truth! Nathanael means “God has given”. The earthly disciples mentioned in these verses occur in the lists of the Twelve Apostles given by the Synoptic Evangelists. Nathanael appears there under the alternative name of Bartholomew (the son of Tholomai or Ptolemy), and is linked with Philip in Matt. x. 3, Mark iii. 18 and Luke vi. 14.

Instead of referring to Christ as the Messiah, Philip describes Him as the One of Whom Moses wrote and the prophets too; Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth. For some reason unknown to us, Nazareth had a bad reputation. “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael asked. He was a Galilean from Cana (John xxi. 2) and therefore knew something about Nazareth; which was an unimportant place anyway. Philip wisely said “Come and see (for yourself)”. First hand knowledge is better than guesswork.

When the Lord saw Nathanael, He recognized straight away his sound character, and said, “Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false” (i. 47); a fine testimony indeed. Nathanael was amazed at Christ’s words. He had obviously not seen the Lord before this. The Lord Jesus, as this Gospel testifies, knows infallibly what is in the mind of every person and He demonstrated this by saying to Nathanael, “I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you”. Doubtless the large fig leaves hid him from view, but not from the all-seeing eyes of Christ. Nathanael’s response was immediate. He said “Rabbi (Teacher), you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel” (i. 49). His was a quick conversation, but nevertheless it was the real thing. Christ assured him that he would see greater things. “Verily, verily”, He said, “you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man”.

The double “verily” is a characteristic of the words of the Lord preserved in the Gospel of John (A.V.). In the Greek it is *amen, amen*; a Hebrew word transliterated into Greek and then into English, our “amen”. There are no less than 25 of these double amens in this Gospel. The words are always used to introduce a statement of importance and each should be carefully and prayerfully pondered. It is not possible to quote them all in full, but we give the complete list so that the sincere seeker after truth may weigh them over: i. 51; iii. 3, 5, 11; v. 19, 24, 25; vi. 26, 32, 47, 53; viii. 34, 51, 58; x. 1, 7; xii. 24; xiii. 16, 20, 21, 38; xiv. 12; xvi. 20, 23; xxi. 18.

The Double Verities (Amens) of John’s Gospel.

- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Open heaven. Angels ascending and descending (i. 51).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Without new birth, cannot see kingdom (iii. 3).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Unless born of water and spirit, no entrance (iii. 5).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. We speak that we do know (iii. 11).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. The Son can do nothing of Himself (v. 19).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that heareth hath life (v. 24).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. The dead shall hear and live (v. 25).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Ye seek Me because ye did eat (vi. 26).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Moses gave you not that bread from heaven (vi. 32).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life (vi. 47).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Except ye eat drink no life (vi. 53).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Whosoever commits sin is its servant (viii. 34).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. If keep My saying, never see death (viii. 51).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Before Abraham was, I am (viii. 58).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Thieves climb up some other way (x. 1).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. I am the door of the sheep (x. 7).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Except wheat die abideth alone (xii. 24).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Servant is not greater than his lord (xiii. 16).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that receiveth whom I send, receiveth Me (xiii. 20).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. One of you shall betray Me (xiii. 21).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. The cock shall not crow, before denial (xiii. 38).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. The believer shall do greater works (xiv. 12).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Ye shall weep but it will turn to joy (xvi. 20).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. Whatever you ask in My Name, The Father will give (xvi. 23).
- Verily, verily, I say unto you. When young guidest self when old another guide thee (xxi. 18).

The Lord makes a direct reference to the dream of Jacob in Gen. xxviii. 12, 13, in which heaven and earth are brought together by a ladder which links them both and that ladder, as Christ asserted, was a picture of Himself and He is the only one in existence who can fulfil what the ladder represents. As God, He touches heaven. As Man, He reaches down to earth, and so He is the one Mediator between both that the apostle Paul deals with in I Tim. ii. 5-7. Those who deny His deity have a broken ladder that cannot reach to heaven. Those who deny His humanity, like the early followers of docetism, likewise have a broken ladder which cannot reach to the earth.

As we have seen, the philosophical use of *logos* by the philosophers and early gnostics of the first century and later, showed the utter failure of human wisdom to supply a

perfect “go between” linking God and the needs of failing man. There was an immense gulf that yawned between the far-off Platonist God and the earthly things of time and sense, so we can understand why the Lord Jesus used the figure of Jacob’s ladder as representing Himself in John i. 51. God and man meet in Christ and can only meet in this way.

Chapter ii.

We now commence the body of the Gospel which extends from chapter ii. 1 - ii. 14 and prominent all through are the specially selected eight signs showing forth the glory of Christ, which in each case leads to the great object of the Gospel as stated in xx. 31, “but these (signs) are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that *believing ye might have life through His Name*”. We shall see that each of the signs leads to this result.

The Evangelist begins with the wedding at Cana of Galilee and relates it to the “third day”, which probably was counted from the call of Nathanael and would therefore be the seventh day of the record. It is not certain where Cana was situated. Kefr Kenna (about 3½ miles from Nazareth) has been suggested, also Ain Kana and Khirbet Kana are possible. The mother of the Lord was invited to the wedding although she is not named. It seems clear that she was an intimate friend, if not a relative of the family where the wedding took place. Christ and His disciples were invited too. The word “disciple” just means a learner. The term is sometimes restricted to the twelve apostles, but often has a wider circle in view (John vi. 60, 61, 66).

The eight selected miracles or signs have a wonderful correspondence which is set out in the next two pages. It is taken from Appendix 176 of The Companion Bible. The reader should take time to look at the correspondence between the miracles which are truly remarkable. The capital letters show the signs that correspond, and the whole is certainly an indication of the divine inspiration of the Word of God.

The EIGHT “SIGNS”.

- A | ii. 1-11. THE MARRIAGE IN CANA. |
- a | The background. Nathanael’s faith (i. 49-51).
 - b | The place. Galilee. (1)
 - c | “The third day.” (1)
 - d | Wine provided. (8, 9)
 - e | “Jesus was called, and His disciples.” (2)
 - f | Failure confessed. “They have no wine.” (3)
 - g | Numbers. Six waterpots, holding two or three firkins apiece. (6)
 - h | Command. “Fill the waterpots with water.” (7-)
 - i | Obedience. “They filled them.” (-7-)
 - k | Waterpots filled to the last drop. “Up to the brim.” (-7)
 - l | The servants bare (*enenkan*). (8)
 - m | Glory manifested (*ephanerose*). (11-)
 - n | His disciples’ faith. (-11)
- B | iv. 46-54. THE RULER’S SON. |
- o | The background. Rejection (43, 44).
 - p | Time. “After two days.” (43)
 - q | His son. “Sick” (*esthenei*). (46)
 - r | Parenthetic explanation *re* the place (Cana). (46)
 - s | “At the point of death.” (47) “Death” only here, and in “B” below.
 - t | “Ye will not believe.” (48)
 - u | “Ere my child die.” (49)
 - v | The servants “met him”. (51)
 - w | “Thy son liveth.” (51)
 - x | “The fever left him (*apheken*).” (52)
- C | v. 1-47. THE IMPOTENT MAN. |
- aa | The place. Jerusalem. (1)
 - bb | The Pool. Bethesda. (2)
 - cc | The longstanding case, “thirty-eight years”. (5)
 - dd | “Jesus saw him.” (6)
 - ee | The Lord takes the initiative. (6)
 - ff | “The same day was the Sabbath.” (9)
 - gg | “Afterward Jesus findeth him.” (14)
 - hh | “Sin no more.” (14)
 - Sin, only here and in “C” below.
 - ii | “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” (17)
 - kk | A double reference to “Moses”. (45, 46)
- D | vi. 1-14. THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND. |
- ll | The only “sign” (with “D”) recorded in the other Gospels: (Matt. xiv. 15; Mark vi. 35; Luke ix. 10).
 - mm | “Jesus went up into the mountain.” (3)
 - nn | Followed by a discourse. (26-35) Signification.
 - oo | “Many disciples went back.” (66).
 - pp | The testimony of Peter. (68, 69)

D | vi. 15-21. THE WALKING ON THE SEA. |

ll | The only “sign” (with “D”) recorded in the other Gospels:
(Matt. xiv. 23; Mark vi. 47).

mm | “Jesus departed again into the mountain.” (15)

nn | Followed by a discourse. (chapter vii.) Signification.

oo | “Many of the people believed.” (vii. 31).

pp | The testimony of Nicodemus. (vii. 50)

C | ix. 1-44. THE MAN BORN BLIND. |

aa | The place. Jerusalem. (viii. 59; ix. 1)

bb | The Pool. Siloam. (7, 11)

cc | The longstanding case, “from birth”. (1)

dd | “Jesus saw” him. (1)

ee | The Lord takes the initiative. (6)

ff | “It was the Sabbath day.” (14)

gg | “When He had found him.” (35)

hh | “Who did sin?” (2, cp. 24, 25, 31, 34)

Sin, only here and in “C” above.

ii | “I must work the works of Him that sent Me.” (4)

kk | A double reference to “Moses”. (28, 29)

B | xi. 1.44. THE SISTERS’ BROTHER. |

o | The background. Rejection (x. 31, 39; xi. 8).

p | Time. “Jesus abode two days where He was.” (6)

q | “Lazarus was sick” (*esthenei*). (2)

r | Parenthetic explanation *re* the person (Mary). (2)

s | “Lazarus is death.” (14) “Death” only here, and in “B” above.

t | “That ye may believe.” (15)

u | “Our brother had not died.” (21, 32)

v | Martha “met Him”. (20, 30)

w | “Lazarus, come forth.” (43)

x | “Let him go (*aphete*).” (44)

A | xxi. 1-14. THE DRAUGHT OF FISHES. |

a | The background. Thomas’s unbelief (xx. 24-29).

b | The place. Galilee. (1)

c | “The third time.” (14)

d | A meal provided. (9)

e | The Lord was the Caller of His disciples. (5, 12)

f | Failure confessed. They had “caught nothing” (3) Had “no meat” (5)

g | Numbers. 200 cubits (8); 153 fishes (11).

h | Command. “Cast the net into the water.” (6)

i | Obedience. “They cast therefore.” (6)

k | Net full, to the last fish. (8, 11)

l | “Bring of the fish (*enenkate*).” (10)

m | The Lord manifested (*ephanerothe*). (14)

n | His disciples’ love. (15-17)

It was customary for a Jewish wedding to last for a week of celebration. We find Laban saying to Jacob at the marriage of Leah and also at his request for Rachel, “Fulfil her week”. It will easily be understood that at a festivity extending over a period of seven days the supply of wine might prematurely run out. Such an experience would be embarrassing to the host. Mary certainly realized that in such a difficulty she could turn to her Son for assistance. She had learned too that the former relationship of family life had changed. The Lord had now been endued with the Holy Spirit and commenced His public ministry. In this the Father’s will alone was supreme and must take the first place over family ties.

His words to her may sound rough to the modern ear, but there is no disrespect in the original. Instead of “woman” (A.V.) it could be rendered “lady”. His words “My hour has not yet come” were significant. There are 8 occurrences of this or similar expressions (see ii. 4; vii. 6, 8, 30; viii. 20; xii. 23; xiii. 1; xvii. 1 note also xii. 27; xvi. 25, 32). The phrase marks a crisis wherever it occurs. The advice Mary gave was wise, “do whatever He tells you”, and this is true for all time.

“Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons” (ii. 6, N.I.V.).

The servants, remembering Mary’s directions, followed the Lord’s instructions and filled them with water. Then He told them to draw some more water from the well and carry it to the master of the feast. The usual view is that it was the water in the six jars that was turned into wine, which would have been around 120 gallons. But the Lord said “draw out now” and He used the word *antleo*, which means to draw water from a well, not from the jars. It was this second drawing from the well that the Lord turned into wine, which is more reasonable. The chief steward was amazed at the superior quality of the wine and remarked about it (ii. 9, 10).

“This, the first of His miraculous signs Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and *His disciples put their faith in Him*” (ii. 11, N.I.V.).

Christ had indeed come to change the old wine of “law” into the new wine of His earthly kingdom, and this miracle led to faith in Him (ii. 11), which is the very object of the writing of this Gospel (xx. 30, 31).

No.6. ii. 12 - iii. 13.
pp. 221 - 225

The Evangelist now records the fact that the Lord and His family moved from Nazareth to Capernaum, where He had His headquarters for the greater part of His Galilean ministry, which is recorded by the Synoptic Gospels. The family were there “for a few days”, for Passover now intervened. The Apostle calls it the *Jewish* Passover, which again indicates that he is writing after the destruction of the Temple and for Gentile readers. Professor F. F. Bruce comments “our Evangelist repeatedly refers to festivals as festivals ‘of the Jews’, not because he himself was not a Jew by birth and upbringing (he was), but because many of his readers would be Gentile, unacquainted with the details of the Jewish sacred year”.

Three Passovers are mentioned by John, the other two being those mentioned in vi. 4 and xi. 55. But for him we should not know that Christ’s ministry was much over a year in length. During Passover, according to the law, all leaven had to be removed from each house. In the cleansing of the Temple which now took place this symbolic act was fulfilled. It was the first public act of Christ at Jerusalem, and the cleansing of the Temple, recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke, came after His public entry into Jerusalem, riding upon the ass, and this was His last public act in the city. Some expositors contend for only one cleansing of the Temple, and conclude that either Matthew or John has made a mistake. But this is an obvious protest by the Lord at the beginning of His ministry against the desecration of God’s House; even though the cessation of the trade in animals and money changing was only temporary in both instances.

The Temple was being turned into a supermarket in the court of the Gentiles, and so worship was being prevented. Some are surprised that Christ used force, but it is not said that He hit the sheep or oxen. A flourish of the whip would be probably all that was needed to move them out of the court. He said to the traders “Get these out of here! How dare you turn My Father’s house into a market!” (ii. 16, N.I.V.). The Israelite who knew the O.T. prophecies would associate Christ’s sudden appearance in the Temple with the prophecy of Malachi “the Lord shall *suddenly come* to His Temple *He shall purify* the sons of Levi” (Mal. iii. 1-3). The Lord’s action was a public witness to His Messianic office and utter devotion to the Temple as His Father’s house.

“His disciples remembered that it is written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume Me’.”
(ii. 17: see Psa. lxi. 9).

As the guardians of the Temple and its worship, the Jews demanded of Him “what miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” (ii. 18). His answer was:

“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” (ii. 19).

The word “destroy” is the first aorist imperative of *luo*, to loosen or destroy. It is the permissive imperative, not a command to do it. The Jews, misunderstanding what He was saying, replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you are going to raise it in three days? But the Temple He had spoken of was His body” (ii. 20, 21). Herod’s Temple began with Herod the Great in B.C.19. The main part was completed and consecrated in ten years. Other parts were still being carried out, and the building was not finished until 63A.D., only 7 years before its destruction by the Romans. John explains that the Lord Jesus was referring to His own body, which was raised from the dead after three days and three nights in the grave. Christ often spoke in parables, especially when His hearers were opposing His teaching. The Evangelist gives us the real meaning of His words which were clear to him after the resurrection, and later on at the time of writing the Gospel. This language of the Lord is recalled and perverted at His trial, as “I will destroy” (Mark xiv. 58), “I can destroy” (Matt. xxvi. 61), neither of which He said. John tells us that the final result of all this was the realization of the object of his Gospel . . . “they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken” (ii. 22) and this is emphasized again in verse 23:

“Now while He was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs He was doing and believed in His Name.”

But Christ was able to distinguish infallibly between the true believer and the unbeliever:

“But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them (kept refusing to trust Himself, imperfect tense).”

Why was this? “for He knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for He knew (kept on knowing, again imperfect tense) what was in man” (ii. 24, 25). This knowledge was because of His deity, not because He was good at guessing.

Chapter iii.

Christ and Nicodemus.

“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him’.” (iii. 1, 2). Now, *de*, so often in John, is explanatory and transitional, not adversative as it generally is. Nicodemus is an instance of the Lord’s knowledge of men (ii. 25) and was an example of a person He could trust. Nicodemus is a Greek name which means “conqueror of the people”, not that we can deduce from this that he was overbearing. He was a man of position, “a ruler among the Jews”, who had evidently been impressed by the miraculous signs which Christ had performed. His own prominence made it remarkable that he came at all to the Lord Jesus. We cannot say positively why he chose the night to visit Him, as the Evangelist does not tell us. It could be that he wished to avoid comment by other members of the Sanhedrin, for Christ had already provoked some of the ecclesiastics by His assumption of authority over the Temple. But we cannot be sure about this; it is better not to guess. John refers to him on three separate occasions.

One thing is clear. Nicodemus was not blinded by prejudice as were other members of the Sanhedrin. He was a sincere seeker for truth and this is an absolute essential if anyone is ever coming to a knowledge of God and the truth of His Word. He said to Christ, “no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (iii. 2). Although he as a leading teacher in Israel, he addressed Christ as an equal with the title “Rabbi”, which was a mark of respect, coming from him.

“In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God’.” (iii. 3).

The solemn importance of this statement is emphasized by the double Amen (verily, verily) with which it begins. The word “again” is the Greek *anōthen*, which is translated “above” in iii. 31 and xix. 11. This birth is not a physical or earthly one, but one from heaven. In other words it is spiritual. Nicodemus missed the point and took the Lord’s words to refer to physical birth (iii. 4). The Lord therefore had to repeat His statement, but express it in a different way. Again He uses the double Amen (truly, truly) and says:

“I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (iii. 5).

The doctrine of the new birth was not a new revelation; it belongs to the O.T. and as a teacher, Nicodemus should have known this. He should have gathered the necessity of the spiritual begetting from Ezek. xi. 19, 20:

“I will give them an undivided heart and *put a new spirit in them*; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. They will be My people and I will be their God.”

Without this new spirit, no man of Israel could “see” or “enter” the kingdom of God. God said “I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean and a new *spirit I will put within you*”. This was amplified in the vision of the valley of dry bones who needed the breath of God to bring them to life (Ezek. xxxvii. 9) and it should be remembered that the noun, whether in Hebrew or Greek, can mean “breath”, “wind” or “spirit” according to the context. The linking of water and spirit should make us careful in our interpretation, bearing in mind that this Gospel speaks of “living water” (iv. 10, 13, 14 & vii. 38) and in the context we are considering it is the word *spirit that is being emphasized* as can be seen by reading the next verse. Instead of translating *pneuma* ‘wind’, it can be rendered spirit, and then we have:

“The Spirit breathes where He wills and you hear His voice, but you do not know where He comes or whither He goes: thus is everyone who has been begotten of the Spirit.”

It is not the symbol that is important. It is what the symbol represents, the work of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God nowhere teaches that literal water can bring spiritual life, and to read water regeneration into these verses is to miss the way completely.

Nicodemus could well understand that a proselyte from paganism would need a new birth. As a matter of fact such were regarded as new-born children by the Jews. But he

was a recognized and respectable teacher in Israel, a true descendant of Abraham — to think that he needed a spiritual birth from above! But it was so and is still true today. This is where we must all start and Christ enforced this by saying:

“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at My saying ‘You must be born again (or from above)’.” (iii. 6, 7).

It is important to know that Christ’s words hold good for others as well as Nicodemus. The word “you” in the phrase “you must be born from above” is not the second person *singular*, but second person *plural*, which then has the force “you must all be born from above”. Note the “must”; this is absolutely necessary for all without exception. Those who remove this Gospel from the present age, remove this “must” of Christ, and not only this but other statements of His that are true for all time. Here then is the one necessary experience for personal entry into the plan and purpose of God.

“I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?” (iii. 12).

What are these “earthly things” which are placed in contrast with “heavenly things”? These “earthly things” must surely include the teaching that Christ had just given to Nicodemus, for this is the only way he could understand the words. It may seem peculiar that a birth from above could be classed with earthly things, but inasmuch as it takes place and is experienced on earth with earthly illustrations with the earthly kingdom in view, this is not so strange as it may appear. But we need to realize that the new birth is but the beginning. There is much more deeper truth of God that He wants us to learn from His Word. So many fail to understand this, and so do not grow and develop spiritually (compare Heb. v. 12-14).

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the One Who came from heaven—the Son of Man” (iii. 13).

The N.I.V. has a footnote pointing out that some Greek manuscripts have “Man, who is in heaven”. This is a difficulty which is removed when one realizes that these words may be an explanatory comment added by the Evangelist, like the phrase “Who has His being in the Father’s bosom” of John i. 18.

Professor F. F. Bruce comments here, “by the time the Evangelist wrote, the only one who came down from heaven had ascended up where He was before; heaven, in any case, is where He belongs”.

The Gospel according to MATTHEW.

No.15. viii. 1 - 20.

pp. 1 - 5

We now come to the second period of the Lord's earthly ministry which deals with miracles and the calling of the twelve Apostles. There are those who have problems with the performance of miracles. Dr. Plummer's words are appropriate here:

"To those who believe that Jesus Christ was what He claimed to be, to those who believe in the Incarnation, there is no difficulty about miracles. They are the natural works of a supernatural Person. If He was not supernatural, then difficulty arises. But in that case, we tear up the New Testament, and the history of the Christian church becomes inexplicable" (*Gospel acc. to Matthew*, p.122).

However, it was not that the Lord worked miracles that proved the genuineness of His Messiahship, for, as we have seen, Satan can travesty the miracles of God. It was rather that He performed the very miracles that the O.T. had predicted centuries before. Isaiah records the visitation of the Messiah to Israel when even the desert and wilderness will be glad:

"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy" (Isa.xxxv.5,6, N.I.V.).

Doubtless there were those in Isaiah's day, as there are today, who would think it impossible to interpret these verses *literally*. They would insist that the meaning was a *spiritual* one. But they would have been absolutely wrong, for the Lord's healing ministry did these very things day after day; giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and completely restoring those who were crippled. In fact the divine record stresses that, when healed, they actually leaped (Acts iii. 8; xiv. 10), showing that it was not just improvement of their condition, but perfect healing.

Peter refers to these credentials of the Messiah in Acts ii. 22:

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man *accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through Him*, as you yourselves know" (N.I.V.).

The epistle to the Hebrews confirms this:

"This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles" (ii. 3, 4, N.I.V.).

It should be noted that the healing of lepers is not mentioned in the summary of Christ's healing ministry given in iv. 24, and it may be that the one recorded in viii. 2-4 was the first instance of such an act. We have similar details given in Mark i. 40-45 and Luke v. 12-16. We should carefully weigh over whether the accounts in more than one

Gospel always refer to the same event, always remembering that the Lord was constantly healing people with similar complaints, and we have only a selection of them recorded in the Gospels.

The Lord's words need not be necessarily different on every occasion, nor the words of the sick person to Him. This may explain the divergence of some of the details recorded by the Evangelists. If Matthew gives us the *first* record of the healing of a leper, then the man's great faith was the more remarkable. Leprosy, at this time, was incurable and Psa. li. 7 points to it as symbolical of sin. If the man had never heard of a cure, then his words, "Thou canst make me clean" show a wonderful trust in the Lord's power to heal.

How different this was from the case of the one who had a son possessed of a demon. He said to the Lord, "*if you can do anything*, take pity on us and help us" (Mark ix. 22). He was not sure whether Christ had the ability to heal the boy. The Lord immediately challenges him on this vital point, "If you *can*? everything is possible for him who believe" (verse 23, N.I.V.). Unbelief always limits the Lord and the one who indulges in it.

Mark mentions the Lord's compassion which doubtless He felt towards all who were ravaged with disease (Mark i. 41). The Lord Jesus does not hesitate to touch the man even though his skin disease was highly contagious. The law of love is above the ceremonial law where the Lord is concerned and He touched the leper to assure him of His sympathy and readiness to help. *Immediately* the leprosy was cleansed; and the sudden cure was one of the outstanding features of these healing miracles.

In no case do we find that mere improvement takes place when the Lord uses His power to heal. It was complete restoration to health. In modern healing meetings we sometimes hear of those who receive some benefit, and this is taken to be a fulfillment of the healing of Scripture, which it certainly is not.

The Lord Jesus now commands the healed man to keep the law and present himself to the priest as an evidence that he had been cured. This shows that Christ did not disregard the law and he had made this clear by His statement in v. 17: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfil".

It is quite evident from the Gospel records that healings formed a large part of the Lord's kingdom ministry to Israel and showed not only His compassion, but His concern for the mental and physical health of His people. We should most certainly have regard for this and realize the important place that health takes in the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven upon earth. Some, with their spiritualizing, remove this entirely from their conception of God's Kingdom and so this comes considerably short of the reality portrayed in the holy Scriptures.

In the O.T. revelation of God's rule, health had an important place: God said, "I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians, for I am

the Lord Who healeth thee” (Exod. xv. 26). Later on God repeated this promise, “I will take sickness away from the midst of thee” (Exod. xxiii. 25), and this was repeated when Israel came to the borders of the promised land, “the Lord will take away from thee all sickness” (Deut. vii. 15).

We must not so stress spiritual realities that we forget how rich is the blessing of good health, both in this life and in the Kingdom yet to be on this earth. Hence the reason why healing miracles have such prominence in Christ’s earthly ministry, for this is one of the characteristics of the Kingdom of heaven when it is finally realized. Then “the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk ii. 14).

The next miracle recorded by Matthew is the healing of the centurion’s servant at a distance. This is not included by Mark, but is found in Luke vii. 2-10, where the centurion sends first elders and friends to plead for his servant. In Matthew he comes himself. This need not be regarded as a discrepancy. Neither Evangelist sets out to give every detail.

It has been noted that in the N.T. centurions have a good character (Matt. xxvii. 54; Acts x. 22; xxii. 26; xxiii. 17, 23, 24; xxvii. 43). Roman training, with its stress on order, often produced excellent individuals such as this one recorded in Matthew. Luke tells us that he had built a synagogue for the Jews, because he loved them, which certainly indicates that he was of a generous character.

His faith was such that it did not need the Lord to be present in person to accomplish the healing. “You have only to speak the word”, he said to Christ, which exhibited the quality and strength of his faith. This made the Lord marvel (viii. 10), so much so that He said “I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith”, which was praise indeed. The Lord made a similar comment concerning the Canaanitish woman (xv. 28). This was all the more remarkable because both of these people were outsiders and not Jews. But this did not hinder them from being subjects of the Messianic Kingdom, whereas many Jews who did not comply with the divine conditions for entering that kingdom would be shut out (verses 11, 12) even though they were “sons of the kingdom”. This is a Hebrew idiom like “son of hell” (xxiii. 15), or “sons of this age” (Luke xvi. 8).

The Lord’s words must have been a severe shock to Jews who considered that they had a natural right to the kingdom of heaven because they were descended from Abraham. John the Baptist had warned them in a similar way that physical descent alone was not sufficient. Their intense disappointment is expressed by the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

Now follows the third of Matthew’s triplet of miraculous healings, that of Peter’s mother-in-law, who was in bed with a fever. We are not told what kind of fever it was, but whatever was the cause the Lord Jesus touched her hand and she was cured at once, for Matthew goes on to say that she got up and began to wait on the Lord. The verb

dickonai is in the imperfect tense. The N.I.V. recognizes this by translating “began to wait on Him”, rather than “ministered” of the A.V.

The day, which was the sabbath (Mark i. 21), closed with a beautiful sunset scene. It was evening (Mark i. 33; Matt. viii. 14) and crowds came as the Lord Jesus stood at the door of Peter’s house and healed all and delivered them from demon possession. Satan and the powers of darkness did their utmost to nullify the Lord’s work at His first coming, as they will do so again at the end of the age just prior to His second coming (I.Tim.iv.1), hence the constant reference to demonism and the casting out of demons.

Matthew tells us that this was in harmony with Isa. liii. 4, “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases” (Matt. viii. 17, N.I.V.). This does not mean that diseases were transferred to Christ, but that He removed the sufferings of those who were ill and showed His sympathy with them by healing. Dr. A. T. Robertson shows that *bastazo* occurs freely in the papyri with the sense of “lift, carry away”. Moffatt translates: “He took away our sicknesses and bore the burden of our diseases”.

After these three miracles of healing we have three miracles of power over the forces of nature, over evil spirits, and over sin and its consequences (viii. 23-34; ix. 1-8). But before this the Lord gives warnings to two would-be disciples. To the first who, with self-confidence, promised to follow Christ fully, he was reminded of the cost of doing so:

“Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head” (viii. 20, N.I.V.).

At other times the Lord stressed this, reminding His hearers of not putting the hand to the plough and turning back (Luke ix. 62); taking up the cross with its suffering (Matthew xvi. 24), hating one’s own father, mother and wife (Luke xiv. 26), and selling all one’s possessions and giving to the poor (Matt. xix. 21). The pathway into the Kingdom was far from easy and this the scribe who addressed Christ had yet to learn.

No.16. viii. 21 - ix. 23.
pp. 21 - 25

Here, for the first time, the Lord describes Himself as the Son of Man, a title He uses over 80 times, 33 of these occurring in Matthew's Gospel. Its first occurrence in the Bible is in Psa. viii. referring to the type, Adam, and his dominion over the earth. The title as used by the Lord stresses His perfect humanity and is used by no one but Himself. How significant that the One Who made the earth (and the whole universe), when He came to it should have no permanent home! At His birth, there was no room for Him at the inn, only a cattle stall! And when adult He had no settled place to lay His head! As Dr. Plummer states, His life began in a borrowed stable and ended in a borrowed tomb! Here was humbling indeed. Yet all judgment has been committed unto Him because He is human as well as Divine (John v. 22, 27), and the time is coming when He shall reign over this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords; where He was once rejected.

To the other disciples, the Lord's enigmatic reply could only mean one thing, following Him meant putting Him first in *everything*, even before funerals, "Let the dead (i.e. spiritually) bury their own dead" (viii. 22). Following Christ means *service for Him* which must always have the first place. This is a lesson for all of us and probably the most important one. It certainly has the greatest challenge to all who profess to believe and fully follow the Saviour.

The second triplet of recorded miracles deal with the Lord's almighty power over natural, supernatural and spiritual forces, storm, demons and sin. He had apparently taken refuge from the crowds in a boat, and being wearied, possibly exhausted, He falls asleep and is unconscious of the severe storm which quickly followed. The disciples, accustomed as they were to the weather conditions on the lake, being fishermen, nevertheless were terrified at its violence, which was swamping the boat. They awaken the Lord, crying out, "Save us, we are perishing (or being destroyed; note the vivid present tense)". And the One Who recently marveled at the great faith of the centurion, has now to marvel at the smallness of His disciples' trust in Him. He said to them, "You of *little* faith, why are you so afraid?" It was not that He did not realize the severity of the sudden storm, but He was amazed at their lack of trust in Himself.

Though they did not realize it, they had the Creator of the winds and waves in their midst!

"Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm"
(viii. 26, N.I.V.).

This result amazed them (verse 27). Experienced men as they were, they had never seen anything like this before. Even if the wind suddenly stopped of its own accord, that would not at once calm the raging sea. The Sea of Galilee is 680 feet below the Mediterranean Sea and sudden squalls can come down from the summit of mount Hermon with terrific force. Both Mark and Luke term it a whirlwind (*lailaps*). Not only

this, but Matthew uses the word *seismos* for tempest. Everywhere else in the N.T. it means an earthquake, and it could mean that there was an earthquake under the lake. Severe though the effects were from all this, yet they were safe under the control of the Creator, and the Lord gives a demonstration in each of these three miracles, different though they were, that His power was supreme.

Why should He address inanimate things like winds and waves? The possibility is that He was dealing with more than these, namely the devil and the powers of darkness behind the storm, whose constant aim was to murder the Lord. More than once His life was in danger through the activity of the powers of evil.

Matthew now gives us the second miracle of his second group of three, which deals with the Lord's authority over the unseen spirit world and the forces of darkness. The Evangelist links it with the region of the Gadarenes, whereas in Mark v. 1 and Luke.viii.26 it is the country of the Gerasenes (N.I.V.). Dr. A. T. Robertson refers to a village by the lake called Khersa or Gerasa. He then says "this village is in the district of the city of Gadara some miles southeastward so that it can be called after Gerasa or Gadara". Matthew speaks of two demoniacs, while Mark and Luke mention only one, the leading one. There is no need to make difficulty here. The tombs were caves cut into the mountainside and people shunned the region because of the madmen.

These men were demon-possessed and the whole subject of demonology is difficult because we know so little of the evil spirit forces under the control of Satan. But to explain this merely as disease will not do, for Christ treats the demons as having real existence apart from the human personality. The Gospels describe them as unclean spirits, yet they immediately recognize Christ and acknowledge His power. One thing that is mystifying about these evil spirits is that they apparently long for embodiment. Consequently, on realizing the Lord's intention to drive them out of the men, they plead with Him to allow them to enter a herd of pigs that were nearby. He then gives them His permission with the consequence that the pigs rushed down a steep slope into the lake and were drowned. The word *abussos*, abyss, is used in Revelation (ix. 1-11; xi. 7; xvii. 8; xx. 1, 3) as somewhere where evil spirits are confined. It is used of the deep sea in Gen. i. 2, and appears to be linked somehow with deep water. In Luke viii. 31 and Matt. viii. 32 it cannot refer to the sea, but could be the depths of the lake into which the pigs rushed, but Scripture does not reveal everything about it. Of course, the demons didn't know what the pigs were going to do—i.e. rush into the lake after they had entered them. Yet the people of the vicinity begged the Lord to leave the district. It was not only the loss of the pigs that disturbed them, for Luke tells us that they were filled with great fear (Luke viii. 37). But they forgot the healing of the demon-possessed men and what it must have meant to them. They cared more for pigs than the deliverance of enslaved human beings and this attitude so often happens today.

Chapter ix.

The third miracle of the second group of three is the healing of the paralytic man. This was at "His own city" (ix. 1), namely Capernaum (Matt. iv. 13; Mark ii. 1-4). The

Lord Jesus recognized the faith of those who brought him on a mat. Mark and Luke record the fact that they could not reach the Lord because of the crowd, so they uncovered part of the roof and lowered him down before the Lord.

Realizing that the man had an uneasy mind, Christ commences with his spiritual need and tells him that his sins are forgiven (ix. 2). What joy this must have brought to his heart! But it had the opposite effect on the Scribes and Pharisees (Luke v. 17). This is the first collision between the Lord and the nation's leaders. In their hearts they said "this man is blaspheming". They did not say these words audibly, but the Searcher of hearts knew infallibly what was going on in their minds. He challenged them:

"Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say 'Your sins are forgiven', or to say 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . . Then He said to the paralytic, 'Get up, take your mat and go home'. And the man got up and went home" (ix. 4-7, N.I.V.).

It is obviously easier to *say* "thy sins are forgiven", because no one can prove that they are or are not forgiven. The claim to heal *can* proved true or false at once. The word *exousia* means either power or authority and the Lord Jesus had both. The instantaneous healing of the man convinced the multitude that the charge of blasphemy had not been proved, for they "were filled with awe and praised God" (ix. 8).

Between the second and third miracles, Matthew inserts his calling by the Lord. He gives his name as Matthew. Mark and Luke call him Levi (Mark ii. 14; Luke v. 27). There is no difficulty in the double name. Simon was called Peter, and Thomas was called Didymus.

It may have seemed surprising that Christ should have chosen a man that belonged to a class that was the most despised and detested among the Jews. This was not only because he was a tax gatherer but also the fact that so many of them practiced graft.

It was indeed a mixed company at Levi's feast, four disciples and the former companions of Levi, publicans and sinners; with Pharisees and Scribes as onlookers, and disciples of John the Baptist who were fasting at this time (ix. 14). The religious leaders pretended to be shocked that the One they sarcastically called "your teacher" should keep such company. The Lord's cutting reply showed up their ignorance and bias:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice'. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (ix. 12 and 13, N.I.V.).

He bids them to learn the real meaning of Hos. vi. 6. This is repeated in Matt. xii. 7. Mercy was of far greater value than animal sacrifice, which after all was only a shadow (Heb. x. 1). Matthew's response was a real act of faith, for it was very unlikely that he would be accepted back into tax collection. Not like the fishermen who could return to their craft and actually did so after the crucifixion.

It was puzzling that John the Baptist's followers fasted while the disciples did not do so. John was languishing in prison and fasting may have been appropriate, but while the festivities of a wedding are going on, it is impossible to fast (ix. 15), but at this wedding, the Bridegroom would be "taken from them", a hint of His violent death. Then, in their sorrow, they would fast. The Lord identifies Himself with the divine Bridegroom of the O.T. (Isa. lxii. 5; Hos. ii. 10) and there the wife is clearly Israel. God never mixes His metaphors, and there is no Scriptural excuse for confusing the wife of Jehovah with the Body of Christ.

The parables of the new patch and the new wineskins clearly indicate the greater importance of the Lord's new ministry than anything that had gone before (ix. 15-17). We should remember that wine was not preserved in glass bottles, but in goat skins; also that a new piece of woolen cloth would shrink when wet and tear a bigger hole than ever when used as a patch.

There follows now yet a third group of miracles. a ruler of the synagogue, Jairus by name (Mark v. 22; Luke viii. 41) comes to the Lord, saying, "My daughter has just died: but come and put your hand on her and she will live" (Matt. ix. 18). As He goes with the ruler a woman who suffered from hemorrhage came behind Him and touched the fringe of His garment, for she said to herself, "if I only touch His cloak, I shall be healed". Here was great faith again, even if it was tinged faintly with superstition. The Lord Jesus encourages her with the affectionate term "daughter" and she is immediately healed.

He passes on to the ruler's home where a crowd of mourners were gathered. Some may have been hired and it was the custom to employ flute players as part of the mourning. The Lord dismisses them with the words "the girl is not dead but sleep" (ix.24). This resulted in derisive laughter. Luke, the physician, states that they knew she was dead (Luke viii. 53) and there is no reason to believe she had only fallen into a trance or deep natural sleep.

Their derision is up to date, for so few, even believers, accept the consistent teaching of the Word of God, both Old Testament and New, that death of the Lord's children is likened to sleep and resurrection like waking up again in the morning.

The Lord then takes the girl by the hand, and He Who is the Resurrection and the Life, restores her to natural life. Matthew tells us that His fame spread throughout that region.

No.17. ix. 24 - x. 23.
pp. 45 - 49

After the raising of the ruler's daughter, Matthew records the healing of two blind men (ix. 27-31), and again in xx. 30. Mark twice records the healing of one blind man (Mark viii. 22; x. 46). In view of the prediction of the Messiah's witness and work in Isa. xxxv. 5, 6, these are not the only occurrences of giving sight to the blind. This miracle was probably of frequent occurrence together with other healing miracles, and we have only a selection of them recorded in the Gospels. The Lord, in His wisdom, restricts the publishing of His healing work. He wished to avoid the cheap publicity and popularity that this would bring. The time for the complete revelation of Himself to the nation had not yet come.

After the giving of life to the dead and sight to the blind, we have the third miracle of this Triplet, the restoration of speech to the dumb (ix. 32, 33). The cause of the dumbness was demon-possession, which only goes to show that these evil spirit can affect the body as well as the mind.

One important result of this miracle was to increase the hatred of the Pharisees. Unable to deny the reality of the miracles, they were becoming desperate and could only discredit them by associating Christ with Beelzebub, the prince of demons, otherwise Satan himself. This occurs again in chapter xii. 24 and is linked with the unforgivable sin by the Lord (xii. 31 and 32). We shall have more to say on this matter when we reach chapter xii.

At this point in chapter ix. Matthew gives a summary of the Messiah's work as a whole:

"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every kind of disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep, without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field'." (ix. 35-38, N.I.V.).

The Evangelist stresses the great compassion of the Lord as He regarded the crowds (ix. 36; xiv. 14; xv. 32; xx. 34). He realized that their leaders were not meeting their needs, either spiritual or temporal. Matthew uses a strong word (*eskulmenoi*) to express their distress. They were like sheep without a shepherd or pasture to feed upon, and were "harassed and helpless" (N.I.V.), not knowing where to get satisfaction. Not only this, but the numbers were so great that it was impossible to reach them all. They needed more workers, hence the Lord's call for prayer recorded in verses 37 and 38.

He Himself is going to meet this need; hence the calling of the Twelve recorded in the next chapter. It is to be noted that Mark puts a considerable interval between the selection of the Twelve and their being sent out to preach the gospel of the Kingdom

(Mark iii. 13-15; vi. 7) and informs us that they were directed to go in pairs (vi. 7). Matthew does not mention this, but nevertheless lists them in pairs. It is noteworthy that there were 12 of them and this number has been connected with Israel since their beginning (12 sons of Jacob and the 12 tribes). Yet we know little about most of them as to where they worked, and where they lived and died. The traditions about them are not reliable. In spite of this we are quite sure that the Lord knew what He was doing when He chose them, and the message of the earthly kingdom must have received an added impetus from their witness. We should remember that in the heavenly Jerusalem, the wall has “twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. xxi. 14). This must refer to the Twelve as re-constituted in the Acts, Matthias taking the place of the traitor Judas Iscariot.

The Twelve were obviously chosen before their commission by the Lord, although Matthew does not record this. It was essential, if their ministry was to be successful, that barriers to its progress must be removed. We have seen that Satan and his hosts made a deliberate attempt, in more than one way, to nullify the Lord’s witness and prevent the kingdom being realized. Demon possession was an evidence of this and the Lord continually countered it by casting out and conquering demons who were holding people in their grip.

This power He now gives the Twelve (Matt. x. 1) and also the capability of healing all diseases, showing that good health was to be an important feature of the Kingdom when it is realized. This transference of power was certainly without precedent in Israel’s history. No Jewish leader, not even Moses, was able to hand over their miraculous powers to others. Elijah was allowed to transmit his powers to Elisha, but only when he himself was removed from the earth.

Matthew and Mark do not give the apostles’ names in the same order, but Peter comes first in the four lists given in the Gospels and Acts i. 13. Judas comes last. “Iscariot” may mean “man of Kerioth” which is situated near Edom (Josh. xv. 21-25). Bartholomew is the name for Nathaniel. Thaddeus is Judas, the brother of James, and is differentiated from the traitor by the words “not Iscariot” in John xiv. 22.

These twelve were “sent forth” by the Lord. The word “sent forth” is cognate with “apostles” which means “sent ones”. The Lord restricted their ministry to Israel and forbade them to go to the Gentiles. Just as, later on, He restricted His own ministry to Israel (xv. 24). It is astonishing how expositors miss the Scriptural reason for this. Some actually say that this restriction was kept to the first tour only. This is obviously wrong because it obtained right throughout the Lord’s life and the Acts of the Apostles (see xxviii. 17-20). Paul on his missionary journeys always went to the Jew *first*. Both Peter and he stressed that this was *necessary* (Acts iii. 25, 26; xiii. 45-47).

One of the chief reasons for missing the Scriptural reasons for Israel’s priority in the purpose of God, is the wrong conceptions of the kingdom of heaven and the failure to link it with the Messianic kingdom of the O.T. If this is avoided, then the prior place of Israel is obvious. We have shown the Scriptural reasons for this in previous chapters. It

is essential that we grip these to understand Israel's priority in this glorious earthly kingdom. Not to do this means confusion and failure to comprehend the true place of the Church, the Body of Christ, with its destiny in the highest heavens.

The Gentile has not been forgotten by God in His earthly kingdom plans. At the beginning of the revelation by the Lord of this great purpose were not Abraham's seed to be the means of blessing to *all families of the earth?* (Gen. xii. 3).

The twelve apostles were to be heralds, proclaiming the good news of the nearness of this Kingdom, just as John the Baptist and the Lord Himself was doing.

“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near’. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give” (Matt. x. 5-8, N.I.V.).

The last sentence means that they must not take payment for healing or for their ministry. The power to heal had been given them for nothing, and they were not permitted to make a trade of their miraculous powers. This does not conflict with verse.10, “the worker is worth his keep” (N.I.V.) or the warning concerning money. Luke, in the charge to the 70, has the words “for the labourer is worthy of his hire” with *misthou*, reward (hire), instead of *trophes*, food (Luke x. 7, A.V.). It is significant that Paul in I Tim. v. 18 quotes Luke's form as *Scripture*.

The word “provide” in verse 9 is in the middle voice and means do not require or provide for yourselves money. To accept support from those to whom they ministered was permitted, but nothing more. They were not to accept financial remuneration for their service. In other words they were not like persons traveling for business or pleasure. There was no need to make elaborate preparations; they must travel in simplicity with their trust in the Lord. But they are to be careful what house they make their headquarters (x. 13-15). Good manners must not be forgotten, “as you enter the home, give it your greeting” (x. 12). It is amazing how many professing Christians forget that good manners are an essential part of sound Christian witness.

But a solemn warning was given to those who rejected them (x. 14, 15). It would be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment than for such people. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha had long since turned to dust in their graves when these words were given. And as they unmistakably refer to a future event, these must surely be raised from the dead in order to come under this divine judgment.

The Lord Jesus does not minimize the tests and dangers that awaited them. He said, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves” (x. 16). They must combine “the shrewdness of snakes with the innocence of doves” (see Psa. lviii. 4, 5??). It was a combination of wariness and innocence that was necessary for the protection of the sheep and the upsetting of the wolves.

Not only this, but they must be prepared to be brought before local courts of justice such as existed in every Jewish town and the synagogues also. They would be falsely accused and even flogged (x. 17-20), but they were not to worry about preparing a defence for the Holy Spirit would speak through them (x. 20). They would be “hated of all men for My Name’s sake” (A.V.) said the Lord. These words were probably surprising and mystifying to the Twelve who were expecting the speedy triumph of Messiah and the setting up of the Kingdom.

However, they must endure the persecutions to the end and then they would be saved (x. 22). Great care needs to be taken with this aspect of salvation otherwise we shall be contradicting holy Scripture. We shall see when we reach chapter xvi., that salvation from sin in the evangelical sense is not in view here otherwise we should have salvation by works and merit. We shall give this detailed consideration when this chapter is reached. In Luke xxi. 19 we have “shall win their souls” (literally) as equivalent to salvation in Matt. x.

Persecution and betrayal would even enter family life, a bitter experience indeed (verse 21). When persecuted in one place they were exhorted to flee to another (x. 23). “To stop and meet useless risks, because one is afraid of being called a coward, is one of the subtlest forms of cowardice”, and “the desire to be thought brave is not a high motive for courageous action” (A. Plummer).

Verse 23 ends with a “verily I say unto you” (A.V.) which always introduces something of extreme importance. This verse is not easy to interpret:

“I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes” (N.I.V.).

No.18. x. 23 - xi. 12.
pp. 65 - 69

It is important to notice that in the original, the element of doubt is expressed. What is this coming to which Christ refers? Some expositors refer it to the Transfiguration, or the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Moffatt translates it “before the Son of Man arrives”; as if the Lord meant that He would overtake them in their tour of Galilee. This is most unlikely when one notes carefully how Christ uses the word “coming”, and relates it in this Gospel to His Second Advent.

In the Greek we have the untranslatable particle *an* with the subjunctive:

“A particle indicating that something can or could occur on certain conditions, or by the combination of certain fortuitous causes” (Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*).

In *The Companion Bible*, Dr. E. W. Bullinger puts in the margin “be come = may have come. This is rendered hypothetical by the particle *an* (which cannot be translated), because His Coming depended on the repentance of Israel (Acts iii. 19-26). It would then have been (and will now yet be) the judicial coming of the Son of Man”.

It was this possibility with tremendous consequences that dominated the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles. Those who are blind to this or reject it, are throwing away a divine key that solves many problems in connection with the epistles written during this period. In verse 25 we find the Lord Jesus using the term “Beelzebub” given to Him in sarcasm by His enemies. The origin of the word is unknown and has given a lot of trouble to expositors. It may mean “lord of flies”, or “lord of dung”, or “lord of idolatrous sacrifices”. In xii. 24 it is evident that the Pharisees regarded the word as meaning “the prince of the demons”, Satan in other words. This was an exceedingly serious charge as we shall see when the Lord deals with the sin against the Holy Spirit.

There follows a threefold “fear not” (verses 26, 28, 31). What has been taught them in private the disciples are to proclaim publicly (verse 27) and they are not to be afraid of the consequences, even though this meant persecution for them. The second “fear not” reads:

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (*gehenna*)” (N.I.V.).

This is an awkward verse for those who believe the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The Bible knows of no such doctrine as a concordance can easily show if the occurrences of the words “immortal” and “immortality” are studied. God alone has immortality (I Tim. vi. 14-16). Note too the differences between “kill” and “destroy”. Fire, both in human and divine spheres is not for the preservation of evil, but for its destruction and abolishment. Verses 29-31 were obviously meant to comfort and strengthen the disciples, even though they may be bitterly persecuted.

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (x. 29-31, N.I.V.).

It is amazing that, although God deals with millions, yet not one is lost in the crowd, but is known, protected, and guided by Him. Here is One Who has all knowledge and His loving care is beyond human comprehension. This is surely true for all time and gives us the reason for the third “fear not” (verse 31).

The verses that follow are challenging indeed. They concern those who publicly acknowledge Christ whatever the results may be in suffering and loss, and those who do not do so and thus disown the Lord before men (x. 32, 33). Such, in their turn, are disowned by the Lord at the judgment seat of God, “I will disown him before My Father in heaven”. As Dr. Plummer says, these words are monstrous, if He Who makes them is not conscious of being Divine. Imagine any created being talking like this! These words were indeed solemn to the Twelve.

Verses 34 and 35 are problematic too. The Lord Jesus assures them that He has not come to bring in an easy time of peace and quiet, rather the opposite, symbolized by a sword (x. 35, 36) which would enter even into family life and cause division between those who receive His words and those who do not. This does not contradict the wondrous peace promise in John xiv. 27 which is the privilege of all who truly trust in the Lord for everything. This peace can be experienced at all times even though they may be difficult and challenging. It is not peace at any price, but a glorious experience of rest and calm for those whose faith causes them to rely entirely upon the Lord.

Christ's teaching goes on to deal with love in its relationship to others:

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (x. 37, N.I.V.).

Luke's Gospel states the same truth in a way that sounds puzzling:

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be My disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple” (Luke.xiv.26, N.I.V.)

This does not mean that men are to bear ill will to their families, but is strong language to emphasize that devotion to one's family must take second place to devotion to Christ. “In all things He must have the pre-eminence (first place)” (Col. i. 18). The believer must love the Lord in action *more than* his family, and this must constantly be shown by *deeds* rather than words.

We need to remember constantly that the love of the N.T. is not just an emotion, or exalted feeling, but is expressed by what we do. Our love for Him is measured by just how far we are prepared to go in loss and even suffering for the Lord.

When Christ talks about taking up the cross, He was using an illustration that would be familiar to all Jews. It was the custom for a condemned person to carry his own cross, as the Lord did Himself—until Simon the Cyrene was impressed for that purpose. The Jews were well acquainted with crucifixion since the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. One of the Maccabean rulers, Alexander Jannaeus, had crucified no less than 800 Pharisees.

When the Lord used this illustration, no one could be in any doubt of its meaning, namely suffering and loss. Mark (viii. 35), Luke (ix. 24; xvii. 33) and John (xii. 25) contain the same teaching.

It should be noted that the word of “life” in verse 39 is *psuche*, soul. The losing of the soul for Christ's sake, the salvation of the soul, are statements with a special doctrinal significance which we shall see when we consider xvi. 24-28. Any loss which follows faithful service for the Lord is respected by Him and honoured by reward, for He will be in no man's debt. The doctrine of reward has been misunderstood and misrepresented by

some, but it runs through the length and breadth of Scripture and cannot be ignored by the faithful student.

We have seen that the great discourses of Matthew's Gospel are ended by the formula, "it came to pass when Jesus ended" (vii. 28; xi. 1; xiii. 53; xix. 1; xxvi. 1) and this occurs in verse 1 of chapter xi., which shows it is a wrong chapter division. Verse 1 should be the last verse of the preceding chapter. This verse makes clear that the Lord followed behind the ministry of the Twelve at a distance, very much like He did with the Seventy (Luke x. 1).

"When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask Him, 'Are you the One Who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' Jesus replied, 'Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me.'" (Matt. xi. 2-6, N.I.V.).

John was in prison in Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea, which at this time belonged to the rule of Herod Antipas. It was more likely this affected John's faith, for, after loyally proclaiming the good news of God's earthly kingdom and its nearness, how was it that he was a prisoner, and the Lord had done nothing to rescue him?

We have seen that the Lord's miracles were confirmatory of His Messiahship. They were not just displays of miraculous power, but were actually those prophetically declared by the O.T. as marks of the true Messiah (Isa. xxxv. 5, 6; lxi. 1). The answer of the Lord Jesus to John's doubt amply confirms this (Matt. x. 4-6) and consists of three pairs of explanation which could only be understood literally.

Verse 6, with its warning, must have applied to the Baptist. "Blessed is he" shows it is John who is under consideration. Had it referred to others we should have had "Blessed are they". The words are a check on John, even though he was imprisoned, for unbelief is always the deadliest of sins in a believer, and if not eradicated, will certainly lead to falling away. Doubt is not, as some people think, a proof of superior intellect or piety. Rather is it the parent sin that has caused infinite trouble in the creation of God. It denies all that God stands for and even limits Him (Matt. xiii. 58).

In spite of this the Lord continues and speaks of John in terms of high praise (x. 7-15). He asks three questions concerning him (verses 7-9). Did they expect him to bend about like the reeds near the Jordan, shaken by the wind? If so, they were wrong. John had all the qualities of a great prophet, which were shown in his integrity, strength of will and fearless zeal for truth and righteousness, and the Lord declares that "among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (verse 11). He was "more than a prophet", for, in addition to this office, he was the Forerunner of the Messiah and was His herald, pointing out Him as come (John i. 29, 35, 36). And the Lord does not hesitate to quote Mal. iii. 1 to prove this. It is significant that this Scripture was not spiritualized, but regarded literally. John is the end of one era and the beginning of another which is related closely to the earthly Kingdom. He has been likened to the mountain peak between the old and the new.

The words at the close of verse 11 are difficult. They probably mean the John is greater than all others in character, but the least in the kingdom of heaven surpasses him in privilege. Yet we must not forget that the Baptist, after the millennial reign of Christ, must have a place in the great wedding scene, which is described in Rev. xxi., pertaining to the new heaven and new earth, for he is the “friend of the Bridegroom”, the equivalent of the “best man” (John iii. 29).

The words of verse 12 are likewise difficult. What are these violent ones who take the kingdom of heaven by force? “Suffereth violence” is *biazetai* which occurs only here and in Luke xvi. 16. It is difficult to decide whether the word is in the middle or passive voice. The probability is that it is middle and then has the meaning of “forces its way” like a strong wind. The N.I.V. takes this view and translate:

“From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.”

The preaching of John had led to an impetuous thronging around the Lord wherever He went and behind it excitement and curiosity was mixed with true conviction.

**No.19. xi. 13 - xii. 24.
pp. 81 - 86**

The Lord Jesus now links the ministry of the Baptist with the prophetic statement concerning Elijah in Mal. iv. 5 by saying:

“And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come, He who has ears, let him hear” (xi. 14, 15, N.I.V.).

We remember that Luke’s account of John the Baptist’s birth and ministry likens him to Elijah (Luke i. 17). He was evidently like the prophet in appearance, temperament, and in his witness, although he did not realize this (John i. 21). The words of verse 15 are used by the Lord 14 times in the Gospel records, always emphasizing something weighty and serious.

The statement He made concerning John was conditional, “if you are willing to receive or accept it”. The whole of the great kingdom teaching as to the time of its setting up, depended upon the attitude of the people of Israel to whom the Lord had come and who were the centre of its purpose. Had the nations repented as commanded and received Christ as Messiah and King, John would have been reckoned as fulfilling the prophecy concerning Elijah.

The Lord now shows the real condition of the people as a whole and their religious leaders:

“To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market places and calling out to others:

‘We played the flute for you,
and you did not dance;
we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.’

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners’.” (xi. 16-19, N.I.V.).

“This generation” is a significant expression, used by the Lord 16 times and described by Him as “evil and adulterous” (xii. 39), “faithless and perverse” (xvii. 17). They were the most favoured generation in the whole history of Israel, as they had the personal ministry of their Messiah. Hence their tremendous responsibility and terrible sin of rejecting Him.

The Lord had often watched children playing in the market place and the illustration is so apt and true that it could not have been manufactured by the Evangelist or anyone else. Israel’s righteous leaders were like peevish children with narrow ideas of games, for whom nothing was right. The Baptist comes with his sternness and they want him to play at dancing and festivals. The Lord Jesus comes, taking part in social joy, and they want Him to play at funerals. In addition to this, they malign both John and the Lord, but “wisdom is proved right by her actions” (xi. 19). The asceticism of John and the lack of it in the Lord were equally right under the control of a God of wisdom.

The Lord Jesus now discusses the reactions of the cities in which He performed many of His mighty works:

“Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. ‘Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you’.” (xi. 20-22, N.I.V.).

Our knowledge of Palestine during the life of Christ is meager and nothing is known of Chorazin or of the Lord’s ministry there, which goes to show that some of His great witness is unrecorded. Tyre and Sidon were wicked cities (Isa. xxiii.; Jer. xxv. 22; xlvii. 4; Ezek. xxvi. 3-7; xxviii. 12-22) and have passed into oblivion many centuries ago. Yet verse 22 assures us that there is a future experience for them on the “day of judgment”.

No human being can judge another on the grounds of what he would have done if circumstances and conditions had been different. But a God of righteousness can and will do so, because He knows all the activities of the *mind* of a person as well as their words and actions, and just what their response would be under different conditions.

Christ goes on to treat with Capernaum, and this city was doubly blessed because it was the Lord’s home as well as witnessing His miracles and signs. He makes the astounding statement that if these miracles had been performed in Sodom, it would have

remained to the present time instead of being destroyed. Again, Sodom, in the future great judgment day will fare better than Capernaum (verse 24). It is very evident that God's standards of judgment are very different to man's, and they are the verdict of One Who is absolutely righteous.

The sins of Tyre, Sidon, and Capernaum were not those of hostility or ridicule. They were just indifferent. His mighty works made no impression on them. And this is the great sin of the present day—indifference. There is little or no spiritual need and therefore few care. One can be enthusiastic about anything except the things of Christ. People are prepared to suffer and put themselves to any lengths for their pleasures. They indeed are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (II Tim. iii. 4). They become worshippers of pleasure and their own interests. It is not that they are violently anti-Christian. They just have no need of Christ and so they ignore Him and His claims.

The conditions were much the same during the earthly life of the Saviour. How wonderful that, in the following verses, He turns away from it all and makes the sublime statement recorded in verses 25-30 in His communion with the Father:

“*At that time* Jesus said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. *All things* have been committed to Me by My Father. *No one knows the Son, except the Father*, and no one knows the Father except the Son and *those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him*.

Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (xi. 25-30, N.I.V.).

What matchless words! And they have been precious to God's people all down the centuries. A. B. Bruce calls them “at once prayer, praise and self-communing in a devout spirit”. Some expositors have felt that these words are manifestly Johanne in spirit and should have been found in John's Gospel. But we are wise if we do not try to correct the real Author, the Holy Spirit, Who, at this point in Matthew's writing, brought to his mind these wonderful words of the Lord Jesus. We should note the verb *epiginoskei* twice, which means “fully know”. No one *fully* knows Christ except the Father. To hear some Christians talk one would think that they have no problems with His tremendous personality. They imagine they know all there is to know about Him, but they should reflect on verse 27 and also remember that Col. ii. 2 designates Him as the Mystery of God in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The Lord calls us to take His yoke upon us and learn from Him. This yoke is “easy” because, being appointed and made by Him, it fits us perfectly and does not chafe. In this way we can be linked with Him and walk together. The “burden” then becomes light. He becomes the burden-bearer, and as a consequence we can find *rest and peace*, and not only that but refreshment too for the word used (*anapausis*) includes this. It means more than just rest; it is rather rejuvenation.

The Lord Jesus is a meek and humble Teacher (verse 29). How vastly different from the world around us. Humility was not a virtue among the ancients. It was ranked with

servility. But the greatest Teacher this world has ever seen glorified real humility; and the apostle Paul remembered this when he wrote “in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself” (Phil. ii. 3).

There is no place for the “big I” in service for Christ. How can we be yoked to the truly humble One and indulge in swank and self-esteem? His yoke is “kindly” (better than “easy”) and His burden is light. What a contrast to the religious teachers of the day, “For they *bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne and lay them on men’s shoulders*; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (xxiii. 4). What a terrible contrast! but it was. We can only thank and praise the Lord for this triplet of wonderful sayings (25, 26; 27; and 28-30). It is indeed a sublime prayer.

Chapter xii.

Chapter xii. commences with the incident of the Lord and His disciples passing through a field of grain, and the disciples, feeling hungry, plucked a few ears of wheat and ate them. This gave the Lord’s enemies, the Pharisees, a golden opportunity as they thought to criticize them for violating the laws of the Sabbath. But it was not the laws of the O.T. that the twelve were breaking, but rather the narrow Pharisaic rules which these religious leaders had forced upon the people. To the Pharisees, plucking the ears of wheat was reaping, and rubbing them in their hands was threshing. This nonsense the Lord Jesus now exposes by quoting the action of David when he was hungry: also the priests in their ceremonial work on the sabbath day which was not only allowed by God, but commanded by Him. There were actually more sacrifices on the sabbath than on any other day of the week, and this meant work all the time.

The Pharisees were careful not to accuse the disciples of stealing grain by eating it, as this was allowed in Deut. xxiii. 25. But as the Lord of the sabbath Christ pronounces the twelve as being innocent of breaking of the Sabbatical law.

It is difficult to avoid Exod. xxxi. 12-18 here. The Lord of the Sabbath is Jehovah, as this context makes clear. The Lord Jesus Christ uses the title “Lord” without any apology whatsoever. He alone is the Lord and controller of the sabbath day and has the authority to determine the way in which the principle of the sabbath rest can best be carried out. This tremendous claim angered the Pharisees extremely and the situation was brought to a head by the Lord’s healing of the man with a shriveled hand (xii. 9-14). Again they tried to find a reason for accusing Him (verse 10) by asking if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath? His answer must have been devastating to them for He insisted that this rest day included doing good! (verse 12). Then we read:

“But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus” (xii. 14, N.I.V.).

Mark’s account tells how they conspired with their hated rivals, the Herodians (iii. 6), so determined were they to murder the Lord and get rid of Him. Not only was He the giver and controller of the Sabbath, He was the great King-Priest, and as such was greater than the Temple with its earthly failing priesthood. The fact that the word “greater” is

neuter in the Greek is not a problem, for, as Professor A. T. Robertson declares, it still refers to Christ and His superiority.

Realizing the plotting of the Pharisees the Lord Jesus withdrew from the place (Matthew xii. 15). Many still followed Him and He healed all their sick, thus fulfilling Isa. xlii. 1-4. He was the great Servant, Who was the special object of divine love and the anointing of the Spirit. He was the One who would finally bring justice to the nations. His tenderness is stressed. He will not extinguish any spark of real longing in human hearts. He will not break the crushed reed nor extinguish the flickering wick that is smoking and going out. These are vivid images which describe His tender and sympathetic work and witness.

A demon-possessed man was brought to Him and much to the astonishment of the bystanders He healed him straight-away. "Could this be the Son of David?" they ask (Matt. xii. 22, 23). The way the question is expressed in Greek, expects the answer "No", but doubtless they were afraid of the Pharisees. They were amazed and full of excitement. Directly the religious leaders noted this they decided that they must do something strenuous to counteract any possibility of the people recognizing the Lord as Messiah, the son of David. They could not deny the fact of the miracles, for the blind and dumb men both saw and spoke (verse 22), so in desperation they suggest that Christ worked His miracles through the power of Satan, and in doing this they committed the one sin that cannot be forgiven, as the context teaches.

No.20. xii. 25 - xiii. 19.
pp. 113 - 119

The Pharisees' terrible assessment of the Lord's miracles being done through Satan's power, so that He was just the tool of the evil one, is now exposed by Christ. If this accusation was true, then Satan was working against himself and the Lord asks "how shall then his kingdom stand?" (Matt. xii. 26). On the other hand, "if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (xii. 28, N.I.V.), for this practical evidence of His control over the spirit world corroborated His Messiahship.

Why is the sin against the Holy Spirit as committed by the religious leaders, regarded as being so terrible? If Christ was Satan's tool, then the whole redemptive plan of God for the universe collapses and comes to nothing.

We occasionally meet those who are so burdened with their failures that they imagine they have committed the unforgivable sin. But let us remember this is confined to one sin only; all other sin can be forgiven by God (verses 31, 32). This sin is believing that Satan is really God, and Christ was using the evil one's power to perform the miracles that He wrought. In all our experience we have never met a person with such a belief, although it is possible that such persons do exist.

The Lord Jesus now uses the terrible words that the Baptist had addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism (Matt. iii. 7):

“You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks but I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken” (xii. 34-37, N.I.V.).

The Pharisees had deliberately made their choice and had taken Satan’s side against God, which only shows the evil heart within them.

Verse 36 is very searching. Christ asserts that every “idle word” is noted by God. *Argon*, the word translated “idle”, literally means “not working”. Such words are useless and do no good. Professor A. T. Robertson says:

“Jesus Who knows our very thoughts (12:25), insists that our words reveal our thoughts and form a just basis for the interpretation of character (12:37). Here we have judgment by words, as in 25:31-46 where Jesus presents judgment by deeds. Both are real tests of actual character and by the radio our words can be heard all round the earth. Who knows where they stop?”.

To cap it all, the Pharisees and teachers of the law, in addition to the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, now demand a miraculous sign from Christ. “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you” (xii. 38, N.I.V.). And this, after all the miracles He had performed! Their request was impudent and hypocritical. The Lord replied:

“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (xii. 39, 40, N.I.V.).

We shall have more to say about the phrase “three days and three nights” when we come to the burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Is it to be taken literally, or is it a loose expression denoting a shorter period of time? We shall weigh up the evidence for and against this when we reach the end of the Gospel.

As He had done before, Christ now asserts that there is a future in resurrection for the men of Nineveh and the queen of Sheba, who will condemn the favoured generation to whom the Lord came (xii. 41, 42). The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, but the wicked generation to whom the Lord came had been commanded to repent, and they refused. The Lord likens them to a demoniac who had been cured and then allows himself to be re-possessed by demons. The final condition was infinitely worse than the first (verses 43-45).

The verses that follow tell of the mother and brothers of the Lord who wanted to speak to Him. These were the younger sons of Joseph and Mary. The Lord’s reply was not a censure on His relatives, but points to the fact that there was something more important than human relationships. He said:

“Who is My mother, and who are My brothers? Pointing to His disciples, He said, Here are My mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother” (xii. 48-50, N.I.V.).

We should note that He does not refer to Joseph as His father for that would not have been true. He had no human father. His Father was “in heaven”.

It may be that here Mary was getting concerned about the Lord’s health and wanted to take Him home for rest and refreshment. Mark tells us that the multitude surrounding Him made it impossible to eat, and some of His brothers actually thought the strain was so great that He was “beside Himself” (Mark iii. 20, 21) and they tried to detain Him. But the Lord the same day went out of the house and sat beside the lake (Matt. xiii. 1).

Chapter xiii. which follows is one of great importance and the correct interpretation cannot be made unless we remember the context in which it is placed. The 12th chapter records a climax, recording the rejection of Christ in a three-fold capacity. He was greater than the Temple with its priesthood (xii. 6), greater than Jonah the prophet (41), and greater than king Solomon (42), and as Prophet, Priest and King He was set aside by the leaders of Israel and this in spite of His mighty works which proved His Messiahship (chapter xi.).

From this point the Lord begins to veil His teaching in parables, which was evidently something new in His ministry for His disciples came and asked Him why He was speaking in parables (xiii. 10).

To anyone who adopts the popular idea about parables, the Lord’s reply must be puzzling indeed. He had sometimes used stories as illustrations, but none of them were called parables. They are often regarded as simple anecdotes for beginners in the Christian way, but a practical acquaintance with them gives a very different view. The Lord Jesus quotes from Psa. lxxviii. 2 in Matt. xiii. 35. The Psalm commences with the words:

“Give ear, O My people, 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.”

“Dark sayings” are hardly an expression of simple truth, and the Psalm with its history of Israel from Moses to David does not merely record external events, but gives the *inner reasons* of their failures which were so often unperceived. Parables deal with the deep ways of God with His people, much of which are veiled from those who are uninstructed, or who oppose the truth.

Linked with the word “parable” in Matt. xiii. is the word “mystery” or secret. It is important to realize that this word does not denote something that is mysterious or puzzling, but a fact that has been *kept secret*. The word is from *mustes*, one initiated, coming from *mueo*, to close or shut, and thus hide. The mystery religions of the East had various secrets and signs, as secret societies do today. We have in this chapter the *secrets*

of the kingdom of heaven, and Christ asserts that the knowledge of these secrets had been given to the disciples, but *not* to the people as a whole:

“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven *has been given to you, but not to them* this is why I speak to them in parables. Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear but blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear” (xiii. 11-16, N.I.V.).

In verse 14 the Lord explains why His opposers in Israel did not see (understand). It was because they had firmly closed their eyes and deafened their ears, and made their minds so hard in their opposition to God that understanding of His truth relating to the kingdom was impossible. And to prove this Christ quotes the momentous prophecy contained in Isa. vi. 9, 10. This was the cause of Israel’s failure in Isaiah’s day. It also explained why the leaders of the people and others associated with them rejected the Messiah at His first coming. There are three quotations of this prophecy given in the N.T. that occur at times of great crisis in Israel’s history, namely here, in John xii. and Acts xxviii. To ignore this is to throw away a divine key that explains so much of the purpose of God contained in the N.T., and gives the reason why the chosen earthly people failed so badly, and also throws light on their spiritual condition today.

The parables revealed the truth to those who were spiritually hungry, but veiled it from those who opposed. From this time of rejection onwards the Lord maintained parabolic teaching in public for “without a parable spake He nothing to them” (xiii. 34).

There are eight parables given in Matt. xiii., not seven as is sometimes taught, and they are in perfect balance as the following structure by C. H. Welch shows:

- A | 1-9. The SOWER. The sowing of the seed into four kinds of ground.
 - 13. They (Israel) *did not* understand.
- B | 24-30. The TARES. Good and bad together.
 - Separated at the harvest (the end of the age);
 - the bad are cast into a furnace of fire,
 - there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.
- C | 31, 32. The MUSTARD TREE. One tree.
- D | 33. The LEAVEN. Hid in three measures of meal.

*These first four parables spoken **outside** the house to great multitudes.*

- D | 44. The TREASURE. Hid in a field.
- C | 45, 46. GOODLY PEARLS. One pearl.
- B | 47-50. The DRAG NET. Good and bad together.
 - Separated at the end of the age;
 - the bad are cast into a furnace of fire,
 - there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.
- 51. They (disciples) *did* understand.
- A | 52. The SCRIBE. The treasure opened to those in the house.

*These last four parables were spoken **inside** the house to the disciples.*

The Sower.

The first parable, that of the Sower, is given in the three Synoptic Gospels. It is, in a sense, a key parable, for Mark records the words of the Lord, "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" (Mark iv. 13). The chief point stressed is the condition of the soil, rather than the seed. Perhaps it is truer to call this parable, the parable of the soils, rather than the parable of the sower. In each of these Gospels we have four kinds of ground which the Lord interprets, and we must take great care to note this and adhere to it.

Much heresy and confusion has resulted from the fanciful explanations of these parables and this must be avoided. Those who listened knew the O.T. Scriptures, and moreover had no church doctrine in their minds for this was then unrevealed. The student of the Scriptures should carefully compare the parable as stated in Matt. xiii., Mark iv., and Luke viii., and note where they differ in detail, but the picture as a whole is the same in the three accounts.

We must keep to the Israelitish setting, remembering the Lord limited His own ministry and that of the Twelve to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (x. 5, 6; xv. 24). The Lord's first explanation is that "the sower (not a sower) went out to sow" (xiii. 3). It is important not to add our ideas to the Lord's. He does not say here, "the sower is the Son of Man". That is reserved for the parable of the Tares. The sower is not named, but he sows the word of the kingdom of heaven.

Again it does not tell us here that the "field is the world". Luke informs us that the various sowings in different kinds of ground had reference to the *hearts* or *minds* of those who heard the Word. The seed of the kingdom of heaven had more than one sower. John the Baptist was the first, as we have seen. It was followed by the sowing of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then Peter and the Apostles during the Acts period. They proclaimed the immanent coming back of the King on the repentance of Israel (Acts iii. 19-26). In spite of this, the ministry from a human standpoint was a failure and we must notice the same thing regarding the first 3 sowings of the kingdom seed in the parable now before us.

However, the earthly kingdom purpose of God cannot finally fail, hence the parable and prophecy in general indicates that the fourth sowing of the gospel of the kingdom seed will finally be fruitful and this will take place at the end of the age.

The Baptist preached the good news of the coming Kingdom, but its realization depended upon the command to Israel to repent and turn to the Lord. It is true of course that each sowing had something of the four kinds of ground among its hearers, nevertheless each had its special characteristics.

No.21. xiii. 20 - 32.
pp. 121 - 125

John the Baptist's sowing of the Kingdom seed fell upon hearts which, like the wayside, had become hardened with continual treading and tradition. Thus it was easy for the Wicked One (Satan) to catch away that which was sown in their minds (xiii. 19).

We should note that there is a double application in the parable, for the seed sown not only represents the word of the Kingdom, but the sons of the Kingdom as well. When the Lord Jesus interprets the parable, He says "this is *he* that was sown by the wayside *he* that was sown upon rocky places, this is *he that heareth the word* *he* that was sown among thorns", and the same intermingling is seen in Mark iv. and Luke viii.

When the application relates to those who are the real children of the Kingdom, their identity is lost in that of the seed sown, and they are thus linked with the truth that is being set forth.

The great majority of the Baptist's hearers, which included the Pharisees, failed to understand his message, clear though it was. He likened them to a generation of vipers and warned them to flee from the wrath to come (Matt. iii. 7). Later on the Lord Himself called them "the children of the devil" (John viii. 44), although they themselves claimed to be the "children of Abraham" (John viii. 33). It was not hard therefore for Satan to snatch the seed away from them.

We come now to the stony ground hearers. These were in rocky places which evidently consisted of ledges of rock with thin layers of soil on them. The seed shot up at once. There were immediate results, but they did not last. These hearers received the message with joy, but only "for a while". Christ said to them "he (John the Baptist) was a burning and shining light and ye were willing *for a season* to rejoice in his light" (John.v.35). When the hot sun of persecution came on them, they were "scorched" and "withered away because they had no root" (Matt. xiii. 6). Their shallowness became only too evident; quick to believe, apparently, but quick also to take offence when trouble arose.

Such were some of the disciples who first of all walked with the Lord, but soon were saying concerning Christ's teaching, "this is a hard saying; who can hear it?.....from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (John vi. 60-67). Similarly, in Luke iv. we have the record of those who heard the Lord's discourse in the synagogue and we are told, "all bear Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth" (Luke iv. 22). Within a few minutes the same people "were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong" (Luke iv. 28, 29).

Herod exhibited the same character. “When Herod saw Jesus he was *greatly pleased* he hoped to see Him perform some miracle” (Luke xxiii. 8). Yet when Christ refused to do this “Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked Him” (verse 11, N.I.V.).

Another example were the multitudes just before the Crucifixion who were crying in excitement, “blessed is He Who cometh in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest”. Yet within a few days, urged by the priests and elders, they screamed “Crucify Him, crucify Him” (Matt. xxvii. 19-25). This shallowness and fickleness was typical of those to whom the Lord witnessed, and thus His ministry can be likened to the stony ground hearers.

The ministry of Peter and the Twelve follow that of the Lord Jesus. Peter uses the key word of the gospel of the Kingdom, “repent” and the external ordinances of the Kingdom “be baptized” (Acts ii. 38; iii. 19-26). The trouble here was not hardness of heart and shallowness, but the failure to progress spiritually and go on to maturity (A.V. perfection). The things that prevented this are likened to “thorns” in the parable, and they stand for the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth that choke the progress of the Word, making it unfruitful (Matt. xiii. 22).

The Epistle to the Hebrews is the Scriptural commentary on this condition. The illustration of the thorny ground is repeated in Heb. vi. 8, “but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected”. In Luke’s accounts we are told that the thorny ground hearers are choked with the riches and pleasures of this life and bring no fruit to perfection (maturity, viii. 14), and we find the echo of this in Heb. vi. with the exhortation “leaving let us go on to perfection (maturity)”. Ananias and Sapphira are examples of those who were choked by the “thorns”, money, the material things of this life.

It is not until we reach the fourth sowing of the Kingdom seed that we get the full results of “good ground”, for God will not allow His great purposes for the establishment of His Kingdom on earth to founder. He gets the real fruit at last.

Finally, this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached for a witness *unto all the nations*, and then shall the end come (Matt. xxiv. 14). This final witness leads on to the fulfillment of the commission of Matt. xxviii. 19, 20:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age” (N.I.V.).

The world-wide proclaiming of the Kingdom and discipling of all the nations is linked by the Lord Jesus to a time preceding His Second Coming, as the whole of Matt. xxiv. teaches. This last sowing will be fruitful. At the end, “Israel shall *all* be righteous” (Isaiah lx. 21). “*All* Israel shall be saved” (Rom. xi. 26). Up to this point the heart of Israel had “waxed gross” and become so hard that the word of the Kingdom did not penetrate. The condition of the heart of mind is at the centre of the New Covenant which God has made with the nation (Jer. xxxi. 31-37). His promise to them is “I will give

them one heart, and I will put *a new spirit within you*; and I will take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh” (Ezek. xi. 19).

This is the great blessing of the New Covenant with Israel which is sealed by the blood of Christ (Luke xxii. 20, N.I.V.), and upon this covenant of grace the future of Israel rests and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom on earth.

Charles H. Welch helpfully sums up the four sowings, thus:

John the Baptist	Wayside hearers	“They seeing, see not, neither do they understand”.
The Lord Jesus, the Twelve, and the Seventy	Stony ground hearers	“Nothing but leaves . . . it withered away”.
Peter and the Twelve	Thorny ground hearers	“No fruit to perfection (Maturity)”. “Riches, pleasures, the lust of other things” (Heb. vi.).
The Final Witness	Good ground hearers (the heart of the New Covenant)	“The honest and good heart”. “Some a hundredfold”.

The parables of the Fig Tree (Luke xiii.) and the Great Supper go along the same lines as the Sower. It is important to realize that the main object of these parables is not to give easy spiritual lessons to beginners, but to depict the secret course of the earthly Kingdom through its apparent defeat owing to human failure, right on to its glorious close. All the parables of Matt. xiii. give further details of this great theme which resulted from the rejection of Christ by Israel as their Messiah and King.

The Wheat and the Tares.

The object of this parable is to underline why the Kingdom should be so long rejected. This has been partly dealt with in the former parable of the Sower. The first three sowings failed because of unsuitable ground, which was reflected in the hostile mental attitude of those in Israel who heard the gospel of the Kingdom.

But the parable of the Wheat and Tares gives a deeper reason. The failure was also due to the working of an enemy, Satan, and this greatly complicated matters. We still have a wheat field before the mind, but this time the Lord interprets it as representing the world and Himself as the Sower. The enemy who sowed weeds among the true wheat is Satan. The weeds are the children of Satan, and the harvest is the end of the age (Matthew xiii. 36-40), and the harvesters are the angels.

Great care should be taken here to get clear every detail of this inspired explanation. So many commentators and expositors ignore the interpretation given by Christ Himself and thus they become positively harmful, however well intentioned they may be. The real cause of the failure and apostasy of Israel was due to the antagonism and work of Satan which has characterized his attitude since his fall. His aim has been to overthrow

the redemptive work of God and so bring to nought His great Kingdom purposes. This colossal conflict of the ages has gone on without intermission since the time that Satan first aspired to take God's place. It is all the more difficult to perceive because it is spiritual, behind the scene, and not apprehended by the senses.

It can be traced throughout the Old and New Testaments. The primeval promise of Gen. iii. 14, 15 introduces this age-long conflict as far as it relates to the human race, "I will put *enmity* between thee (Satan) and the woman, *between thy seed and her seed*. It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise His heel". The antagonism of Satan is bitter and intense and worsens as time proceeds, and comes to a colossal climax at the end time described by the Book of Revelation.

The doctrine of the two seeds, though denied by some, cannot be ignored if one seriously studies the sacred Scriptures, nor can the slowness (from a human standpoint) of the realization of the great plan of God for His universe be understood without it. We have seen in these studies that many of Israel's religious leaders were declared to be the children of Satan by both the Baptist and the Lord, although in their own estimation they were the children of Abraham. Externally this was true. Outwardly they appeared to be the true wheat, but inwardly they were the "chaff" of John's denunciation (Matt.iii.11,12) and the "tares" or "darnel" of the parable before us, whose end was to be burned up and destroyed. This darnel was a bastard wheat which resembles the true except that the grains were black. In its earlier stages of growth it was indistinguishable from real wheat and remained so until the harvest. Hence the Lord's prohibition of the disciples attempting to weed it out, lest they inadvertently pulled up the true wheat with it.

Later on, in His argument with the Pharisees, He told them plainly that they were of their father, the devil (John viii. 39, 41, 44). We ought not to forget the Lord's opening words of this parable "the Kingdom of heaven *has become like*", and this was the result of the rejection of Christ given in chapters xi. and xii.

The two seeds are still in existence today and await the Second Coming of the Lord to judge and separate them, nor can His Kingdom become a reality until this takes place. One thing we do not find is *tares converted into wheat* or any hope of such a thing happening.

The Mustard Tree.

It is not quite certain what plant is meant by the mustard, but it is obviously one which grows to a large size from a very small seed. In verse 32 it is described as the smallest of all seeds. There is no need to make a difficulty of this when we remember it is seed sown in fields which is being described. "Small as a mustard seed" was a Jewish proverb.

The word "tree" does not necessarily mean a timber tree. After all, we speak of a rose tree or gooseberry tree without misunderstanding. When Mark records this parable he gives the Lord's words "What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it?" (Mark iv. 30, N.I.V.), suggesting that the analogy was

difficult to express. The history of the earthly Kingdom was taking such a strange turn that it needed great skill to express what was taking place.

The first thing stressed is the smallness of the mustard seed; the Kingdom purpose of God commenced with the call of one man, Abram, and later on Moses declared that “the Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for *ye were the fewest of all people*” (Deut. vii. 7). So the words of illustration were “less than all the seeds”. But God’s plan revealed to Abram was that his posterity would be numberless like the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea.

But this was not realized without reverses. The curses of a broken law of God had this warning:

“. . . . and ye shall be *left few in number*, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy xxviii. 62).

This came to pass first by the removal of the ten northern tribes, and afterwards the two which formed the southern kingdom were removed by Nebuchadnezzar. With him and the world kingdom of Babylon the “times of the Gentiles” commence which then degenerated through Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, and reached to the earthly time of our Lord. The kingdom or dominion over the earth had taken an abnormal twist, as it were, which certainly did not form part of God’s original kingdom purpose.

The mustard, instead of becoming a normal herb, had now become a tree in which the birds of the heaven could settle, and these are designated by the Lord Jesus as the agents of Satan.

We can set it out in this way:

The mustard seed sown: “least of all”—its beginning small.	\	The Kingdom viewed from Abram
“When it is grown, it becomes greatest of herbs.”	/	to its final establishment.
Its real end—a large herb.	/	
It becomes a tree with birds settling in the branches.	\	The Kingdom as it became
The Kingdom’s development under Gentiles.	/	during “the times of the Gentiles.

No.22. xiii. 33 - 50.
pp. 141 - 145

The Hidden Leaven.

The parable of the leaven is the last of the four spoken by Christ outside the house to the multitudes. It gives us the *external* history of the kingdom of heaven in its final phase. But how do we interpret the word “leaven”? Expositors are sharply divided here, many interpreting it of the gospel of grace which finally extends everywhere, and this is deduced from the words “the whole was leavened” (Matt. xiii. 33).

We should however ask ourselves, how is this word used in holy Scriptures? Is it ever used in a good sense? And how did the Lord Jesus employ the word elsewhere in His teaching? In the O.T. we read in connection with the Passover, “ye shall *put leaven out of your houses*” (Exod. xii. 15). Exod. xxxiv. 25 and Lev. ii. 11 state, “thou shalt *not* offer the blood of *My sacrifice with leaven*” and “*no meal offering, which ye shall bring unto the Lord, shall be made with leaven*”. These offerings represented typically the *purity and sinlessness* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we come to the N.T. we find the Apostle Paul speaking of “the leaven of *baseness and wickedness*”, contrasting it with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (I Cor. v. 6-8). “Know ye not that a little leaven doth leaven the whole lump? *Purge out therefore the old leaven*”, and this ends with the words “*Remove ye the wicked man from among yourselves*” (I Cor. v. 6-13).

How does Christ use the word? He warns by saying “take heed and *beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees* then understood they how that He bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, *but of the doctrine* of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matt. xvi. 6-12). In Mark viii. 15 we read, “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod”. Luke xii. 1 reads, “beware of the *leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy*”. The Lord Jesus uses it consistently of evil and not once of good, and this accords too with its O.T. usage. The phrase “the leaven of the gospel” used by modern preachers is a contradiction.

If Christ was using the word in a good sense in Matt. xiii., then surely some clear statement would have been made that this was so, otherwise He would have been contradicting Himself and causing confusion in His hearers. The consistent Scriptural usage right throughout the Bible gives this word a bad meaning, but all this is ignored by those who interpret the word as referring to the gospel of salvation.

What these teachers fail to realize is that these kingdom parables show the working of Satan as well as the purposes of God, and as we have seen with the Sower parable, the first three sowings are failures due to the activity of the evil one and the bad state of the soil. If they want to show the triumphant conclusion of the parabolic teaching, then it is

to the last four parables, spoken *inside the house*, which, giving the *inner meaning and purpose*, assure us of the final success and establishment of the kingdom of heaven.

What are the “three measures of meal”? (verse 33). This is yet another of Matthew’s “threes”. We must not make the mistake of trying to find a spiritual equivalent of *every* detail in a parable. All sorts of peculiar ideas result from this practice, and many have been the guesses as to what the three measures represent. It may be that it was merely the usual amount used to bake bread or other food, or it could refer to the evil doctrine of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians.

The teaching of the first four parables gives us the proclaiming of the Kingdom message and the delay in its realization through the failure of Israel and the working of an enemy, namely Satan. Not only this, instead of the small seed of Israel flourishing and filling the earth with fruit, we find that through their apostasy the sovereignty changed hands and was deposited with the Gentile nations.

Nebuchadnezzar was assured that God had made him “the head of gold” and given him world wide power even though he was a pagan. This condition of things lasts until “the fullness of the Gentiles comes in” as revealed through the apostle Paul in Rom.ix.-xi. when Israel will be taken up by God again and “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. xi. 25-29).

The present “times of the Gentiles” are exceptional and only came into being because of the gross defection of Israel. This stage is marked by the words of the parable “it becometh a great tree and the birds lodged in its branches” (the agents of Satan). That which should have been pre-eminently the kingdom of righteousness, becomes the habitation of Satan and his angels. He is now the “god of this age” (II Cor. iv. 3, 4), “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience” (Eph. ii. 2). This will go on and work its course until the rise of Antichrist, his worldwide deception and the general corruption of the visible witness for God which will finally be dealt with by the glorious Second Advent of Him Who is “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (Rev. xix. 11-20; see II Thess. ii. 7-10).

It is obvious then that the Lord, contrary to popular teaching, was not portraying the permeating influence of the gospel of grace and the kingdom being set up as a consequence. Both in these first kingdom parables and in His prophetic teaching (Matt.xxiv.) the Lord makes it quite clear that the end of the age is one of apostasy and world-wide trouble which can only be remedied by His Second Coming (Matt. xxiv. 11, 12, 21, 22, 24, 27-30). “When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?” (Luke xviii. 8), and the answer is certainly not yes!

Yet in spite of this, God has His treasure, as the next four parables show, and at last the good seed of the kingdom, sown on good ground, will produce the fulfillment of His great kingdom purposes.

After giving the parable of the leaven, the Lord leaves the multitude and goes inside the house. There He explained the parable of the tares to the disciples and then proceeded to unfold the *inner* aspect, the Godward side of the kingdom of heaven, in the second set of 4 parables. These are related as follows:

- A | The Treasure hid in a Field.
The nation of Israel as distinct from the nations.
- B | The One beautiful Pearl.
The faithful remnant of Israel as distinct from the nations.
- B | The many fish.
The Gentile nations as distinct from Israel.
- A | The Treasure in the house.
Israel, viewed as a missionary nation redeemed and restored,
sent to the nations.

The Hidden Treasure.

It is clear that the hidden Treasure balances and is in direct contrast to the hidden Leaven. This Treasure is hidden in *the* field (not “*a* field” as the A.V.) and this field has already been interpreted by the Lord as meaning the world (xiii. 38).

We are not left to guess who are meant by the Treasure for Scripture makes it quite clear that Israel were specially chosen by the Lord and separated to Himself for the carrying out of His earthly kingdom purposes, and as such they were precious to Him.

“The Lord hath chosen thee (Israel) to be a *peculiar people (s’gullah)* unto Himself above the nations that are upon the earth” (Deut. xiv. 2; xxvi. 18).

“The Lord hath chosen . . . Israel for His *peculiar treasure (s’gullah)*” (Psa. cxxxv. 4).

“And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels (*s’gullah*)” (Mal. iii. 17).

Israel had a higher calling and a special glory that was greater than any other nation on the earth. Through their disobedience they have become scattered all over the world. They are now mixed with the Gentile nations, so that no-one today can know for certain just who are true Jews and who are not, for now “they are not all Israel, that are of Israel” (Rom. ix. 6-8). But the true ones, although hid, are all known to the Lord, Who will regather them back to their land at the end of the age (Isa. xliii. 5-7; Jer. xxiv. 6, 7; Ezek. xx. 41, 42; xxviii. 25, 26; Amos ix. 13-15). Not only this, but we must remember that they will be redeemed. They cannot be a kingdom of priests by virtue of their own deeds. The New Covenant ratified by the blood of Christ will ensure this redemption (Jer. xxxi. 31). In many Scriptures the Lord has declared His love for them and they are precious (a treasure) to Him. The day will come when the triumphant words will be known all over the earth: “the kingdom *of this world* are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev. xi. 15). This parable shows that in spite of all opposition, human or Satanic, God’s purpose for Israel and the Kingdom will be fulfilled and at last Israel will be a glorious diadem in the hand of their God (Isa. lxii. 3).

The Pearl of great Price.

While the whole nation of Israel is beloved by God, even now during this age, when they still reject Christ, they are “beloved for the fathers’ sake” (Rom. xi. 25-29). How much more must this be true of the faithful remnant in Israel. The doctrine of the remnant is of great importance. God never leaves Himself without a witness. The Scripture shows that at the blackest times of Israel’s history, there was always a remnant, a few who remained absolute faithful to the Lord. They are designated as “the remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. ix. 27; xi. 5). Heb. xi. gives a list of those in O.T. times who were proved faithful despite all difficulties, opposition and suffering. Many of them have given their lives for God and there will be those in the future days when Antichrist reigns who will also do this. Surely all these are very precious to the Lord and come under the symbolism of the “pearl of great price”; who like faithful Abraham will finally find their place in the heavenly Jerusalem, the city whose builder and maker is God and whose glory and wonder are described in detail in Rev. xxi.

These two parables graphically set forth these two companies in Israel. We have the elect nation as distinct from the Gentile nations, and the elect remnant, faithful even to death, who are distinct from the Nation as a whole.

Once more we see the Lord showing the disciples how God’s plan for Israel will run its course, and in spite of all hindrances will reach its glorious goal when the kingdoms of this world are at last claimed by Christ and become subject to His righteous rule.

The Drag Net.

In this parable we find two kinds of fish, good and bad, and this is parallel to the Wheat and Tares, as the structure given earlier shows. There is one difference however. The tares were the Satanic counterfeit of the true wheat, but in the drag net the bad fish do not counterfeit the good, but nevertheless they are separated from them at the end.

One point we must not miss. When the fish are brought to the shore *they are living* and not dead. This shows clearly they typify *living* people and do not represent the judgment of those who are raised from the dead. Scripture reveals that at the end time, not only will Israel be dealt with, but also *the living nations*, whose relationship with the kingdom must be settled.

A gathering of the nations of the world is to be expected as the age reaches its close (Joel iii. 1, 2, 11, 12; Zeph. iii. 8; Zech. xiv. 1, 2). It is this that leads to the battle of Armageddon. And then, after the Second Coming of Christ, we read:

“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and *before Him shall be gathered all nations*: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd his sheep from the goats” (Matt. xxv. 31, 32).

The context teaches that this separation is decided by the way each nation has treated the “brethren” of the King. Those nations who have treated them well, go into the Kingdom; those who have ill-treated them are shut out. It must be realized that this judgment does *not deal with the behaviour of individuals*, as to whether they have been kind to others or not. *It is national judgment*. As *nations* they enter the kingdom, or as *nations* they are debarred. The people of Israel are in the centre of world affairs at the end of this age, as prophecy makes perfectly clear, and also shows that they will go through the greatest persecution of all their history. They will be “hated of all men” (Matt. xxiv. 9). Anti-semitism will be rife everywhere.

The animosity against the Jew will be world-wide prior to the Lord’s Second Advent. The judgment of Matthew xxv. is incipient in the Lord’s first promise to Abram in Gen.xii.3, “. . . . and I will bless them that bless thee, and *curse him that curseth thee*: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”. Thus it is that the nations of the earth at the end time will have to give account to the King of Israel as to how they have treated His earthly people. They do not *consciously serve Christ* as the Lord Jesus in Matt. xxv. clearly shows, but their attitude to the Jew and their behaviour towards him is crucial to their having a part in the Messianic kingdom when it is set up after the Second Advent of the Lord.

There are therefore two great siftings by the Lord at the end time; first of all in Israel, as indicated by the Wheat and Tares, and then with the Gentile nations as shown in Matthew xxv.

**No.23. xiii. 51 - xiv. 36.
pp. 165 - 169**

After explaining the parable of the drag net, the Lord pauses to ask the disciples “have you understood all these things?” (Matt. xiii. 51), for understanding is vital to the reception of truth. Hundreds may read the Word of God, but if there is no understanding how much are they benefited? Happily the disciples could answer “Yes”. How different they were to the nation of Israel of whom the Lord declared in verses 10-16 that because of their willful blindness and rejection they did *not* understand.

The last parable, that of the householder, follows on from the perception of the disciples, as the first word “Therefore” shows:

“He said to them, *Therefore* every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old” (Matt. xiii. 52, N.I.V.).

The word “instructed” occurs four times in the N.T., (Matthew xiii. 52; xxvii. 57; xxviii. 19; Acts xiv. 21). It is the word translated “make disciples” in Matt. xxviii. 19

of the N.I.V., and this relates not to individuals, but *nations*. How often is this verse misquoted and misunderstood! Before they can disciple all nations, they themselves must have been “discipled into the kingdom”. In other words, they must be learners themselves. The scribes were the teachers of the law, hence the word scribe in the A.V. For the most part, instead of being occupied with the greatness of the divine law, they wasted their time debating about such trifles as mint, anise and cummin, the length of fringes, the breadth of phylacteries, the washing of cups and platters, and the particular quarter of a second when new moons and sabbaths began. In His denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees the Lord Jesus uncovered these trivialities (Matt. xxiii. 23) and showed the utter emptiness of their teaching.

As a complete contrast, the scribe of this last parable will have the word of the Kingdom hidden in his heart. Those he represents will have “learned of Him” and out of the kingdom Treasure will be able to bring things new and old, the contrast between the old and new covenants, with their fullness of teaching and many other facets of truth.

With this parable the Lord Jesus finished His instruction in the secrets of the kingdom of heaven in that particular locality, and from there, we are told, He moved to His home town; the region around Nazareth, and taught in the synagogue. The people were astonished at the fullness and wisdom of His teaching, so absolutely different from the shallowness of the ministry of the Scribes and Pharisees.

They asked themselves how He had acquired this? After all, was He not just a carpenter’s son and one of themselves? As a result they took offence at Him (xiii.54-57), instead of being proud of Him and glorifying God for His wonderful ministry. The last verse of the chapter gives the sad consequence:

“And He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith (unbelief)”
(xiii. 58, N.I.V.).

Mark is even more definite:

“He *could not do* any miracles there except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them. And He was amazed at their lack of faith” (Mark vi. 5, 6, N.I.V.).

So unbelief even nullifies the work of God and caused the Lord to look upon their attitude of rejection and opposition with amazement.

This was a prophetic intimation of His rejection by the whole nation at Jerusalem, and the account of John the Baptist’s murder which follows, a prophetic type of His own murder later on. All three Gospels tell us that Herod Antipas had heard of Christ’s mighty works. Herod was the ruler of Galilee and Peræa, which was a fourth of the dominion of Herod the Great. A guilty conscience quickened his fears, and he imagined that the Baptist has risen from the dead and would now confront him (xiv. 2).

Luke informs us that this idea was put into his mind by others (Luke ix. 7). John had aroused Herod’s animosity by telling him that it was not lawful for him to have Herodias as his wife, for her first husband was alive, and even had he been dead marriage with a

sister-in-law was forbidden (Lev. xviii. 16). Antipas had put away his own lawful wife, who was the daughter of king Aretas, and the gross immorality was the cause of the Baptist's sharp rebuke. Not only did this arouse the enmity of Herod, but also Herodias for trying to induce Antipas to put her away. Her hatred of the Baptist was implacable, hence her pressure on Herod to murder him. Now that Herod needed much urging, but he was afraid of the people (Matt. xiv. 5).

Thus the greatest of the prophets met his end through being faithful to the Lord and His Word. The account is given in verses 6-12, and we can imagine the fiendish delight of Herodias, for a woman scorned can be a veritable demon.

When the Lord Jesus heard this, He withdrew to a desert place apart, crossing the lake. But the people evidently were not to be put off, for they must have gone round by land to find Him once more. There were more than 5,000 of them and the disciples were concerned that they needed food, but the Lord's concern was even greater and He puts the disciples to the test by saying:

“They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat” (xiv. 16, N.I.V.).

All the four Gospels relate this miracle, each adding details; and it is the only one that occurs in all the four. It is John who tells us that there was a lad who had five loaves of barley bread, and it was Andrew who pointed him out. The disciples tell the Lord that all the food they had was “five loaves and two fishes”. One can almost feel that they thought, what is the use of this to feed the crowd of people? They did not realize that they had the Creator of the universe standing in their midst. The Lord then bids them to bring the food to Him. He then tells the people to recline on the grass in groups. Mark tells us they were groups of hundreds and fifties. This orderly arrangement made it easier to feed them and also to count their number.

The Lord now gives thanks, breaking the thin Jewish loaves and giving them to the disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. While the Lord's miraculous power multiplied the food it was not distributed miraculously, although He could have made this to happen if He had so willed. The disciples have a part to play and they distribute the food, which increased as long as increase was needed.

In all the four narratives the fragments of food are gathered up for future use. Nothing was wasted. This was done by Christ's command, as John relates, and thus He who could feed thousands does not countenance waste. This can never be justified even when the need was supplied so superabundantly.

What effect had this stupendous miracle on the crowd that was present? It was mixed, for John records the action of some of them:

“Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world” (John vi. 14).

But the next day the Lord had to say to many of them:

“Verily, verily I say unto you, Ye seek Me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled” (John vi. 26).

Then follows the great discourse which gives the *spiritual* meaning of the food and the manna of the O.T. (verses 27-59). Both these foods were typical of Himself Who was the Bread of life, the One Who alone can completely satisfy (verses 35, 48), and just as that earthly bread had to be broken before it was eaten, so He had to be broken (except His bones) in death so that he could be assimilated by faith, and give eternal life to the believer (verses 47, 51).

Unbelievers have gone out of their way to discredit this miracle; but there is no sensible alternative to simple faith in the reliability of the records given. All explanations that deny them require a greater stretch of credulity than is needed to believe what is written. Some have said that the loaves and fish were exceptionally large! Do such people realize that the fish would need to have been about half a ton in weight, apart from the loaves, to feed 5,000 people!

Others say that the Lord filled them with spiritual food, and if this was so what did the disciples collect in baskets? The evolutionist cannot except the record, for they must believe in the uniformity of natural law as an explanation of all physical phenomena, and this miracle involved special creation, which is taboo to evolutionary theories.

What happened is perfectly clear. He Who was the Creator of the universe, created enough bread and fish on the spot to feed at least 5,000 hungry people, so much so that twelve baskets full remained afterwards. He thus foreshadowed His own death on the cross as the true Bread from heaven, broken to feed and satisfy the needs of multitudes of sinners.

The Walking on the Sea.

Christ now commands the disciples to go by boat to the other side and meanwhile, having satisfied the physical needs of the crowd, He dismisses them. After this He retired to a nearby mountain to pray and have fellowship with the Father. Several times it is recorded that He did this (Luke vi. 12; ix. 28) and if the blessed Son of God felt this to be a need, what about ourselves and the need for quiet devotion?

There was another reason why He desired to be free from the crowd. In John's account we are told that it was at this time that the multitude tried to take Him by force to make Him a king. They recognized that He was that Prophet foretold in the Old Testament (John vi. 14, 15) and in their excited enthusiasm they tried to compel Him to become Israel's King. On the surface this appeared as though the great kingdom message was getting through, for had He not come to take David's throne? But He could see through their empty zeal, for a few verses later He said to them, “I tell you the truth, you are looking for Me, not because you saw the miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill” (vi. 26, N.I.V.). It was all nothing more than excitement of the senses.

Meanwhile a stormy wind had arisen on the lake, making rowing difficult for the disciples, as it caused the boat to be buffeted against the waves (Matt. xiv. 24). The Lord had rescued them once before on the lake which was subject to sudden storms. Remembering their fear, He started to walk out to them on the water. Job ix. 8 tells us that one of the characteristics of God is that "He treadeth upon the waves of the sea". Once again we have a demonstration of the Lord's sovereign superiority over the laws which He, in creation, ordained and here supercedes. He treads the waves beneath His sovereign feet, and what buffeted the disciples provided as it were a carpet for Him. Moreover, we must remember that the last time He calmed a storm on the lake it was daylight, and He was with them. Now it is night and they are alone.

When the disciples saw Him approaching they were terrified (A.V. "troubled" is not nearly strong enough), and they cried out for fear, thinking they saw a ghost (xiv. 26). The Lord then calls out to them "take courage", and surely they had heard that voice before!

Impulsive Peter cries out, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you on the water" (verse 28). The Lord replied in one word, "Come". Peter obeys and does something that no human being had ever done before; he walked on water towards the Lord: and this was accomplished because, at this moment, he had faith in the Lord Jesus and the word that He had given. While he looked at the Lord all was well, but, looking away to the stormy elements, he became afraid and started to sink, crying out "Lord, save me". Immediately Christ did this very thing and pulled him up while still walking on the water, but had to say "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (verses 29-31).

There is a profound lesson here for all of us. There is only one way that our difficulties can be overcome and that is by constantly looking, trustingly, to the Lord and relying on Him to help, strengthen, guide and deliver us from them, if it is His will.

The result of this miracle was that, after climbing into the boat, they worshipped Him and the Lord accepted it. If He was not God, then this would have been blasphemy. They added "truly you are God's Son". The definite article is omitted before the word "Son", as the centurion did in Matt. xxvii. 54. Perhaps they had not yet realized fully the implications of His deity, but their appreciation was growing when compared with their statement in viii. 27.

Then they landed at Gennesaret, which was a rich plain four miles long and two broad. The Lord was recognized immediately and the whole neighbourhood were informed of His presence (xiv. 34, 35), with the consequence that many sick people were brought to Him and once again He healed them all. So urgent were some of the cases that they begged Him to allow them just to touch Him, and this was sufficient to bring them healing and complete restoration.

The hierarchy at Jerusalem were obviously watching every movement of the Lord and the results that followed from His work and witness. So they send Pharisees and teachers of the law to question Him about His attitude to the tradition of the elders. This was the

oral law with its vast number of precepts and prohibitions formulated by past elders, which was supposed to be a sort of protective fence around the written law. The evitable result was that this oral or traditional law became more important than the written law, and brought its adherents into terrible bondage.

No.24. xv. 1 - xvi. 12.
pp. 181 - 186

The question that the Pharisees from Jerusalem put to the Lord concerning their tradition was:

“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don’t wash their hands before they eat!” (Matt. xv. 2, N.I.V.).

We must bear in mind that these religious leaders were not concerned with hygiene, but with *ceremonial* cleanness.

“Jesus replied, And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honour your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death’. But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God’, he is not to ‘honour his father’ with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

‘These people honour Me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from Me.
They worship Me in vain;
their teachings are but rules taught by men’.” (Matt. xv. 3-9, N.I.V.).

These stinging words laid bare their empty quibbles about hand washing. We should note that Christ stresses the fact that the author of the O.T. law was not Moses *but God*. What Moses gave to Israel was the *word of God* (verse 6), not his own opinions, so that when the Pharisees contradicted this law by their traditions they were breaking nothing less than God’s Word. A man could dodge his duty to his parents by saying that he had devoted all his money to God, and the Pharisees and Scribes permitted him to do this. They well merited the stinging rebuke, “you hypocrites”, and the quotation from Isaiah fitted them perfectly.

The Lord then calls the crowd to Him to explain further:

“Listen and understand. What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him unclean, but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him unclean.” (xv. 10, 11, N.I.V.).

The disciples inform Christ that He had offended the Pharisees, but He replied, “Every plant that My heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides” (xv. 13, 14, N.I.V.). At the final great sorting out at the end of the age the weeds, like the tares of the parable, will be permanently removed by divine agency. When weeds are rooted up, they are not preserved, but rather destroyed.

Peter now asks the Lord to explain further, which caused Christ to say “are you still so dull?”, that is, like the religious leaders are? He tells him that what enters the mouth passes through the body in the normal way. But spoken words come from the heart or mind, and so are a true index of character.

“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man unclean; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him unclean” (xv. 19, 20, N.I.V.).

In Mark’s account (vii. 21, 22) the list of sins is extended and six more are added, guile, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride and folly. Matthew adds one, false testimony. In Mark they are given in no particular order, but in Matthew they are evidently arranged according to the decalogue, “murder, adultery, fornication, thefts and false witness” represent the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth commandments. This would make a great impression on the mind of a Jew who was familiar with the law given through Moses.

The great faith of the Canaanitish woman.

The Lord Jesus now moves northward to the region of Tyre and Sidon, and a woman of Canaan comes to Him and implores Him to rescue her daughter from demon possession. The woman was a Greek speaking descendant of the old inhabitants of Phoenicia, and in dealing with her we have a startling contrast to the multitudes He had recently fed miraculously. Up to this point, we have no record of any sick or needy person being turned away by the Lord. He healed them all, is the constant statement. But now He apparently ignores her. He answers her not a word. But she persists and it began to annoy the disciples. “She keeps crying out after us” they said.

Then the Lord spoke, but what He said was far from encouraging as far as the woman was concerned:

“I was sent *only* to the lost sheep of *Israel*” (xv. 24, N.I.V.).

She was a pagan, certainly not a descendant from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Yet she had addressed Him as the “Son of David” (xv. 22). But as an outsider, she had no claim upon Him. She had evidently heard Him addressed in this way as such. Her great need and her great faith encouraged her to persist. She now kneels before Him and pleads, “Lord, help me”, and now uses the all-embracing title “Lord”. Again Christ speaks, testing her even further. He said:

“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs” (xv. 26, N.I.V.).

The children were obviously Israel, and she was certainly not a true Israelite. But there was a ray of hope in the Lord’s words which her faith recognized. “Yes, Lord” she said, “but even the dogs (little dogs) eat the crumbs that fall from the master’s table (verse 27). In Palestine dogs were scavengers and looked upon as unclean, but puppies were sometimes allowed into houses and of course ate anything that accidentally dropped from the table during a meal.

This woman could not have any claim on the Lord Jesus as an Israelite, but she was willing to take the place of a dog and get what crumbs she could! Her great faith greatly impressed the Lord. He answered her:

“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted. And her daughter was healed from that very hour” (xv. 28, N.I.V.).

What a contrast this was to the tiny faith of the disciples! Those who were near to Him had the small faith, while the poor pagan outsider had the great faith!

There is an important lesson underlying the Lord’s words which we must not miss. We have seen that the earthly kingdom which John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus preached was none other than the great Messianic Kingdom of the O.T. which had been explained by the prophets.

In that kingdom purpose of God Israel had premier place as a channel of blessing to all nations, and this was enshrined in the divine promise made to Abraham and his posterity (Gen. xii. 1-3) and confirmed in Deut. xv. 6; xxvi. 18, 19; xxviii. 1, 13 and Psa. cxlvii. 19, 20. When we come to the N.T. this is still stressed, and the Lord’s earthly ministry is primarily concerned with Israel (Matt. xv. 24; Rom. ix. 3-5; xv. 8) but not wholly, for the Gentile world was finally in view. God’s kingdom is not limited to the Jewish nation, but will finally be world-wide (Rev. xi. 15).

With this in view we can understand why the Lord limited His own ministry and that of the Twelve to the people of Israel. As the channel of blessing and the recipients of knowledge of the kingdom, they come first in importance. It is interesting that in Mark’s account of the healing of the Syro-Phoenician’s daughter, he gives words of the Lord which Matthew does not include. Christ said “Let the children *first* be filled” (Mark vii. 27) and the children were undoubtedly Israel. Israel’s place in the kingdom plan of God as it relates to the earth is that of being first.

To ignore this and substitute the idea that Christ came to bring in and establish the church, the Body of Christ, is unscriptural and completely misleading. This is one of the popular ideas which are often propagated but it is destructive of correct understanding of the great plan of the ages which is centred in Christ. The revelation of the *heavenly* aspect of the kingdom of God awaits the later ministry of the Apostle Paul.

For the moment Israel must have all the divine attention to prepare her for her great role of introducing the kingdom teaching to all the nations. Meanwhile, the Gentile must be willing to take the lowly place and be content with the crumbs of blessing until this is accomplished. Those who wish to introduce the church at this point can have little conception of the exceeding riches of grace and glory that are revealed later on in the prison ministry of the Apostle Paul, who was the minister, by divine appointment, of the Body of Christ (Col. i. 23-28). All this cannot be compared to crumbs!

The feeding of the 4,000.

Verses 29 and 30 tell us that Christ moved on along the Sea of Galilee and as usual the crowds followed Him, bringing disabled and sick ones for healing. Their immediate restoration to health and fitness amazed the people, and, we are told, “They praised the *God of Israel*” (verse 31). The Lord looked on the multitude and realized that, after being with Him for 3 days, they were very hungry, and He had compassion on them as He had before with the crowd that numbered around 5,000. He tells the disciples that He does not want to send them away in this famished condition as they might collapse on the journey. The disciples immediately asked:

“Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”
(Matthew xv. 33, N.I.V.).

Could it be that they had so soon forgotten the previous miraculous feeding? It hardly seems possible, but it looks as though this was the case.

As before, He told the crowd to sit down on the ground, and taking all the food they happened to have, seven loaves and a few small fish, He multiplied them with His creative power so that finally all ate and were satisfied (verse 37). There were seven basketsful of broken pieces of food left over, collected by the disciples. Once more He gave evidence that He could meet all physical needs, and this was an illustration of what He could do spiritually for all who look to Him.

Some Bible scholars do not accept the idea of two miracles so similar as the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000, but they seem to forget that both Matthew and Luke give them in detail, and *they were confirmed as separate miracles by the Lord Himself* (xvi. 8-10).

Christ now dismisses the crowd and gets into a boat and goes to the vicinity of Magadan, which was probably Magdala, as many manuscripts have it.

Chapter xvi.

Chapter xvi. commences with a party of Pharisees and Sadducees coming to Christ “to tempt Him” and trip Him up if possible. This is the first time we have the combination of these two groups who detested one another. A common enmity united traditional foes. They asked Him for a sign *from heaven* (xvi. 1). The Lord had healed many and given *earthly* signs of His Messiahship, but the enemies thought they could defeat Him by asking for a special sign from *heaven*. The inference is that this would *really* impress people. The Lord replies to their cunning by reminding them that they could interpret weather portents (and we do the same today with red sky in the morning and evening), but they were totally unable to interpret the signs of the times. He continued:

“A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah” (xvi. 2-4, N.I.V.).

On saying this He left them and went away, refusing to argue with them. The sign of Jonah meant death and resurrection, but this was beyond the understanding of the carnal minds of the Lord's enemies.

The Lord Jesus and the disciples proceed across the lake and He warns them of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (verses 5, 6). The disciples began to discuss among themselves the meaning of this statement, and they decided it was because they had forgotten to bring bread with them (7).

It was quite pathetic that they should have come to this conclusion after the miraculous feeding of the multitudes. Surely they should have had no anxiety about food so long as He was with them! Christ reminds them of this (verses 9, 10). "How is it", He said, "that you do not understand that I was not talking to you about bread?". He was warning them to be on their guard against the *evil doctrine* of the Pharisees and Sadducees and at last they realized this, but merited the rebuke "you of little faith" (8). This is another instance of yeast or leaven being used as an illustration of something evil and not good, this being its consistent meaning in Scripture.

The dullness of the Twelve shows how slowly the education of the Lord's most intimate disciples was progressing. We have no stones to throw at them for we are often slow pupils in God's school and have to learn a lesson the second time, because of our failure to grip His teaching the first time in His dealings with us.

No.25. xvi. 13 - 19.
pp. 201 - 207

The Lord Jesus now goes northward to Caesarea Philippi, which was situated on a spur of Mt. Hermon and was under the rule of Herod Philip. He questions the disciples concerning the current gossip relating to Himself:

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked the disciples, Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (Matt. xvi. 13, N.I.V.).

They tell Him that some considered Him to be John the Baptist, others thought He might be Elijah, Jeremiah or another of the prophets. Matthew alone records the belief that He was Jeremiah. Jeremiah was not much esteemed during his life, but came to be regarded as one of the greatest of the prophets afterwards.

The Lord Jesus now turns to the disciples and puts the crucial question:

"But what about you? He asked, Who do *you* (emphatic) say I am?" (verse 15, N.I.V.).

This is what really mattered, what was their *real* estimate of Christ? It is still the most important question and comes down to the present day to each one of us as the greatest of challenges

Peter, the disciples' usual spokesman, answers:

“You are the Christ (Messiah), the Son of the living God. Jesus replied, Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven” (verses 16, 17, N.I.V.).

Peter had once before made this great confession (John vi. 69), but possibly he had not realized its fullness then. Now, by the Father's revelation, he understands that Christ is truly the great Messiah promised by the O.T. Scriptures.

The Lord Jesus accepts this and thereby claims the statement to be true. He now says:

“And I (emphatic) tell you that you are Peter (*petros*), and on this rock (*petra*) I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (verses 18, 19, N.I.V.).

Christ says in effect, “the Father has revealed one truth to you, and I also tell you another”. We now come to statements which have caused volumes of controversy and endless theological strife. The Lord calls Peter (*petros*), the name He said he would have (John i. 42), and then adds “and upon this rock (*petra*) I will build My church”. *Petros* means a detached stone or boulder, whereas *petra*, the feminine form of the word, means a mass of rock like that of Matt. vii. 24 on which a wise man built his house, or a rock in which a tomb is hewn (xxvii. 60).

Some have said that too much must not be made of this distinction because probably Christ spoke Aramaic, which draws no such distinction. We cannot be sure whether Christ spoke in Aramaic or Greek and therefore weighty doctrine cannot be placed on the Aramaic word, whereas this verse in Greek is part of God-breathed Scripture (II.Tim.iii.16), and the Evangelist is therefore expressing the mind of the Holy Spirit. The *petra* cannot refer to Peter personally, for if so, there was no need of the word *petra* after *Petros*. It would have read “upon *you* I will build My church”. *Petra* pointed to something solid and immovable in contrast to a stone, a solid foundation upon which this assembly can safely rest. The designation *rock* is used in the O.T., but it is never given to *men*: but *always to Jehovah*. “He is the Rock” (Deut. xxxii. 4). “Who is a rock, save our God?” (II Sam. xxii. 32). “In the Lord Jehovah is the rock of ages” (margin, Isa. xxvi. 4). “I will say unto God my rock” (Psa. xlii. 9). He says Himself, “Is there a God beside Me? Yea, there is no Rock (A.V. margin, see R.V. & N.I.V.), I know not any” (Isa.xliv.8). This is likewise emphasized by the Apostle Paul in I Cor. iii. 11 “other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”.

God then, God in Christ and His Word (see Matt. vii. 24-27), is the only rock foundation upon which the redeemed can rest. Peter's person, Peter's faith, or Peter's confession are really altogether out of the question. No human being, however eminent, can be the Rock of ages! Later on Paul asserts that the smitten rock that gave Israel water in the wilderness was a *picture of Christ*, “. . . . and that *petra* was *Christ*” (I Cor. x. 4).

Allied to this figure is that of a *chief corner stone* of a building (Eph.ii.20; I.Pet.ii.4-6) and this again is a picture of the Lord Jesus as the foundation of His Body, the church. It has been said that in Matthew Christ cannot be part of the building because He is the Builder (xvi. 18). Why not? He can call, save and build up those whom He has chosen, and at the same time be their sure foundation.

Peter was only a stone resting upon this mighty rock foundation of Christ, and in himself, in spite of his earnestness, was the weak vessel who denied his Saviour and Lord three times and later on had to be rebuked by Paul for his weakness in witness (Gal. ii.); certainly not a very sure foundation to rest on!

We come now, in our consideration of Matt. xvi. 18 to the words, “*My church*”. From this it is clear that this assembly does not belong to Peter or any other human being; Christ claims it as His property. Reams have been written as to who constitute this church, but we must keep one thing in mind all the time, and that is *to avoid reading modern conceptions of the church into this passage of Scripture*.

The word *ekklesia*, church, means any called-out assembly of people, whether for religious purposes or not. It is even used of the Ephesian mob in Acts xix. 32, 39, 41. One great hindrance to spiritual knowledge of the plan of God revealed in His Word is the idea that the word “church” in the Bible can only refer to the Body of Christ. Many talk about ‘the one church’ which is an unscriptural expression. There is “one Body” but that is a different matter. Stephen does not hesitate to call *the nation of Israel* “the church in the wilderness” (Acts vii. 38).

Dr. F. V. Filson has words to the point here:

“The word ‘church’ has deep roots in its Old Testament use to designate the congregation of Israel. Jesus does not think of a church which rejects all ties with Israel, but of a congregation within Israel which represent what all Israel should be and seeks to win all Israel. It accepts Jesus as the Christ and tells all Israel that He is their Christ” (Commentary on Matthew, p.187).

We should realize that the word “church” as related to Israel was a fact well known to the Jew. The Greek translation of the O.T., the Septuagint, was in common use in the N.T. era and was freely used by the Lord and the Apostles. In it the word occurs no less than 96 times. It is usually the translation of the Hebrew *qahal*, rendered “congregation” in the A.V., and is used also for four other Hebrew words.

We give several examples of the Septuagint usage:

“And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of *all the church of Israel*” (I Kings viii. 22).

“And at that time Solomon held a feast, and all Israel with him, *a great church*” (I Kings viii. 65).

“And David said unto *all the church of Israel*” (I Chron. xiii. 2).

“Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast a cord by lot *in the church* of the Lord” (Micah ii. 5).

It is interesting to note that Heb. ii. 12 quotes the Septuagint version of Psa. xxii. 22:

“I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren; in the midst of the *congregation* I will praise Thee” (Psa. xxii. 22).

The quotation in Hebrews read:

“. . . . I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren, in the midst of the *church* will I sing praise unto Thee” (ii. 12).

In the Scriptural sense there is more than one assembly of God’s people in the Bible, though there is only *One Body*, and that is the company ministered to by the apostle Paul (Col. i. 23-25).

Coming back to Matt. xvi., we may ask what Peter and the eleven would understand by the word “church”? As we have seen, it was well-known to them and they could have understood it only in the way used in the O.T. If Christ was referring to the church as revealed to Paul later on (Eph. iii. 1-11) then Peter and the disciples would have needed the same revelation that Paul was given, to receive and understand it (cp. Eph. iii. 1-7 and note verse 3), for at this time it was still a secret (mystery) hid in God (Col. i. 23-28).

There is no indication whatsoever that Peter and the other disciples had such a revelation. Moreover, if Peter’s epistles are studied, he never refers to the Body of Christ or uses the word “mystery” or “secret” so intimately joined to it in Paul’s ministry.

We should remember at the time covered by Matt. xvi., that the leaders of Israel had already rejected Christ in His capacity of Prophet, Priest and King (Matt. xi. & xii.), and in chapter xiii. Christ quotes the solemn verses from Isa. vi. and rejects them. The old nation was coming to its spiritual end, but God’s plan was not wrecked, for He had commenced building a new nation based upon the faithful remnant that still existed. There had always been a faithful remnant right throughout the nation’s history, which the Scriptures make perfectly clear.

The Lord was building and would continue to build a new nation of Israel and *this is the argument of Rom. xi.*, “Hath God cast away His people”, the Apostle asks, and the answer is decidedly ‘No’, “God hath *not* cast away His people” (Israel, verse 2). Paul’s conclusion is “Even so this present time also (that of the Roman epistle) there is *a remnant according to the election of grace*” (verse 5).

This company was predominantly from Israel, but, during the Acts period the Lord’s purpose widened to include Gentile believers; and it was certainly a church in the Biblical sense. Those who had responded under the ministry of John the Baptist and of the Lord Jesus, together with the faithful saints of previous centuries, belonged to this company and we believe they formed the church that Christ declared to Peter He would go on building. This does not conflict with any other Scripture and fits into the purpose of God as far as it had been revealed at that time. Dr. A. Plummer states in his Introduction, page 32:

“The famous utterance ‘on this rock I will build My church’ must not be judged by the ideas that have gathered round it. ‘On this rock I will build My Israel, the new Israel that is to grow out of the old one’, is the meaning quite in accordance with thoughts that were current in the first generation of Christendom.”

The opposition of death and Hades could not overcome this assembly because it was for ever linked with the conqueror of death (Rev. i. 18).

In addition to this the Lord said to Peter:

“. . . . I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. xvi. 19).

Here is a figure of a building with keys to open from the outside, and we have seen that the kingdom of heaven is not the Body of Christ, nor was Peter given any power to include or cast out any who form this church, for its membership had already been decided by God before the creation (Eph. i. 4). Peter used the keys of the kingdom in the early chapters of the Acts as he declared how entry to that kingdom could be obtained. Peter had no peculiar prerogative in this matter, for it applied to other ministers of the circumcision. It is clear that neither Peter nor the other disciples understood Christ to say that he was to have supreme authority permanently. The “binding” and “loosing” in the words that follow was given to *all the disciples* (xviii. 18), and also after the Resurrection (John xx. 23). This assumes that the use of the keys and the power of binding and loosing will be in accordance with the teaching and mind of Christ.

Peter was simply the first among equals, because he was the spokesman for the faith of the other disciples. Binding and loosing does not refer to the forgiveness of sins. To ‘bind’ is to forbid; to ‘loose’ is to permit, and the expressions belonged to the technical rabbinical language which was well understood at that time. It is important to notice that it is “*whatsoever* thou shalt bind”, not “*whomsoever* thou shalt bind”, and there is no indication that Peter was able to pass this power on to his successors, in spite of the advocates of papal supremacy.

Not only must we be careful not to go further than the plain meaning of the words, but also we must give due regard to the tense of the verbs here. On the surface it looks as though Peter was given power to influence *heaven* as well as earth, “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (xvi. 19, N.I.V.), and this is what Roman Catholic doctrine teaches. Both verbs here are in the *future perfect passive*. Dr. J. R. Mantey in “The Misinterpretation of the Perfect Tense in John 20:23, Matthew 16:19 and Matthew 18:18” states:

“. . . . according to the unanimous testimony of all Greek grammarians, the perfect tense pictures a past action, the result of which was present to the speaker or writer”,

and this is supported by many reputable grammarians. Accordingly Dr. R. O. Yeager translates verse 19:

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, but whatever you bind on earth is that which *shall already have been bound in the heavens*, and whatever you loose on earth is that which *shall already have been loosed in the heavens*.”

Dr. Mantey points out that at the beginning, when the church fathers were thoroughly familiar with *koine* Greek, there was no question about this verse, but later, when Latin influence was brought to bear, the translation as contained in the A.V. was allowed to creep in, that God's actions in heaven are contingent upon what Peter and his successors do on earth in deciding whether men shall be saved or lost, bound or set free. The opposite is true; the Lord's representatives on earth bring about those situations which have already been determined in the heavens. God's decrees antedate man's decisions. This is surely made clear in Rom. viii. 28-30 and I Pet. i. 2. The purpose expressed is God's; the knowledge is God's; the predestination is an act of God; the pattern is God's; justification and glorification are acts of God. All is of God in the final sense. Though man has a function of proclamation, it is God Who is the origin and the final authority.

At the same time we realize that God uses human means in the execution of His will, and men are not treated as machines, otherwise they would have no responsibility. In reverse we see the human side in Rom. x. 13-15 and this complements the revelation given in Matt. xvi. 18, 19.

Young's Literal Version reads:

“whatsoever thou mayest bind upon the earth shall be having been bound in the heavens, and whatsoever thou mayest loose upon the earth shall be having been loosed in the heavens.”

The Amplified New Testament reads:

“. . . . whatever you bind—that is, declare to be improper and unlawful—on earth must be already bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth—declare lawful—must be what is already loosed in heaven.”

See also Dr. R. H. Gundry's Commentary on Matthew, page 331:

“. . . . and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.”

C. B. William's translation reads:

“Whatever you forbid on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth must be what is already permitted in heaven.”

The New American Standard Version reads:

“whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

It is greatly to be regretted that here our Authorized Version and others give a translation that supports priestcraft.

No.26. xvi. 20 - xvii. 8.
pp. 225 - 230

Dr. A. Plummer sums up these difficult verses by saying:

“. . . . nor can we assume that what Peter decides for the visible church is binding on the church invisible; or that what he decides for the visible church of his day holds good for ever, however much the conditions may change; or that his power of prohibiting or permitting has passed to his successors.”

The Lord concluded this episode by charging them to tell no one that He was the Messiah (xvi. 20). The time had not yet come for Him to present Himself publicly to the whole nation as their Messiah and King. Had he been announced as such at this point, it was inevitable the people would have taken it in a political sense. In fact they had already done so (John vi. 15).

At verse 21 we have the second time division of the Gospel. The first commenced with iv. 17. Now we read:

“From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (xvi. 21, N.I.V.).

This was the first time He had mentioned His death and it obviously came as a great shock to His disciples. The word “began” is important for it shows us that the Lord’s words were a summary of what went on for some time. It was only a little over 6 months before the cross and the disciples must know it now in order to be ready then. But how could the Lord be the Messiah and Israel’s King if he was going to be killed? This must have been a shattering blow to the Twelve. It was too much for impulsive Peter. He “took the Lord aside”. The verb is in the middle voice; “he took Him to himself” aside and apart, almost as though he had a right of his own, and he said to Him:

“Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (verse 22, N.I.V.).

The Lord’s reply, on the surface cursing, was absolutely necessary:

“Jesus turned and said to Peter, Out of my sight, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (verse 23).

This recalls the dismissal of Satan after the temptations in the wilderness. What is astounding is the fact that a little while earlier Peter was voicing the revelation of God the Father! Now he becomes Satan’s catspaw even though he did not realize it. This should be a warning to all of us.

It was the old temptation of a short and easy way to the Throne without suffering. But upon that death rested the whole purpose of God for redemption and the bringing in of

His Kingdom. In no way could it be avoided and Peter had not learned this fundamental lesson yet. Christ *must* go to Jerusalem and suffer many things (verse 21). Dr. Plummer points out how necessary was the charge that the apostles should be silent about the Lord's Messiahship. If the first of the apostles could commit so disastrous an error as was involved in his rebuke to Christ, what might not the ignorant multitude do?

The lesson that followed had already been mentioned by the Lord in x. 38, 39, but He expands it here:

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?’” (verses 24-26, N.I.V.).

Care must be taken here with the words *thelo* and *psuche*. The A.V. is not helpful here, nor is the N.I.V. “If anyone *wishes* or *wants* (*thelo*) to come after Me” (verse 24), and in the next verse “whoever *wants* (*thelo*) to save his life will lost it”. Hence the N.I.V. correctly translates *thelo*. Why is *thelo* (24) rendered differently? This is misleading. Again in verses 25 and 26 *psuche* is rendered “life” in verse 25, and “soul” (twice) in verse 26. Why is there not a consistent translation? The New American Standard Version (NASV) renders *thelo* “wishes” correctly. *Psuche* means life, or soul, and whichever word is chosen, should be kept in these verses. J. B. Rotherham does this consistently, and so does The Berkeley Version, both translations keeping to the word “life”.

But what does “saving the life” and “losing the life” mean to *those who are already saved*? Let us not forget that these words were not spoken to the unsaved multitudes but to the saved disciples who were true believers in the Lord, and therefore received the promise of everlasting life (John iii. 15, 16) which means they would never perish (x. 28).

Unless we are very careful here we shall get into severe difficulties and make Christ contradict Himself. A careful consideration of this context will show that the word “life” is used in two senses. It refers (1) to the present life, and (2) to the resurrection life to come, which in Matthew's Gospel refers to a place in the kingdom of heaven when this is finally set up by the Lord.

We have seen in this Gospel that this is in the nature of *reward*, for *reward* is one of the key-words, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount. We must not lose sight of the teaching regarding *reward* in the context we are considering, specially as it is stressed in the closing words of the Lord in this section:

“For the Son of Man is going to come in His Father's glory with His angels, and then *He will reward* each person according to what he has done” (Matt. xvi. 27, N.I.V.).

“Each person” must refer to saved people. Christ does not reward unbelievers who reject Him. However, Scripture teaching is quite clear that not every believer will be rewarded, for this depends on faithfulness to the Lord, even to the point of suffering and

loss. In the parables at the close of Matthew it is the *faithful* servant that receives the “well done” from the Saviour and enters into the joy of the Lord in resurrection at His Second Coming, which is parallel to “entering the Kingdom”.

The two senses of the word “life” come out in C. B. Williams’ translation. He has added the words “higher” and “lower” to designate them:

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone wants to be My disciple he must say ‘no’ to self, put his cross on his shoulders and keep on following Me. For whoever wants to save his higher life, will have to give up the lower life and whoever gives up the lower life for My sake will find the higher life. For what benefit will it be to a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his higher life? What price would a man pay to buy back his life?” (xvi. 24, 26, C. B. Williams).

The figure of cross bearing would be well known by reason of the crucifixion of criminals in Palestine. It is clear that God does not force any disciple of His to take up the cross. This is decided by the believer himself as to whether he chooses to do so or not. There is always the easy way to take which avoids suffering and loss which is typified by the cross.

Losing the life or soul means to forfeit voluntarily many of the pleasures and good things of this life for the truth’s sake, and looking forward in faith to a resurrection life which is infinitely better and permanently satisfying. Abraham experienced this loss when he left the pleasures and attractions of Ur of the Chaldees, giving up kith and kin to become a dweller in tents in a far off undeveloped country. But Heb. xi. tells us that this was done with the eye of faith, looking forward to that “better country”, heavenly in character, to be enjoyed in resurrection (Heb. xi. 13-16).

Moses likewise gave up much that was attractive and enjoyable in Egypt, for he had been brought up in Pharaoh’s palace, surrounded by tremendous wealth and power. Yet he let it all go, and *chose to suffer affliction with the people of God (Israel), esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward* (Heb. xi. 24-26).

Paul had the same experience when he voluntarily gave up the gains of this present life with all their seeming advantages, for the far better spiritual treasures to be found only in Christ (Phil. iii. 7-11).

Peter, in his first epistle, referred to the sufferings that those to whom he wrote were undergoing. It was indeed “a fiery trial” of faith for them, but they were urged to look forward to receiving “the *end* of your faith, *even the salvation of your souls*” (I Pet. i. 7-9) which would be experienced “at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (verse 7). The Hebrew believers likewise had endured much suffering and loss (Heb. x. 32, 33). They were reminded that they belonged to those who have believed to “*the saving (or gaining) of the soul*” and that the Rewarder would come in a “little while” and then they would have “*great recompense of reward*” from Him (verses 35, 37).

The same truth is illustrated in the book of Revelation where those living under the dominion of the Antichrist at the end of the age, choose to die rather than receive the mark of the Beast. As far as this present life is concerned, they had given up everything, but the Apostle John, in a vision, sees them raised from the dead later on, not only living in the millennial kingdom, but on the throne with Christ, *reigning with Him* (Rev.xx.4-6). But verse 5 reads “the rest of the dead did not come to life again until the thousand years were ended” (R.S.V.). So here we have a clear illustration of what being shut out of the kingdom means in the Sermon on the Mount.

Taking up the cross is a voluntary act of a believer who is willing to suffer pain and loss *now* for Christ Who takes note of this, and gives immense gains in the life to come for eternity. Thus we see that the phrase “the saving of the soul” in the N.T. applies to faithful *believers*, not to the unsaved. Moreover, we can now distinguish between coming *to* Christ as sinners needing salvation, and choosing to come *after* Christ (literally behind Christ, that is with Christ in front, leading). This can only be experienced *after* being saved.

“To deny himself” (xvi. 24) means more than what we mean by “self-denial”. It means to say ‘no’ to self, to refuse to make *our* aims, *our* pleasures, *our* wills the laws of life, thus giving them the first place. For these we must substitute the claims of Christ, His Truth, and the well-being of others. Such a choice is far from easy, but we dare not alter or tone down the conditions laid down by the Lord.

All this section of the Gospel must be seen in its context of *reward* for faithfulness in service. It does not refer to *salvation*. If this is introduced here we create difficulties that are insoluble. The Lord Jesus at this point reveals that His coming back to the earth is in great glory with the accompaniment of the angels of heaven, and He concludes with the words:

“I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom” (xvi. 28, N.I.V.).

Once more we have the untranslatable particle *an* with the subjunctive mood which implies some uncertainty of the *timing*, not the *fact* of the Lord’s return. By His own statements that we have considered, the Lord Jesus brought His Second Coming near to the first, and we know that the conditions that obtained in the Acts period showed that this second coming was an imminent possibility, for all the epistles written during this period show that it was near. (See the author’s *The Unfolding Purpose of God*, p.43).

We note that the next chapter commences with an account of the Transfiguration. Some expositors feel that this is the fulfillment of the verses we have been considering, for Peter, James and John witnessed it, and the three Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke record it (Matt. xvii. 1-8; Mark ix. 2-8; Luke ix. 28-36) *in exactly the same context*. Before we reject this, we should consider Peter’s testimony in his second epistle which refers to his experience at the Transfiguration of Christ:

“We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the *power* and *coming* of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of His majesty. For He

received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is My Son, Whom I love; with Him I am well pleased'. We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with Him on the sacred mountain" (II Pet. i. 16-18, N.I.V.).

Peter declares here that he saw the *power* and *coming* (*parousia*) of Christ. He was an eye-witness of the majesty and coming of the One Who was not only Israel's Messiah, but Israel's King. This *parousia* ('coming', or better 'presence') is going to be described by Christ in Matt. xxiv., and there can be no doubt that this is His Second Advent.

These verses then must not lightly be set aside, for they concern the Transfiguration which is being detailed in the chapter of Matthew's Gospel we are studying. In any case there is no need to make a problem of the Lord's statement in xvi. 28. If we compare the accounts of the three Evangelists we shall find they vary slightly, and in this way add more detail.

Prison Experiences

No.1. “because the Lord was with him” (Gen. xxxix. 23). pp. 237 - 240

In this series, we propose to use as a guide the many references to prison in both the Old and New Testaments. We might expect that many of them would be records of those who were being punished for their wrong-doing but this is not so.

Although we are studying the circumstances that lead to prison experience, we bear in mind that some people (and probably more than we realize) have experiences which do not lead to being bound or being confined to a prison cell, but which are similar to prison experience. Some of the references in scripture to prison relate to “restraint” so that there are limitations to the freedom of the individual although they are not in chains. How many people suffer from limitations that restrict their freedom? People may be severely limited owing to problems connected with their health, or their financial situation or other disabilities. One can be unable to visit friends, if a car is not available and if public services are withdrawn. Those who live in the country find travel more and more difficult and such environment conditions could lead to a type of “prison experience”. In fact, we may go further and say that each one of us is limited to some extent by our circumstances, our responsibilities, our occupation, our environment, our financial situation, our obligations, our health, and many other factors. A young and healthy person could be “imprisoned” by the responsibility of caring for an infirm and aged parent. A Christian wishing to help in a witness in a certain locality may be prevented from so doing, because he is employed in a different locality and cannot get “time off” to travel to and from the other locality, or the distance may be so great that the time and the cost involved make the journey impossible.

The limitations which we have tried to illustrate are of a physical nature but there is the spiritual dimension. How many times do we hear of the need for “fellowship”? How many Christians for one reason or another cannot meet with others for fellowship and worship? How many members of the church which is His Body find themselves isolated and have little or no opportunity to meet and talk with others of like precious faith. They feel “shut up” or “imprisoned”. They are lonely and want fellowship.

We are aware of this need and that is why we have arranged for the Tape Recording Service, which enables the lonely ones to apply for cassettes and by that means they can share with others the message that was delivered at the Chapel, or elsewhere. We also encourage such isolated ones to share with others in prayer and we issue Joints and Bands for this purpose, asking the lonely ones to contact us and exchange their experiences with others.

Examples of Suffering.

The Apostle Paul certainly knew that to follow Christ faithfully was costly. How he suffered for his faith! He lists the characteristics of his life in II Tim. iii. 10-12, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me". He adds in verse 12, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution".

In Heb. xi., where we have that wonderful account of those who lived by faith, in verses 33-38 we have a long list of the tremendous trials and afflictions that were endured. In verse 36, we read, "and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment".

Of Christ, we read in Isa. liii. 8:

"He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation?
for He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of My people, was
He stricken."

So in days of old, trials, persecutions, and afflictions had to be endured and Paul included prison experiences among those trials. Conditions may be different today, and in this country, we are greatly favoured. But in some countries, Christians are suffering prison sentences and even torture for their faith. We propose to consider some examples of those who had prison experiences and we will commence with the life of Joseph.

Joseph (Introduction).

We read the account of the life of Joseph in Gen. xxxvii.-l. It is a long but thrilling story. In addition to its own intrinsic interest, it contains much valuable material for Bible study. A number of O.T. characters are types of Christ and a study of Joseph's life, watching for similar events in the life of Christ, can be very rewarding.

In Volume XII of The Berean Expositor, Charles H. Welch sets out on page 5 a little structure which he calls "Seven great types of Christ". We reproduce it here.

- A | ADAM.—Sin forfeits life.
- B | ABEL.—The accepted offering.
- C | SETH.—Substitution.
- D | NOAH.—Atonement ("pitch").
- C | ISAAC.—Substitution.
- B | JUDAH.—Suretyship.
- A | JOSEPH.—Sufferings lead to preservation of life.

In view of the length of the whole story, we must restrict ourselves to the main features, leaving the reader the pleasure of studying the complete narrative.

Reuben was the eldest son and Joseph was a younger brother; Rachel was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. When the story opens in chapter xxxvii., Joseph was 17 years old. Now one would expect the family of brothers to be described as “Reuben and his brethren”. But this is not so. We read of “Joseph with his brethren”. Joseph takes the central position and Israel loved Joseph more than all his children because “he was the son of his old age”. He made him a coat of many colours. This must have been an embroidered coat and it was significant for two reasons. It indicated that Joseph was the heir. Further, the garment was evidence of a priestly office. Aaron had embroidered garments of blue, purple and scarlet as symbols of his priestly office. So Joseph was the priest of the family. C. H. Welch comments “Throughout scripture, clothing has a symbolic value. The result of Joseph’s pre-eminence is prophetic of Christ”.

Joseph had two dreams, one about sheaves in the field, and the other about the sun, moon and stars; in each dream, obeisance was made to Joseph. The brothers of Joseph were furious when he recounted his dreams and this increased the hatred that was building up in the hearts of the brothers against Joseph.

We read that “his father observed the saying” (Gen. xxxvii. 11) and this comment reminds us of the mother of Jesus, who “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Luke ii. 19).

The rejection of Joseph as ruler foreshadows the refusal of the Jews to accept their Messiah. We may compare:

“Shalt thou indeed reign over us?” (Gen. xxxvii. 8).

“We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke xix. 14).

C. H. Welch points how the career of Joseph is associated with pairs of dreams.

1st pair.		Joseph’s dreams of pre-eminence lead to prison and suffering.
2nd pair.		The prisoners’ dreams being interpreted lead to deliverance from prison.
3rd pair.		Pharaoh’s dreams being interpreted lead to glory and honour.

Having introduced Joseph and his background, we are ready to study the life of Joseph and this we hope to do in our next article.

Random Thoughts

No.1. “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me” (Psalm cxxxix. 6). pp. 158 - 160

In the first verse of this Psalm the writer expresses the fact that the Lord has absolute and complete knowledge of us, “O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me”. Young’s Analytical Concordance gives the meaning of “search” as “to search out or investigate”. The Companion Bible contains a note, “to search out as for treasures or secrets”. It is evident that the Lord knows all about us, even our secret thoughts.

The Companion Bible also points out that “known” has the meaning “seen so as to understand”. So the Lord sees us and understands us. According to The Companion Bible the structure of the Psalm is as follows:

- A | 1. Divine searching
- B1 | 2-5. Omniscience
- C1 | 6. Admiration
- B2 | 7-16. Omnipresence
- C2 | 17, 18. Admiration
- B3 | 19. Omnipotence
- C3 | 19-22. Detestation
- A | 23, 24. Divine searching

So if we look at verses 2-5, David says that the Lord knows and sees our every movement and understands our every thought. He follows us wherever we go, and hears all we say. It is impossible to go beyond the extent of His knowledge, for there is no limit to His vision and understanding.

Can we flee from the presence of God? Verses 7-16 show that God is everywhere and we cannot get beyond His care.

For the traveler, verses 9 and 10 are very comforting, “If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me”. The writer remembers reading these words after flying to New Zealand. It seemed impossible to be further from home. And being alone in an hotel, the Psalmist’s assurance that the Lord was present was a source of comfort. His protecting hand was always there.

The Psalmist extends his survey of God’s knowledge and His protection to the time even before we were born:

“For Thou hast possessed my reins: Thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well” (verses 13 and 14).

Even before the limbs were formed, a record was written in God's book. So as the body gradually took shape and grew, the eye of the Lord was observing and His providential care brooded over the unborn child. No wonder the Psalmist exclaims:

“How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!
If I should count them they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still
with Thee” (verses 17 and 18).

Verses 19 to 22 refer to the wicked. The Lord has the power to deal with them, as stated in the first part of verse 19. David then goes on to express his hatred of those who hate the Lord, and he counts the enemies of the Lord as his enemies.

Throughout the Psalm there is a sense of wonder at the knowledge of the Lord, for He knows every detail of our lives, our birth, our every thought and desire: where we go and what we plan. And He is always thinking about us, watching over us and protecting us. He is always with us, and we never pass beyond the bounds of His love and care. John Greenleaf Whittier expresses it in verse:

I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.

As we meditate on this Psalm we have to echo the words of David:

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (verse 6).

At the beginning, David says “O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me”, but after thinking about the omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of the Lord, he begins to feel a sense of unworthiness. So he prays:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if
there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (verses 23, 24).

The Psalm does indeed tell us of God's wonderful knowledge, but before we close let us read of an even more astounding revelation. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul blesses the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. He then continues:

“According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we
should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the
adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself” (Eph. i. 4, 5).

In Psa. cxxxix. we read “My substance was not hid from Thee, when I was made in secret”. In Ephesians we read of what the Lord did “before the foundation of the world”. So, long ago, the Lord chose us and prepared a place for us in His divine purpose and plan. May the eyes of our understanding be enlightened that we may know what is the hope of His calling (Eph. i. 17-20)*.

[* - The reader is referred to Stuart Allen's book *Letters From Prison*, pp.22-26,
where he examines the above passage.]

The Epistle to the ROMANS.

No.20. xi. 17 - 36.

pp. 5 - 9

Coming therefore to the parable of the olive tree, we must remind ourselves that the Israel of chapter xi. must be the same as the Israel of chapter ix. An exegesis that makes Israel the literal nation in the ninth chapter and then changes it by spiritualizing into another people when one reaches the chapter we are dealing with is not acceptable. We must also get quite clear in our minds what grafting into Israel actually means.

Is this only another way of expressing the salvation of Gentiles, or is more than this intended? Let us give Paul's words:

“If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, ‘branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in’. Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either” (Rom. xi. 17-21, N.I.V.).

We may ask ourselves, why does the Apostle introduce the theme of the olive tree at this point? We may be sure of one thing, he did not do so to introduce theological argument. He has been showing the purpose of the Lord in introducing Gentile believers was to “provoke” Israel to emulation. This “provocation” is the theme of this context and its object was to stir the nation up spiritually, to make them realize what they were losing through unbelief. This is the real reason for the figure of the olive and its grafts and to miss this is to miss the whole point of the parable. It should be obvious, after the clear teaching of chapter viii., that no Gentile could be justified or saved by being placed in the position forfeited by one of the natural branches of the olive tree. Chapter viii. has stressed that no believer who is justified by faith can ever be separated from the love of God, or can ever be condemned and lose eternal life, so the threat of excision in Rom.xi.22 cannot refer to this, otherwise we have absolute contradiction.

Firstly, let us get the Scriptural answer as to what the olive tree represents. The Apostle quotes Jeremiah in this chapter and it is this prophet who gives us the clue. In chapters xi. and xii. we read:

“The Lord thy God called thy name, *a green olive tree*, fair and goodly fruit the branches of it are broken” (Jer. xi. 16).

“But if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the Lord” (Jer. xii. 17).

The broken branches are very much like the olive tree of Rom. xi. Yet we must not misread these verses into thinking this would be the end of the nation, for the prophet

makes it abundantly clear that Israel will be preserved *as a nation* for ever under the terms of the New Covenant of grace (Jer. xxxi. 31-37). God says:

“If those ordinances (the sun by day and the moon and stars by night) depart from before Me, said the Lord, then the seed of Israel shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever. Thus said the Lord; if heaven above can be measured and the foundations of the earth search out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord” (Jer. xxxi. 36, 37).

Israel then represent the olive tree of Rom. xi. and the branches that were broken off were the unbelieving among Israel. The remaining branches were the faithful elect remnant, and when the unbelieving Israel had been “broken off” the believing Gentile had been “grafted in”, although Paul describes this as “contrary to nature” for normally, in grafting, the choice is grafted on to the wild and not vice versa. There are critics who say that Paul’s knowledge of gardening was minimal but Paul had a contemporary, Columella, who wrote that when an olive tree ceases to bear well, a wild olive slip grafted in gives new vigour to the tree (Columella, *De re rustica*, v.9). So perhaps he was not so ignorant as these critics think. Sir William Ramsay states that it was customary in Palestine 60 years ago to re-invigorate an olive tree which was ceasing to bear fruit, by grafting it with a shoot of the wild olive, “so that the sap of the tree ennobles this wild shoot, and the tree now again begins to bear fruit” (*Pauline and Other Studies*, p.223). But what does the Apostle Paul mean by stating this was “contrary to nature”?

We must remember that it was God’s purpose that the Gentile should be blessed through Israel, and not the other way round. This is clear in the first great promise to Abraham, “in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. xii. 3). But when we reach the period covered by the Acts of the Apostles, through Israel’s repeated failures and disobedience, this abnormal condition of things caused God to reverse the process and bless the Gentile “before the time” as it were, and so seek to stimulate the nation that was so rapidly declining into apostasy and darkness.

“The root and fatness of the olive tree” belonged to Israel and if Israel had repented there would have been no need for Gentile grafting, but the nation could have gone on to accomplish what had always been God’s will for them and take the knowledge of Himself to the ends of the earth. Gentile blessing would have *followed* the repentance of Israel and not been a human factor in its accomplishment.

What does the “root and fatness of the olive tree” represent? It cannot be just salvation or justification by faith for, as we have seen, no one is justified by his works or by being joined with another nation, and cannot be “cut off” from this; for Rom. viii. stresses that such separation is impossible (Rom. viii. 35-39). Paul has already described in detail what the “root and fatness of the olive tree” represents. This he gives at the opening of this section of the epistle in chapter ix. 3-5, listing the tremendous national blessings that God had bestowed on Israel in His plan for the establishment of His kingdom on earth. It gave them a unique position over the nations, so much so that Psalm cxlvii. 20 asserts that God had not dealt so with any nation in bestowing on them such privileges and blessings relating to adoption (the position of the heir), the glory of

God, the many covenants wherein God's purpose was so clearly revealed, the giving and guidance of the law, the great privilege for service, the many vital promises relating to the will of God for them, and then the greatest Gift of all, their Messiah, Saviour and King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

These were the tremendous and unique blessings which God had showered on Israel, concerning which the O.T. is so full. It was these great blessings into which the Gentile believer was grafted in to share, and it was *from this that he could be "cut off"* if he acted in a high-handed way like most of Israel had done. Gentile nations cannot be in view in Rom. xi., for such cannot be addressed as "brethren", neither do they stand "by faith" (Rom. xi. 20).

Once this is seen there is no problem about being cut off from salvation, and in order to show that this cannot be true, Paul concludes by teaching that the One Who had broken the natural branches off through their unbelief was able and willing to graft them in again, in other words, *to restore them* once more to the position He wills for them in His earthly purpose, for their blindness is only temporary "until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (xi. 25).

There were several excisions of the branches of Israel between Matthew xiii. and Acts xxviii.; what happened at Antioch and Corinth being two of them (Acts xiii. 45-47; xix. 8, 9) for the record makes perfectly clear that the opposition to Paul came continually from the Jews, not the Gentiles, who often received the gospel gladly. The "hope of Israel" dominates the Acts and obviously was related to the twelve tribes (Acts.xxvi.6,7). What would happen to the olive tree if the grafting in of Gentile believers failed is not revealed in Romans. Now that we have the light of all Scripture, we know that unbelieving Israel were to be "plucked up" and "scattered" to the ends of the earth as the O.T. had repeatedly warned them, yet had so clearly spoken of their ultimate restoration and gathering back to the land of promise because of God's grace and His unconditional promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. Israel's blindness or hardness was a mystery (secret, xi. 25) for although the O.T. revealed the nation's laying aside in unbelief there was no revelation of the length of time this would last. Thus it is that Paul ends his parable of the olive tree by stressing this great goal of God for the nation. The One Who has disciplined them and scattered them is the One Who will gather them (Jer. xxxi. 10).

The O.T. prophets give ample evidence of this (see Isa. xliii. 5-7; Jer. xxiv. 6, 7; Ezek. xx. 41, 42; xxviii. 25, 26; Amos ix. 13-15; Micah iv. 1-8; Zeph. iii. 19, 20). (The reader is recommended to the author's *The Kingdom of God in Heaven and on Earth*, pp.58-66, where this is discussed in detail.). The day is coming when the Redeemer shall come to Zion (Isa. lix. 20; Rom. xi. 26) and Israel shall be restored and enter into the fullness of God's purpose for them:

"The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee (Israel) shall perish, yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted" (Isa. lx. 12).

"But ye (Israel) shall be named the Priests of the Lord: men shall call you Ministers of our God: ye shall eat the riches of the Gentiles" (Isa. lxi. 6).

The Redeemer's coming to Zion relates to His second coming. At no other time can the glories of these prophecies be fulfilled—certainly not by any activities of men, Christian or otherwise. The olive tree was a parable of truth that fitted the Israel of the Acts period. This is its divine setting; but to pull it out and try to make it fit the church today is to attempt the impossible if the details of holy Scripture are carefully followed.

The olive tree cannot represent the Israel of today, for since Acts xxviii. their blinded condition, through God's judgment, is the very negation of the New Covenant, which relates to a new heart implanted by the Lord to keep his Truth. In no sense can a believer be grafted into the hardened Israel of today. Neither can the olive tree be linked with any of the denominations of Christendom, for if this was true, it would follow that the denomination concerned would, according to Rom. xi., receive back the broken-off branches of Israel, which is impossible.

It has been objected that in Rom. xi. Paul says nothing about the restoration of an earthly Davidic kingdom, or about natural reinstatement in the land of Israel. But why should he? Had he done so it would have turned the Roman epistle into a lengthy treatise and strayed away from his great subject, justification by faith. The restoration of the nation of Israel has been given in great detail in the O.T., and no Jew needed this.

If the view of God's kingdom in the N.T. is completely different from that presented in the O.T., then it was incumbent on the N.T. to make this perfectly clear. But we find no such statement in the Gospels (where we would expect it) nor anywhere else. The olive tree cannot be an illustration of the church which is the Body of Christ, for this church consists of a new creation taken from both Jew and Gentile (Eph. ii. 11-16) and blessed in perfect equality in the sphere of the highest heavens and seen to be enthroned there in Christ (Eph. ii. 6), and its members are urged to set their minds there and not on things on the earth (Colossians iii. 1, 2), for there is where our heavenly citizenship exists (Phil. iii. 20). The olive, as we have seen, represents the nation of Israel and in it the Jew still has priority (Rom. xi. 18) and this cannot be a fit illustration of a company where the Jew nationally does not exist and its blessing placed in an exalted sphere where Christ now reigns in the highest heavens.

The Apostle Paul now ends this section with a doxology:

“O, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His adviser? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen” (xi. 33-36, N.I.V.).

The matchless wisdom, knowledge and judgments of God are untraceable by man unless they are revealed, yet they all contribute to the carrying out and fulfillment of His great redemptive plan which will come to a glorious conclusion in spite of Satan and all human failure.

No.21. xii. 1 - 18.
pp. 25 - 29

Chapter xii. begins the practical section of the epistle. To the apostle Paul doctrine alone was not sufficient. God's teaching always brings responsibility. Consequently we find in Paul's epistles doctrine balanced by practice. It could be said concerning all doctrine, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them" (John xiii. 17). Everyone who rejoices in the truth of justification by faith must be concerned about his practical response, and in these last chapters of Romans we find guidance concerning our daily lives. Our concern should be that of the Psalmist when he said "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?" (Psa. cxvi. 12). It is significant that Paul not only talks about faith, but the *obedience* of faith, and it is to this that true faith always leads.

Romans xii. 1 reads:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Christian scholars have noticed the resemblance in this section with some of the statements of the Sermon on the Mount, but this should cause no surprise when we remember that sometimes the Lord is giving teaching that applies to all men at all times, whatever their differences in birth and upbringing.

The "mercies of God" are given here in Romans as the compelling reason as to why we should now yield ourselves back to Him, so there is a depth here which can easily be missed. Surely the Apostle uses this term to cover and sum up all the tremendous teachings of chapters i.-xi. Because of all this, there can only be one suitable response by the believer and that is to "yield" (same Greek word "present, A.V." as vi. 13, 19) his body to the Lord, which is equivalent to yielding himself. This is a "sacrifice", but not one of outward ritual. Modern translations render "your reasonable service" of the A.V. as "your spiritual worship". *Latreia* has already occurred in ix. 4 where it is translated 'service'; the verbal form occurs in Phil.iii.3 and is there rendered 'worship' in the A.V. *Logikos* can mean "reasonable" or "spiritual". It is perfectly true to say that the believer's service is the only reasonable response to God's infinite grace. It is equally true that it is "spiritual worship" in contrast with the externalities of Israel's temple ritual. It is the response of the believer's inward being rather than outward rites. This widens our view of worship which is too often confined to regular attendance at a church building.

The logical service or spiritual worship leads on to the next verse:

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. xii. 2).

The word “world” is *aion*, age. While this age is full of the exploits of man and his considerable attainments, yet the word of God reminds us that it is “evil” (Gal. i. 4). It is dominated by the “god of this age” who blinds the mind (II Cor. iv. 4), in consequence of which Christ is still rejected. To be conformed to this age is therefore dangerous and always to be avoided by the believer. In contrast he should be “transformed”. This word *metamorphoo* is translated “transfigure” in the Gospel records, and this transfiguration comes about through the work of the Holy Spirit. In II Cor. iii. 18 we have believers being “changed” into the likeness of Christ from one degree of glory to another by the work of “the Lord Who is the Spirit” (N.I.V.). The mind is far from being continually good; it must be constantly “renewed”. Without this it would be impossible to test and approve what the will of God is. It is always good and perfect coming from Him, but is it always acceptable to us? It is only so when we are prepared to submit our will to His. The renewed mind constantly needs divine instruction, hence the detailed advice and guidance in the following chapters of the epistle.

The Apostle now deals not only with diversities of personalities, but diversities of gifts, yet insists that all should co-operate for the good of the witness as a whole. He once more uses the illustration of a human body as He had already done when writing to the Corinthian church. Each member of the human body has its own particular work to perform, yet all the parts work together harmoniously otherwise good health would be impossible. In the same way, an assembly of God’s people should function together in love and harmony.

“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Rom. xii. 3).

The Apostle gives the ground for his authority, the grace and power God had bestowed on him for the teaching and building up of the churches (cp. II Cor. xiii. 10). He starts by warning against pride and self-esteem which would lead to some imagining themselves to be superior to others. God had given each a measure of faith and this word is used in a somewhat different sense from that which it has in the rest of the epistle. Here, it refers to the spiritual power which each believer had received for the discharge of his special responsibility.

Although this responsibility is stressed, yet all must work in harmony, for they were “one body IN Christ” (Rom. xii. 5). The phrase, the Body *of* Christ does not occur in the epistle to the Romans. The word body to describe a group of people was of common occurrence in early times.

“The metaphor of the body, used to describe a group of men who have common interests and activities, was not infrequent in antiquity. An example often quoted is the speech put by Livy (2:32) into the mouth of Menenius Agrippa on the occasion of the secession of the Roman *plebs*. Senate and people, Agrippa argued, could no more dispense with each other than stomach and limbs; they formed a unity within one body” (C. K. Barrett, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.236).

Professor F. F. Bruce writes:

“In I Corinthians and Romans the human body is used simply as an illustration of the corporate life of Christians, but the idea is carried much farther in Colossians and Ephesians. In these later epistles emphasis is laid on the relation which the church, as the Body, bears to Christ as the Head. In them there is no possibility for an ordinary member of the church being compared to the Head, or to part of the Head (as is done in I.Cor.xii.16,21). In them, too, the Body ceases to be a mere simile, and becomes the most effective term which the Apostle can find to express the vital bond which unites the life of believers with the risen life of Christ” (*Romans*, p.228).

It is vital that we understand this and do not try to force the later teaching concerning the great revelation of the Mystery (Secret) of Ephesians and Colossians into these earlier epistles.

The apostle Paul continues by bringing forward 7 of the Pentecostal gifts:

“We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (xii. 6-8, N.I.V.).

The N.E.B. renders the last phrase “if you are helping others in distress”, which gives the sense of the words used. The Apostle had already dealt with these confirmatory gifts in the first canonical letter to the church at Corinth. The reader is referred to the author’s *The Early and Pastoral Epistles of Paul*, chapters 12 to 14, where they are dealt with in detail, specially the gift of tongues.

At verse 9 there is a transition from faith to love, and verse 12 mentions hope. Faith, hope, and love are often seen together in Paul’s epistles. They are a trinity of graces that cover the Christian walk so admirably. In this section the injunctions are reminiscent of the Sermon on the Mount. Something more than the mutual love of Christians is required, namely practical love and forgiveness to those outside the fellowship, specially to those who persecute and injure them. It is noteworthy that whenever God wants truth carried over into another dispensation, He repeats it. It is not left to us to pull texts out of their context, because we feel they are of practical importance.

We continue with this section of the epistle as rendered in the N.I.V.:

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (xii. 9-18).

These verses cover a wide field of Christian practice touching the order and conduct of church life and for the most part are direct and clear. We comment on each verse. Verse 9: Love must be literally “without hypocrisy”. It must be absolutely sincere and not “put on”. Verse 10: Others must be counted as better than themselves. Here we have the spirit of Phil. ii. 3, “in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves”. Verse 11: “Fervent in Spirit”. This expression is used of Apollos in Acts.xviii.25. It is difficult to decide whether the word “spirit” should have a capital and refer to the Holy Spirit or a small ‘s’ referring to the believer. Probably the former is correct. The R.S.V. renders it “be aglow with the Spirit”. Verse 12: Hope is the sure fulfillment of faith and so should surely produce lasting joy. Affliction should be patiently endured and there must be perseverance in prayer.

No.22. xii. 14 - xiii. 14.
pp. 41 - 44

Verse 14: Here the Apostle echoes the Sermon on the Mount. Compare Luke vi. 28, “Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you”, and also Matt. v. 44 “Love your enemies and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you”. Verse 15: An exhortation to show true sympathy with others, so avoiding being self-centred. Verse 16: “Be of the same mind one toward another”. This is like Phil. ii. 2 “to be high-minded”, which is ensured when each one has “the mind of Christ” as explained in the verses that follow. “Mind not high things”: this is repeated from chapter xi. 20 where we read “Be not highminded”, and this is a warning against conceit and “men of low estate”, that is, “humble folk” should not be avoided. Verse 17: Again, a reference to the Sermon on the Mount. The second sentence in this verse is a quotation from Prov. iii. 4 (LXX) and is an exhortation to lead an honest life before all men. Verse 18: This, again, reflects the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. v. 9). Verse 19: This is a warning against taking revenge. There is only one Person Who can do this righteously and that is God. No one has a right to imagine that his own revengeful feelings will carry out the will of God. Paul is quoting here from Deut.xxxii.35. Verse 20: The meaning here being that if an enemy is treated kindly, it may make him ashamed and repentant and become a friend, so “overcoming evil with good” (see verse 21).

Chapter xiii.

Chapter xiii. commences a new section dealing with the relation of believers to the ruling powers. Attempts have been made to confine the meaning of “powers” to those in authority in the churches, but this is not a satisfactory exposition of the passage as a whole. The believer’s attitude to authority was one of extreme importance. The position of Jews in the Roman empire was regulated by a number of imperial edicts. They enjoyed many privileges, for their religion was registered as a lawful one, *religio licita*, and these included the sabbath law, food regulations, and the prohibition of graven images.

After the death of Christ, Roman law tended to regard Christianity as a variety of Judaism, yet it started with a great handicap in the eyes of Rome for its Founder had been convicted and executed by the sentence of a Roman magistrate. He had led a movement which challenged the authority of Caesar.

This was often a trump card with the enemies of Christ (see the argument in Actx.xvii.6,7 against Paul). It was therefore necessary that Christians should take care with regard to their actions as they affected the governing authorities. The Lord Jesus Himself—in His wisdom—had already done so in His words “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matth.xxii.21; Mark.xii.14-17). These words related to the paying of taxes while God Himself ordained human government, and Prov. xxi. 1 assures us that “the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will”, yet we must not assume that human government constantly reflects the mind of God. The opposite is the truth and cries out for the return of Christ and the commencement of His righteous rule which will give justice to all. Yet with all its imperfections it is better than anarchy, which would arise if there was no restraint on human behaviour.

But another problem follows: what if human government is contrary to God and His laws? What if Caesar claims not only things that are his, but the things that belong to God? The N.T. provides the answer. If the decrees of authorities conflict with the commandments of God, then the Christian must refuse to comply with them. The ruling powers are then exceeding the authority delegated to them by God and trespassing on the sphere that belongs to God alone. Thus we have the answer of the apostles in Acts v. 29 “we ought to obey God rather than men”. This problem becomes acute in totalitarian countries. Yet it is significant that Peter echoes the words of Paul that the normal attitude of Christians to governments is one of obedience:

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men; whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men” (I Pet. ii. 13-15, N.I.V.).

Thus it is that Paul commences the 13th chapter of Romans by writing:

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God” (xiii. 1, N.I.V.).

Thus, in the providence of God, He has provided for everyone civil rulers as a restraint against uncontrolled sin and failure, just as He has provided them with sun and rain. The obedience of this verse is only within the limits of the purposes for which it has been divinely instituted and cannot override the obedience which is due to God alone.

The apostle continues:

“Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience” (xiii. 2-5, N.I.V.).

The teaching of these verses is perfectly clear. The person whose conscience and actions are right, has nothing to fear. The opposite is true for the wrongdoer. “Bearing the sword” can only mean capital punishment and moreover shows that the authorities must be civil powers and cannot refer to angels, which some have taught: nor is any problem felt with the Christian way of love. Those who have are confusing *the preservation* of mankind with *the salvation* of mankind (which many do these days). The authority of human rule is to protect from evil, but in no sense is this a spiritual work, doing away with the need of salvation which has grace and love at its root.

The submission to authorities includes the paying of taxes:

“This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone what you owe him; if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour” (xiii. 6, 7, N.I.V.).

No one enjoys paying taxes. Most think this is to be avoided as far as possible, yet we remember that the Son of God did not consider Himself to be free from this duty (Matthew xvii. 24-27). Moreover He gave the injunction, as we have seen, to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”, and the paying of taxes once again proves that we are not dealing with angels or spiritual powers, but with human beings.

Having dealt with the relation of the believer to the State, the Apostle continues his theme of Christian practice by returning to the all-inclusive command of love:

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘do not commit adultery’ (Exod. xx. 14), ‘do not murder’ (13), ‘do not steal’ (15), ‘do not covet’ (17), and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (xiii. 8-10, N.I.V.).

Here Paul gets to the very heart of the law of God given through Moses. It is really perfect love in action. The first five commandments deal with our love to God, and the second five our love to our neighbour. The problem is that man, by becoming a sinner, cannot love properly in the sense that God uses the term. The word becomes besmirched with uncleanness, selfishness and sentimentality. The word “fulfillment” is the important word *pleroma*, often rendered “fullness” (see xi. 25; xv. 29).

We must not imagine that the Apostle is teaching that a believer in loving fulfils the law and therefore does not need the salvation or justification. One breach alone of the law is sufficient to come under its condemnation, as this epistle and Galatians clearly testify, and the Apostle here is certainly not contradicting himself.

Dr. C. K. Barrett writes:

“Love is not the *completion* but the *performance* of the law. Verse 9 shows that by the law Paul means the Old Testament law in its preceptual character. Love fulfils all the negative and positive commandments inclusively, from Lev.19:18 downwards. When Paul says this, however, he is not instituting a new, though simplified, legalism. He does not say that a man is justified by fulfilling the law through love, rather he is pointing out the ethical expression of the true meaning of the law, which, when rightly understood, itself points the way of faith which expresses itself in love (Gal.5:6) it is not a means of salvation, but the ethical channel through which the new life in Christ Jesus flows” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, p.251).

The next practical section of the epistle is coloured by the nearness of the end of the age which culminates in the Second Advent of Christ:

“And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies of drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (xiii. 11-14, N.I.V.).

We must never forget that Romans is an Acts period epistle when the Second Advent of Christ was a glorious possibility according to the divine offer of forgiveness to Israel and the promise to send back the Lord Jesus Christ if only the nation would turn back to God and repent (Acts iii. 19-26). It is significant that all the epistles written during this time mention the nearness of the Lord's Second Coming as the hope of the churches. For further details the reader is referred to *The Unfolding Purpose of God* by the author, pp.42-44.

No.23. xiv. 1 - xv. 13.
pp. 61 - 64

The next section in this epistle relates to the duties of one Christian to another, bearing in mind that all had not attained to the same level of spiritual growth. There were those who were “strong” and those who were “weak” in the faith, and their attitude to food and the religious observance of certain days was not the same. The Jew would be scrupulous concerning meat, which had for him to be slaughtered according to O.T. rules, otherwise he would abstain. The Gentile would not be so particular. Some would insist certain religious days should be observed. Others might think this was not important. Believers at this time needed some advice as to their behaviour to each other, and the Apostle gives this:

“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand” (xiv. 1-4, N.I.V.).

It is not for one believer to judge or criticize another. Once again we are reminded of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord’s “judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt. vii. 1, 2).

The habit of criticizing others is a sin that is very prevalent among Christians, who seem to act as though they had a divine right to do this. The act of one sinner criticizing another sinner is absurd and unedifying, and the Apostle’s conclusion is given in Rom.xiv.13, “Let us not therefore judge one another any more”. What we can do is to “judge ourselves”, which may not be pleasant, and if we do “we should not be judged” (I.Cor.xi.31).

“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: ‘As surely as I live’, says the Lord, ‘Every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will confess to God’. So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God” (xiv. 5-12, N.I.V.).

In verse 7 Paul is not just teaching that our actions affect our fellowmen with whom we come into contact, but that *we live in relation to God*, and are accountable in our actions to Him *as Lord*. This makes our relationship to each other important, for finally we have to answer to Him for this, as well as all other aspects of our witness day by day.

This final interview no Christian will escape. We must *all* give an account of ourselves to God (12). “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John v. 22). It is He Who is “the righteous Judge” (II Tim. iv. 8); He it is Who is the *Lord* of both the dead and the living (Rom. xiv. 9), and to stress the solemnity of His judgment-seat the Apostle quotes from Isa. xlv., and the One Who speaks here declares “I am the Lord, and there is none else” (verse 18); “a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside Me” (21). Without hesitation Paul applies this Scripture *to Christ*. The judgment seat of Christ is the *judgment seat of God* (Rom. xiv. 10). In Phil. ii. the Apostle, quoting the same context from Isa. xlv., applies it to Christ, and if Christ is not God then words have no meaning at all. Yet there are those who declare that the apostle Paul did not teach the deity of Christ! Those who make such statements must be very ignorant of his witness. “Every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (12), and that is the One Who has been “manifest in the flesh”.

The problems concerning “food” and “days” were very real in the early days of Christianity, and the fact that the Lord Jesus had abrogated the food laws of the O.T. by pronouncing all kinds of food to be “clean” (Mark vii. 18, 19) seems to have been little understood at the beginning. Peter needed a special vision from God at Joppa to realize that he was not to count as unclean what God had cleansed, so that he could conscientiously visit the Gentile Cornelius and accept his hospitality, and it is significant that shortly afterwards, when the Council of Jerusalem agreed that Gentiles could be admitted to fellowship on the basis of faith in Christ, a regulation was made that Gentile converts should abstain from foods which were still abhorrent to Jewish brethren and conform to their O.T. food laws (Acts xv. 20, 29). In other words, while the Apostle taught the freedom of Christians in Christ, yet voluntary limits should be placed on this freedom, in order to avoid strife and disunity. This was not to be regarded as bondage but a practical expression of love and concern for someone else who may be weaker in the faith.

Consequently, in the next section of Romans, this is stressed:

“Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling-block or obstacle in your brother’s way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall” (xiv. 13-21, N.I.V.).

The drift of this long section then is clear. The “strong” must not flaunt their liberty before weaker Christians and upset them. These problems were bound to arise at Rome as they had done at Corinth, where the Apostle gave guidance in I Corinthians relating to meat offered to idols. Those who were more mature should be prepared to restrict

their liberty in the interests of others who were not so advanced. Only in this way would practical love and consideration prevail, and the unity between believers be maintained.

In this respect the Apostle had set an example himself. He said, “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (I.Cor.ix.19). He was always willing to restrict his liberty so that others might be helped and encouraged. After all, the kingdom of God is not concerned with food and drink and other subservient matters, but the really important things as “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. xiv. 17).

To sum up, let us repeat verse 13, “let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way”. Note the two senses of the word ‘judge’ (*krino* in the original). In the former clause it means ‘criticize’, and in the latter ‘decide’. As in English, the Greek word can be used for both senses.

Paul concludes the section:

“So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin” (xiv. 22, 23, N.I.V.).

Here the Apostle is saying that if a person does something which makes his conscience uneasy, he is condemned at heart. The one who does it knowing that it is permissible according to the Word of God is doing right and he does it “of faith”. Whatever is not “of faith” is sin, because the action does not arise from conviction. Thus it is that the believer has the teaching of the holy Scriptures, the revelation of God’s character to exercise the Christian spirit indicated in Rom. xiv. Added to this the apostle Paul now brings forward the example of Christ Who “pleased not Himself”.

“We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please Himself but, as it is written: ‘The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me’. For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (xv. 1-4, N.I.V.).

To those who follow Christ’s example in practice, there can be only one result: they will aim first to please the Lord; second their neighbour, with the aim to edify or build him up in the truth, and thirdly they will be ready to receive all true believers without discrimination, even though they may be weak in the faith.

“May the God Who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ became a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy, as it is written:

‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;
 I will sing hymns to your Name.’
 Again, it says,
 ‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people’.
 And again,
 ‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
 and sing praises to Him, all you peoples’.
 And again, Isaiah says,
 ‘The Root of Jesse will spring up,
 One Who will arise to rule over the nations;
 the Gentiles will hope in Him’.
 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you
 may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (xv. 5-13, N.I.V.).

No.24. xv. 14 - 33.
pp. 86 - 90

In Rom. xiv. the apostle dealt with problems concerning food and religious days that had to be faced by the early churches. For the most part these problems do not exist today, although some may have a difficulty regarding days. It seems quite certain that the regulations concerning the Jewish sabbath, the seventh day of the week, could not have existed then, otherwise Paul could not have written Rom. xiv. 5, 6 or Col.ii.15-17. It will be helpful to quote Dean Alford here. Regarding the observance of days, he says:

“He (Paul) classes the observance or non-observance of particular days, with the eating or abstaining from particular meats. In both cases he is concerned with things which he evidently treats as of *absolute indifference in themselves*. Now the question is, supposing the divine obligation of one day in seven to have been recognized by him *in any form*, could he have thus spoken? The obvious inference from his strain of arguing is, that *he knew of no such obligation*, but believed that *all times and days to be*, to the Christian strong in faith, ALIKE. I do not see how the passage can be otherwise understood. If any one day in the week were invested with the sacred character of the Sabbath, it would have been *wholly impossible* for the Apostle to commend or uphold the man who judged all days worthy of equal honour,—who, as in verse 6, paid *no regard* to the (any) day. He must have visited him with his strongest disapprobation, as violating a command of God. *I therefore infer, that sabbatical obligation to keep any day, whether seventh or first, was not recognized in apostolic times*” (*The Greek Testament*, p.452).

We must surely distinguish the commands of God contained in the Scriptures from the institutions of Christian men, and realize that the first day of the week is always so designated in the N.T. and never called the Sabbath.

It is also essential to recognize the pre-eminence of Israel in Romans. “To the Jew first” is written all over it. While, from the standpoint of sin, there was no difference between Jew and Gentile, yet from the standpoint of the earthly phase of God’s kingdom purpose, Israel is pre-eminent as the Scriptures make abundantly clear, for it was through the posterity of Abraham that all families of the earth were to be finally blessed (Gen.xii.) and Paul does not depart from this, as chapters ix.-xi. show, as also does the present

context in chapter xv. The Apostle brings forward 4 O.T. Scriptures to prove that Gentile blessing was in the purpose of God (Psa. xviii. 49; cxvii. 1; Deut. xxxii. 43; Isa. xi. 10) but always the Gentiles is seen in his relationship to Israel. The Gentile was to be blessed *in, through, and with* Israel, but never independently of Israel.

It is a pity that the A.V. in quoting Isa. xi. 10 uses the word ‘trust’ in Rom. xv. 12 and ‘hope’ in the next verse; it is the same word expressed as a verb and then as a noun and should be rendered “hope” in both cases, thus linking the two together and showing that the hope of the believer at this time was related to the millennial hope of Isa. xi., looking forward to Messiah’s reign on earth at His Coming.

Here, in Rom. xv., the Lord Jesus is brought forward as the “minister of the circumcision (the Jew) to confirm the promises made to the fathers” (verse 8), that is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He Himself declared to a Gentile woman in need that He was only sent to Israel (Matt. xv. 24), and moreover He restricted the ministry of the Twelve to Israel (Matt. x. 5, 6). All this is incomprehensible to those who have no Scriptural insight into the earthly kingdom purposes of God in which Israel is at the centre from the human standpoint. But the message was not to Israel exclusively. It was rather that through Israel all the Gentile world would finally be blessed. As we have seen when considering chapters ix.-xi., Israel had not been laid aside by God and Acts.iii.19-26 was still possible of fulfillment, and the hope at this time was that it would be fulfilled, that the Lord would return and set up His kingdom of righteousness and peace. Then Deut. xxxii. 43, as quoted here by Paul would become true, “Rejoice ye Gentiles (nations) with His people (Israel)”. This would be specially so when at last “all families of the earth” would be blessed through Abraham’s posterity (Gen. xii.).

The Apostle now contemplates the plan of God as it affected himself:

“I have written to you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ. It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation. Rather as it is written:

‘Those who were not told about Him will see,
and those who have not heard will understand (Isa. lli. 15, LXX).’”

(Rom. xv. 15-21, N.I.V.).

It was in his Christ-given capacity as the Apostle of the Gentiles that he had written to the believers at Rome. The other apostles, led by Peter, had been sent by Christ to the circumcision, Israel (Gal. ii.). Paul had faithfully discharged his Gentile ministry for well over 20 years. The words that he used (such as *leitourgos* and *leitourgei*) always denote religious service in the N.T. How many professing Christians realize that Christ-directed service is worship? The sphere his gospel ministry had covered began at Antioch and taken him round the eastern end of the Mediterranean to the Adriatic sea. The Acts does

not mention the Roman province of Illyricum nor any of Paul's epistles up to this time. From Macedonia the *Via Egnatia* crossed the Balkans to the coast of the Adriatic and it is possible that Paul had traversed this as far as Illyricum. At this point he could say that he had completed the preaching of the gospel of Christ (see the N.E.B.) and this was confirmed by the evidential miracles which abounded in the Acts period. He does not mean by this that every individual had heard the gospel, but that he had preached it in every province in that part of the Gentile world and so fulfilled his ministry in that region. He tells us that he avoided treading on someone's toes, but to cover as wide an area as possible for the truth of God. This he had done at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. What remained for his ministry? There was left the north coast of Africa, Gaul and Spain. Paul makes no mention of Africa, though this was doubtless in his mind. He does express his intention of visiting Spain, probably taking Gaul on the way.

“But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while” (Rom. xv. 23, 24).

Did the Apostle ever reach Spain? There is no further reference to Spain in the N.T., nor certain evidence that he did so, but it was not impossible. However, he had a more immediate task. He was concerned to organize a collection from the Gentile churches for the poor saints living at Jerusalem. This not only recognized the indebtedness of the Gentile churches to the mother church, but it also helped to cement the bond between the Jerusalem believers and the churches of the Gentiles. It was a practical expression of brotherly love.

At the same time Paul realized that the stricter brethren at Jerusalem looked on his Gentile ministry with suspicion and he therefore had misgivings as to the sort of reception he would receive from them:

“Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings. So after I have completed this task and have made sure that they have received this truth, I will go to Spain and visit you on the way. I know that when I come to you, I will come in the full measure of the blessing of Christ. I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judaea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed. The God of peace be with you all. Amen” (Rom. xv. 25-33, N.I.V.).

This collection for Jerusalem was not an innovation on Paul's part, for eleven years previously Barnabas and he had brought a similar gift from believers at Antioch in Syria to the church at Jerusalem in a period of famine (Acts xi. 30; xii. 25). At that time the Jerusalem leaders could add nothing to Paul's ministry in the way of instruction, but advised him to “remember the poor”, which, the Apostle tells us, he was ready to do

(Gal.ii.10). The details of this collection are found in I Cor. xvi. 1-4; II Cor. viii. 4; ix. 1, 12, and while this was the recognition of a debt, it was a moral one, not a legal one.

Paul ends this section of the epistle, and one edition of the epistle ends here. There are five doxologies, or benedictions, in the A.V. (xv.13; xv.33; xvi.20; xvi.24; xvi.25-27). In each of these God or Christ is besought to do something for the readers. For those who want full details we refer them to the works of Prof. F. F. Bruce, Dr. C. K. Barrett and other scholars. It is only with the last doxology (xvi. 25-27) that doctrine is affected. It is found in various places in the ancient manuscripts. The Alexandrian textual family, and the Manuscript D from the Western textual family have it at the end of chapter xvi. Some manuscripts place it after xiv. 23. A few put it both after xiv. 23 and xvi. 25-27. One of them (G) omits it altogether. The papyrus manuscript P46 puts it after xv. 33.

There may be several reasons for this. Origen, in his commentary on Romans, declare that the heretic, Marcion (138-150A.D.) cut away all of the epistle from xiv. 23 to the end. His followers would produce copies ending at this point. It has been suggested that other Christians shortened the end of the epistle when it was circulated to other churches. Whatever the reasons, we can be thankful that we have the complete epistle today.

Chapter xvi. consists mainly of personal greetings and a short section of warning and encouragement. The greetings are addressed to 26 individuals and five households. On the surface it seems improbable that he knew so many people in a city he had never visited. Dr. C. K. Barrett comments:

“The view has often been maintained (on grounds partly textual) that 16:1-23 was not addressed to the church at Rome. It is said (a) that Paul is unlikely to have known so many members of the Roman church, which he had never visited and (b) that some of the names mentioned point rather to Ephesus (which Paul knew well) than to Rome. Neither of these nor textual arguments are convincing: (a) In writing to a strange church Paul might very naturally include as many personal greetings as he could in order to establish as close contact as possible; (b) The possibility of movement on the part of members of the Pauline churches must be reckoned with” as regards Prisca and Aquila, “they had been expelled from Rome, made their way to Corinth, and thence to Ephesus. There is no reason why they should not have returned to Rome, specially if Romans was written after the death of Claudius (13 October 54A.D.). That ‘all the churches’ had reason to be grateful to them confirm that they had numerous contacts over a wide area” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, pp.281-283).

No.25. xvi. 1 - 27.
pp. 101 - 109

When we consider the names of the believers which are brought forward in Rom.xvi., there are two things we must remember: (1) arguments based on names are worth little in view of the fact that men of all races met in Rome. All roads led to Rome, and (2) most of the names are common ones which could be borne by a number of individuals. We give the first sixteen verses as rendered in the N.I.V.:

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.
Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.
Greet also the church that meets at their house.
Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.
Greet Mary, who worked hard for you.
Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relative who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.
Greet Ampliatus, whom I loved in the Lord.
Greet Urbanus, our fellow-worker in Christ, and my dearest friend Stachys.
Greet Apelles, tested and approved in Christ.
Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.
Greet Herodion, my relative.
Greet those in the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.
Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.
Greet my dear friend Persis, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.
Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me too.
Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brothers with them.
Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them.
Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings”
(Rom. xvi. 1-16, N.I.V.).

The first two verses commence with Phoebe, a Christian who was traveling to Rome from Cenchreae, the eastern port of Corinth. She is described as a “deaconess” of the church there. The word “servant” is *diakonos*, deacon. This was a form of Christian service which could be performed by men or women. In I Tim. iii. 11 (A.V.) “their wives” is more likely to be “women” (R.V., R.S.V.), i.e. women-deacons.

Phoebe was then a trusted servant of the church, and so the Roman believers are exhorted to receive her warmly and help her in any matter in which they could render assistance.

Paul’s first greeting is sent to two outstanding Christians, Priscilla and Aquila, to whom we have already referred. Paul calls her Prisca (II Tim. iv. 19), whereas Luke uses the more familiar form Priscilla (Acts xviii. 2, 18, 26). They had gone so far as to risk their lives for the Apostle, though when this happened we do not know, but it was most likely at one of the critical phases of his ministry. So loyalty was a joy and stimulus to

Paul. Their home was a glad meeting-place for believers, a privilege which many provided, as there were no recognized buildings for worship like we have today. We can therefore understand why the home of a leader had to be such as becomes one who is a believer and witness for Christ (I Tim. iii. 2-6).

Verse 5. Epenetus was a valued friend and was the first convert to Christ in Asia (not Achaia A.V.).

Verse 6. Mary, who bestowed much labour, or worked hard. She was a devoted worker who did not spare herself. Mary was a common name, and there are six mentioned in the N.T. We have no means of knowing who she was.

Verse 7. Andronicus and Junia. Paul's reference to them as "my kinsmen" may mean no more than that they were Jewish Christians. They had evidently shared one of the Apostle's frequent imprisonments, but it is impossible to say which one. They were "of note among the apostles", which probably means they were apostles themselves and outstanding ones among the others.

Verse 8. Amplias was an abbreviated form of Ampliatus. He was dear to the Apostle.

Verse 9. Urbanus and Stachys. Urbanus means "belonging to the city (*urbs*)", a common name in Rome, whereas Stachys (literally an "ear" of grain) was uncommon.

Verse 10. Apelles had the commendation that his Christian profession had stood the test. He was a genuine and faithful believer. Aristobulus, again, is unknown to us.

Verse 11. Herodion, my kinsman, may mean he was a relative, or no more than a Jewish believer as in verse 7. The household of Narcissus—Calvin and others identify him with Tiberius Claudius. Narcissus, a wealthy freedman of the Emperor Tiberius.

Verse 12. Tryphena and Tryphosa, possibly were twin sisters. Their names are derived from the same root. They were hard workers, like Mary of verse 6. Persis (means Persian woman) possibly a freedwoman. The name appears on Greek and Latin inscriptions.

Verse 13. Rufus (meaning red, or red-haired). Again, he was an outstanding Christian. A Rufus is mentioned in Mark xv. 21 as one of the sons of Simon of Cyrene. The name may be mentioned here for identification only as he has no part in Mark's Gospel. As to when the mother of Rufus "mothered" Paul we have no means of knowing, but her affectionate care of him was precious to the Apostle.

Verse 14. This verse contains names of persons also unknown to us. Hermes and Patrobas are abbreviations of longer names. Hermes was the god of good luck and this name was very common among slaves.

Verse 15. Philologus and Julia are probably man and wife. Nereus was possibly a freedman of Nero. Olympas is an abbreviated form of Olympiadorus.

Paul now exhorts them to greet one another with a holy kiss. This became a feature of Christian fellowship (see I Cor. xvi. 20; II Cor. xiii. 12; I Thess. v. 26; I Pet. v. 14) and answers to the handshake of greeting today.

One important name is absent from the list, and that is Peter. If he was leading the church at Rome at this time it would be unthinkable for Paul to miss him out.

All the churches under Paul's leadership sent their greetings. At this point the greetings break off and four serious verses of admonition follow. Some scholars regard them as an interpolation, but this is not necessary. As Dr. C. K. Barrett states, "Such parenthetical remarks are in Paul's style. They may reflect additional information brought to him before the letter was completed" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, p.284).

"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people. Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil" (xvi. 17-19, N.I.V.).

The Lord creates *unities* (Eph. iv. 1-6, 13, 16); the devil seeks to break them and cause friction and division among the people of God. The course of church history has made this abundantly clear. These trouble-makers should be avoided, declares the Apostle. They were probably the same as the evil workers he denounces in Phil. iii. 18 who were tainted with incipient gnosticism and possibly preoccupation with food laws, rather than gluttony. But Paul reiterates his confidence in the Roman Christians (xvi. 19) and assures them that the Lord would give them victory over Satan and his works:

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (xvi. 20, N.I.V.).

This is surely an allusion to Gen. iii. 15 where God declares that the seed of the woman will bruise the serpent's head and the fact that it could be "soon" shows that this was linked with the imminence of the Lord's Second Coming which is stressed in all the epistles written during the Acts period, as we have seen. The Apostle is looking forward to that glorious coming which would mean victory for His people and defeat for Satan and all his hosts.

Paul then gives his usual reference to the grace of God with which he finishes all his epistles (verse 20). He now resumes the greetings that were broken off in verses 17-20 and gives the names of those believers who were with him.

"Timothy, my fellow-worker, sends his greetings to you, as do Lucius, Jason and Sosipater, my relatives" (xvi. 21).

The epistles make perfectly clear Paul's special relationship with his son in the faith, Timothy. Jason: This could possibly be the Jason who gave hospitality to Paul on his first visit to Thessalonica (Acts xvii. 6, 7, 9). Sosipater is probably Sopater of Berea, who, according to Acts xx. 4 (R.V.) was with Paul at this time. Then comes a reference to the amanuensis who had written this letter, namely Tertius:

"I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord" (xvi. 22).

The Apostle regularly employed amanuenses for the writing of his letters, but Tertius is the only one whose name is given in the N.T. He was a believer and was evidently glad to include his greeting with the others. Lucius may be the Lucius of Cyrene (Acts.xiii.1). On the other hand there are some expositors who think this is Luke, the writer of the Gospel and the Acts, who frequently accompanied Paul on his travels. The Apostle certainly refers to Luke in Col. iv. 14, Philemon 24, and II Tim. iv. 11, and in these references calls him Lucas (*Loukas*), but this spelling can be an equivalent to Lucius. The matter must be left undecided.

Gaius seems to be the Titius Justus of Acts xviii. 7 who gave hospitality to Paul and the church members of Corinth who were expelled from the synagogue next door. Erastus was the city treasurer of Corinth who had evidently been touched by the truth of the gospel preached by Paul.

The doxology of verses 25-27 which follows bristles with difficulties:

“Now unto Him Who hath power to establish you, according to my glad message—even the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of a sacred secret in age-past times kept silent, but now made manifest, and through means of prophetic scriptures, according to the command of the age-abiding God, for obedience of faith unto all the nations made known” (J. B. Rotherham).

Many translations insert the definite article before the word “mystery”, or secret, but it is not in the original. The addition of the article creates a problem, for it makes the phrase parallel with Eph. iii. & Col. i., and appears to be a reference to the great “mystery” revealed in those two epistles. But neither of them had been written when Romans was composed, and therefore the revelation of the secret concerning the Body of Christ, and Christ’s headship in relation to it, had not yet been made known.

Some get over the difficulty by the suggestion that this doxology was added at a later date by Paul after he had written Ephesians and Colossians. This was put forward by John B. Lightfoot in his *Biblical Essays*. But after the Mystery had been revealed, what need was there to add this doxology to the epistle to the Romans, and that in an enigmatic way which does not reveal the details of this great Secret? Just what purpose would this serve? We should note that the time elements concerning the secret of Rom. xvi. do not agree with Ephesians and Colossians. In Romans the secret was hushed *in* age times, whereas in the prison epistles the secret was hidden *from* the ages and generations (Col.i.26) and related to a period “*before* the age times” (Titus i. 2; II Tim. i. 9). This hidden subject had “its own season” of manifestation, which manifestation was through “preaching” and “according to a commandment” (Titus i. 3). This manifestation is *now* in this present age of grace.

Paul was a steward of the mysteries (secrets) of God (I Cor. iv. 1), some of which were made known through his ministry during the Acts, like the secret of Israel’s blindness (Rom. xi. 25) and the instantaneous change of the believer in resurrection (I.Cor.xv.51,52), so there is no need to try to fit the later revelation of Eph.iii. & Col.iii. into Rom.xvi.

What is the meaning of “prophetic writings”? We should bear in mind that a prophet was not confined to revealing future events. He was a forth-teller as well as being a foreteller. This phrase must not be confined to such books as Daniel or the Revelation. There is a sense in which all the Scripture can be classed as prophetic writings, making known the mind and will of God (II Pet. i. 20, 21). As there were N.T. prophets as well as O.T. ones, the title “prophetic writings” could be applied to the New Testament as well as the Old Testament.

Let us state what the mystery of Rom. xvi. cannot mean. (1) It cannot refer to the gospel of grace and salvation for this was never hidden, but made known “by His prophets in the holy Scriptures” (Rom. i. 2), i.e. the O.T. (2) It cannot refer to the blessing of the Gentile with the Jew, for this likewise had been revealed in the O.T., namely that “all families of the earth” should be blessed through Abraham’s seed (Gen.xii.1-3). It must refer to truth not previously revealed.

There are those who look on the doxology of Rom. xvi. as superfluous to the epistle as a whole. But the structure of the epistle is defective without it (see Vol. LI, p.83).

The doxology balances chapter i.:

Rom. i. 1 - 17	Rom. xvi. 25 – 27
The gospel of God . . . concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, promised afore by prophets in the holy Scriptures.	The preaching of Jesus Christ, kept silent in age times, now made known through prophetic writings.
Grace . . . from God our Father	Praise to the eternal and only wise God
To the end ye may be established	To Him Who is able to establish you
The power of God unto salvation	To Him Who is of power
Righteousness revealed . . . as it is written	Revelation of a mystery Scriptures, the prophets

Professor F. F. Bruce says:

“there is in the doxology a recognizable echo of dominant themes of the opening salutation; in particular the mention of the scriptures of the prophets recalls ‘which He had promised afore by His prophets in the holy Scriptures’ and make known to all nations ‘for the obedience of faith’ is practically a repetition of ‘for obedience of faith among all nations’ (1:5). This rounding off of the epistle on the same note as was struck at its commencement suggests the author himself” (*Epistle to the Romans*, p.282).

We come back to our original question, what is this secret, hushed since age-times commenced, but now made known through prophetic writings? The answer must be made from the Scriptures themselves and we believe the best explanation is given by Charles H. Welch in his exposition, *Just and the Justifier*. He writes:

“The mystery of Rom. xvi. is not said to be related to a period ‘before age-times’, but ‘silenced *in* age-times’. This theme is the secret of the central section of Romans (chapters v.-viii.) and its subject is Adam, not Abraham; man, not Israel or Gentile; the law of sin, not the law of Sinai; the dominion of sin and death, not the domination of Canaanites or Babel.”

He points out that:

“the period covered by the Scriptures from Gen. xii. - Matt. i. is as long as that covered by Gen. i. 3 - xi. If Israel should finally fall and fail, the prophets had nothing to tell us of how God would cope with the resulting problem. It is accordingly the purpose of the central section of Romans (chapter v.-viii.) to reveal the relationship of man, as such (i.e. neither Jew nor Gentile) to Adam and to Christ, irrespective of the promises made to the fathers, and the failure or success of the chosen people (Israel). But this is not the theme of the O.T. prophecy in general much important truth latent in Gen.i.-xi. was ‘hushed’ until the time to speak had arrived in that small space of eleven chapters is written all that can be known of the first 2,000 years of this present creation. What is written is pregnant with truth, but it must await its appointed time, and just as the gospel itself revealed teaching hidden in O.T. Scriptures so these early chapters of Genesis hold much basic teaching, throwing light on the position of the believer who is saved and justified without reference to the law of Moses” (*Just and the Justifier*, pp.350-352).

Once again we point out the secret of Romans xvi. was silenced in age-times. Part of the divine purpose which relates to the highest heavens concerns a period “*before* age-times” (Titus i. 2; II Tim. i. 9). This concerns the great mystery or secret of the prison epistles of Paul which was hidden “from the ages” and “from the generations (of people)” (Col. i. 26) and is linked to a divine purpose “*before* the foundation of the world” (Eph. i. 3, 4). Rom. xvi. refers to a mystery (secret) not related to a period “*before* age-times” but silenced “*in* age-times”. This secret is the theme of the central chapters of Romans (v.-viii.), and its subject is Adam, not Abraham; man, not Israelite or Gentile; the law of sin, not the law of Sinai; the domination of sin and death, not the domination of the Canaanites, the Egyptians or Babel.

When the apostle Paul was inspired by God to write the epistle to the Romans, the prophetic writings, which for generations held their secret, began to speak. The fact that Rom. xvi. was for “the obedience of faith to all nations” links it with Rom. i. 5 and establishes the unity of God’s purpose.

The final doxology is given in verse 27 (R.V.):

“To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be the glory for ever Amen.”

The glory must finally be the Lord’s, not that of any created being. As we come to the end of this wonderful epistle, let us constantly praise and thank the Lord for the heights and depths of truth revealed in it. Let us hold fast to its teaching, for it is absolutely fundamental to the Christian faith, and it also gives the foundation for the glorious truth of the Mystery (secret) to be revealed later in Eph. iii. and Col. i.

The N.T. warns us that at the end of the age there will be a great departure from the truth of God (Matt. xxiv. 11, 12; II Tim. iv. 1-4). This will not affect or mislead those who are grounded and constantly cling to the teaching of Romans.

To God be all the praise and glory.

The Book of RUTH

No.4. Summary.

pp. 13 - 18

The tiny Book of Ruth so clearly illustrates how a forfeited inheritance can be redeemed by the next of kin; that only the nearest kinsman (redeemer) can do this, and that it involves perpetuating the dead man's name in Israel. The question that arises in our minds is "how does that affect you and I?" The answer to that is that redemption can only be understood when we come to know two things:--

- (1) the nature of sin
- (2) the character of God.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they had to be prevented from eating of the tree of life, for if they did do this, they would be preserved in their sinful state. So a guard was set upon it, and they were expelled from the garden, and God's plan for their redemption was put into effect. Sin had entered His perfect creation, and man could no longer communicate direct with his creator.

We see therefore that sin separated man from God, and involved the forfeiture of an inheritance. As the result of Adam and Eve's sin God's creation was affected, the ground was cursed, and the sentence of death was pronounced.

In the provision of clothes for the fallen man and woman an animal was slain. So through the shed blood of that sacrifice God provided protection and covering, and this indicates to us at the very beginning His plan and His purpose for the salvation of mankind.

In the Book of Ruth, we find that only the kinsman-redeemer, the next of kin, had the right to redeem and to raise up an inheritance in Israel. In Isaiah however, we read of this title "Kinsman-Redeemer" used of Jehovah Himself.

"Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. xli. 14).

"Thus saith the Lord, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships" (Isa. xliii. 14).

"Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God" (Isa. xliv. 6).

When we remember that the same Hebrew word "GAAL" means not only redeemer, but also "the kinsman who has the right to redeem", these titles become doubly important. If Jehovah, the Creator, the God of the whole earth is to be also the Kinsman-Redeemer of the sons of Adam, then God Himself must become man.

As we would expect, in Scripture the prophet that gives these titles and creates this problem, also supplies the answer.

In Isa. vii. 14, we find both brought together in the wonderful name “Immanuel”—“God with us”. This amazing prophecy was fulfilled as we read in Matt. i. 18-25. When Jesus was born Immanuel came. Hundreds of years before His birth Isaiah records in ix. 6:--

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given . . . His name shall be called . . .
The mighty God.”

John writes in the first verse of chapter i. in his gospel “. . . . The Word was God” and in verse 14, “The Word became flesh”. That is just what God has done.

Paul says in his letter to the Galatians “. . . . when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made unto law, to redeem” (iv. 4, 5). In Phil. ii. 5-8, Paul tells us that this divine kinsman emptied Himself of His divine attributes and condescended to take upon Himself the outward fashion of a man in order to give His life and shed His blood as the One offering for sin for ever, and so make salvation possible for the human race. God loved the world like this, “He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John iii. 16).

Boaz not only redeemed the forfeited inheritance, he married Ruth. Our security for ever is that we are not only redeemed by His precious blood, but made one with Himself. So we see the wondrous theme of resurrection implied in this Book, and that Boaz became a type looking forward to the blessed Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Psa. xlix. 7-9 tells us no man can redeem his brother from the bondage of sin and realize his forfeited inheritance, that he should live for ever. Our salvation and resurrection necessitated the coming of the Lamb of God, Who alone could take away the sin of the world.

Having by faith accepted God’s offer of salvation, in newness of life, and sealed by His Spirit, the redeemed are reinstated, the adoption is realized, the inheritance secured, the bondage removed, and the way made clear for the outworking of the original purpose of God.

It is the Book of Ruth that illustrates this amazing grace so beautifully. The Book itself is so small, and the words just a record of a seemingly charming romance. Yet beneath its surface revealing to us the loving condescension of our God in the Provision of His Son, Who came born of a woman, and so flesh and blood, to become our Kinsman-Redeemer. In the Lord Jesus Christ alone we have salvation and resurrection life.

To the believing Jews Paul writes his letter to the Hebrews endeavouring to strengthen their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has to contend against the bitter hatred of the bigoted religious leaders of the nation who strenuously opposed the claims made both by the Lord Himself, and by the words and actions of the apostles during that period covered by the Book of the Acts. In Heb. ii. 15, 16 Paul quotes from Psa. viii. showing that the One Who came as Jesus of Nazareth took upon Himself human flesh in order to destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

“For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted” (Heb. ii. 16-18).

Here was One Who was infinitely greater than angels, yet Who willingly condescended to be made lower than the angels for the suffering of death. Angels have no blood, and it was necessary that blood should be offered, that is, death, for the salvation of mankind. Redemption which is God’s way of getting rid of all barriers between Himself and us, could be made possible no other way. All the offerings and sacrifices of the animals that were without blemish as worship, look forward to the One Offering made by the Lord Jesus Christ, when He came to lay down His Life for His friends, made like the children of flesh and blood; made like unto His brethren, His object in coming the first time was to deal with sins. To make a propitiation for the sins of mankind, that God might have mercy upon the descendants of Adam and wipe out, obliterate for ever, that which separated Himself from His creation. So the glorious hope of resurrection was made possible, and our salvation and life with Him made absolutely secure.

In the Book of Ruth we saw that it was the eldest brother who had the right to redeem the inheritance and marry Ruth. The firstborn son, the heir, the one who occupies the position of privilege and responsibility; so in Scripture he holds a unique position.

Israel was the Lord’s son, even His firstborn. In Egypt, God warned Pharaoh that if he would not let His people go, He would slay Pharaoh’s first-born son.

The passover lamb was not selected “for sin”, but “a lamb for a house”, and if the household were too small to be represented in this way, they were to join with another. The house was not connected with death. “There was not a house where there was not one dead” (Exod. xii. 30), which was as true of Israel as of Egypt. The difference was that in Israel’s home the lamb died instead of the firstborn son.

So we see that the passover lamb really sets forth *the* Kinsman-Redeemer, *the* great firstborn Son, the Lamb of God. “. . . . Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son” (Matt. i. 24, 25). John writes concerning this amazing birth, “In this manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (I John iv. 9). But see

who This One was in the beginning, This One Who came as our Redeemer: Col. i. 14-17 tells us He was “the firstborn of every creature”. This title of Christ must not be misunderstood however. It does not mean that Christ was the first of all created beings, for we go on to read “*for* by Him were all things created”. In verse 17 we read “And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist (or hang together)”. There is nothing untidy about the cosmos, everything moves in an orderly fashion and is absolutely ship-shape. This preposition translated “before” is the Greek *‘pro’* and indicates priority of position or dignity—“that in all things He might have the pre-eminence”.

The fact that Christ is the Creator of all things is stated many times in the N.T. It was not the Father, but the Son. When we say “all things”, it is well to remember that He did not create anything evil, poisonous or mis-shapen. These became so after creation, and were the direct result of sin. We also understand that He assumed a shape in order to create, for we read that man was made “in our image, after our likeness”. This fact is borne out in John i. and Heb. i.

We know too, that He assumed human form in order to redeem. Through the death of His Son, when His blood had been shed all who by faith accept Him as Saviour, become a redeemed people. Redemption goes back beyond our own personal sins to the one sin of Adam that involved us all in death. In the Scriptures the first ray of hope for sinful man is found in Gen. iii. After Satan had beguiled the woman in the garden, the Lord God said in pronouncing his ultimate destruction, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it (i.e. Christ, the seed of the woman) shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (verse 15).

This prophecy foretells the temporary sufferings of Christ, but His final victory. Christ has come and suffered. Satan’s overthrow awaits fulfillment.

Incredible as it may seem to us, the Hebrew word “GAAL” which is translated so many times by the word “kinsman-redeemer”, has also another meaning and office. It also means “avenger”, and we find it so used in connection with the cities of refuge. These havens of safety were provided by the Lord Himself, for the nation of Israel when they entered Canaan, and were given as a means of escaping from retribution from the next of kin. They could not be used by the cold blooded killer, but only when the killing was unintentional, an accident, an act that was not premeditated. This man it was who could find safety in one of these cities; but the murderer “shall be surely put to death” (Numb. xxxv. 31).

One aspect of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ was that “He might destroy him that had the power of death and deliver them to bondage” (Heb. ii. 14, 15). The double office of the Saviour is again suggested in Isa. lxiii. 4, “. . . . the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come”.

In I John iii. 8 “. . . . the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil”. In Heb. ii. 14 the devil himself is said to be destroyed by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapter ii. verse 15 the avenger is clearly seen:

“And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it (i.e. His cross at Calvary).”

Evidently therefore we must understand that by that very same cross some were “reconciled”, and some were ‘spoiled’.

“For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things on earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight” (Col. i. 19-22).

The O.T. type most definitely reveals to us that the Kinsman-Redeemer could not be avenged upon those who were redeemed by him, neither could he redeem those who were the objects of his wrath.

“And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. xx. 15).

So Christ fulfills both aspects of the Kinsman-Redeemer, just as the name of the dead was raised up and perpetuated in Israel, so all who look to Him for salvation shall be raised up in resurrection glory.

Boaz not only redeemed the forfeited inheritance, he married Ruth. Our security for ever is that we are not only redeemed by His precious blood, but made one with Himself.

The Book of Ruth helps us to understand more fully just what Christ has done, and sheds light on many references to the glorious things that Christ has done as The Kinsman-Redeemer.

In Eph. i. 13, 14, we read “. . . . in Whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory”.

The Greek word used for “the purchased possession” is also used to translate two Hebrew words in the O.T. whose meanings include “recover”, “a peculiar treasure”, “a peculiar people”, “beyond the ordinary”, “an acquisition”. Mr. Charles Welch points out that in no one instance is Israel promised that they shall *inherit* a peculiar treasure, an acquisition; they are told they will be taken by the Lord for His peculiar treasure, His acquisition, a special people unto Himself. The blessing is to be on the earth.

Regarding the church that is the body of Christ, however, we read that the sphere of blessing is “in the heavenlies”, that is in the glory where Christ now sits. Of this company of believers Paul writes in Eph. i. 1, “in Whom also we have obtained an inheritance”, which could be more accurately translated by “in Whom we have been

taken by God for His inheritance". What a unique and blessed position this church occupies in the purposes of God! We can only with wonder humbly praise Him, and pray for strength and wisdom to walk worthily of such a blessed hope.

I SAMUEL

No.1. Introduction and i. 1 - 20 pp. 32 - 40

The book of Ruth establishes a link between the days of the Judges in Israel and the days of David. The opening book of Samuel begins with the days of the Judges, and ends with the death of Saul, preparatory to the anointing of David as king in the opening chapters of the second book of Samuel.

The books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles form a complete whole, and were apparently written by Samuel, Gad and Nathan (I Chron. xxix. 29, 30). It is evident the prophets often wrote the history of their own times, for we read, "Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord" (I Sam. x. 25).

The prophet Gad first appears in association with David when he had escaped to the cave Adullam, and warns David not to stay in the hold but to depart into the land of Judah (I Sam. xxii. 1-5). In I Chron. xxi. 9 he is called "David's seer".

Nathan also was closely associated with David, and continued on into the days of Solomon (II Chron. ix. 29).

A seer was an earlier name for prophet, as we see in I Sam ix. 9. The Hebrew word for 'prophet' means "one who spoke for, or was moved by God", or "God's mouthpiece". In *The Companion Bible* under the heading "The First Book of Samuel", we read "otherwise called 'The First Book of Kings'". Under the heading "The Second Book of Samuel" we read "otherwise called 'The Second Book of Kings'". For I & II Kings Dr. Bullinger states "commonly called the 3rd and 4th Book of the Kings". The reason for this is because the book that we now call I & II Samuel were always reckoned by the Hebrew as one Book. They were first divided and treated as two by the Septuagint translators of the O.T. Scriptures in the B.C. 3rd century. This sub-division has been followed ever since.

Scrolls were probably more or less equal in length. As Greek writing required at least a third more space than Hebrew, one scroll was filled up and another necessary long before the 55 chapters of I & II Samuel had been completed. That there was originally no break between the two books is evident from the Sedarim, i.e. the divisions or portions laid down for public reading. In the original, which was one long book, there were 34 Sedarim, and the 20th begins with I Sam. xxx. 25, and ends with II Sam. ii. 6, without showing the slightest break. Exactly the same thing applies to the book of Kings.

As to the purpose of these records, we are assured that beyond the mere preservation of the historical facts, there was a more important intention served. Peter, speaking of the rejection of Christ by the nation of Israel at His first coming, and of His offer of

forgiveness and willingness to return again provided they repented (i.e. changed their minds concerning Him), and were converted (i.e. turned again to Him) in Acts iii., refers to the testimony of the prophets and says “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days” (Acts iii. 24).

So these Books in the O.T. Scriptures are not put into God’s Word for their historical interest. They are vital to an understanding of the N.T. They foretell (and those that have eyes to see, and hearts to understand) the coming of Israel’s mighty Deliverer, their Messiah, God’s Anointed One. Guided by the Spirit of God they wrote down, to their utter dismay, that this Coming One would be afflicted and slain. That He would offer Himself as the one sin-offering for all mankind, that all might be saved from the penalty of sin and death. That in the end He would come in power and majesty and set up His Kingdom on the earth in the city of Zion.

The message that Peter and the other disciples proclaimed in Jerusalem in Acts ii., iii. and iv. was that this Deliverer had come. That Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the man they had crucified, whom God has raised from the dead, would return if they repented of their wickedness and believed in Him as their risen and glorious Saviour.

As we now know, the Jewish people rejected the message of the disciples, even as they rejected Jesus of Nazareth Himself as their Deliverer when He came among them fulfilling all the signs and wonders foretold by the prophets. Every sabbath day the O.T. prophets were read to the Jewish people in their synagogues. The doctors of the law who were the religious leaders of the day were steeped in these books. Yet they failed to heed the words of both Christ Himself and Peter and the other apostles. Their eyes were blind and their hearts were hard: they refused even the second opportunity God offered them to accept the One Who came and fulfilled all the O.T. prophecies that they were supposed to know so well.

So temporarily they became set aside at the close of the Book of Acts, and will be until they do acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah. We, today, are living in this dispensation of Grace, this interim period, and have the opportunity of accepting by faith, not an inheritance on the earth, but one “far above all”, as members of that church which is the Body of Christ.

In several ways Samuel stands to David as John the Baptist does to the Lord. Both the mothers of Samuel and John were naturally barren and waited a long time before their sons were born. Samuel was dedicated as a Nazarite all his days (I Sam. i. 11), while of John it was said “He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink” (Luke i. 15). Samuel anointed David as king, while the special office of John the Baptist was to testify at the baptism of the Lord at Jordan that the Messiah, Israel’s King, had come. Samuel was rejected by the people, while John similarly “decreased” until his final death in prison.

Hannah’s song at the birth of Samuel is strikingly similar to the song of Zacharias at the birth of John (I Sam. ii. 1-10; Luke i. 67). Of Samuel it is written: “And the child

Samuel grew before the Lord” (I Sam. ii. 21). Of John: “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit” (Luke i. 80).

As Samuel was the last of the judges and the first of the prophets, so John was the last of the prophets and the first of the disciples. There is a notable similarity indeed between these two great men of God.

From the period commencing with the death of Eli related in the early chapters of the first book of Samuel, for more than 800 years the prophetic order continued an enduring public power among the people of Israel. The prophet acted as the mediating agency between God and His own peculiar people and nation. He was the organ of the Spirit of the Lord, His mouthpiece during the whole period of the monarchy, the captivities, and right up to the coming of the Son of God, the Messiah Himself.

It was not the high priest, as perhaps one would have thought, would be the most likely medium for the Lord to choose; though there were individual members of the priesthood during certain periods who faithfully fulfilled their office.

Turning now to the 1st Book of Samuel, and commencing at verse 1, we have here an account of the state of the family into which Samuel was born. His father’s name was Elkanah, a Levite, of the family of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Jacob. The name means “acquired by God”, perhaps indicating the position of a firstborn son (see Numbers iii. 11-13).

Elkanah is recorded as dwelling in the city of Ramathaim-zophim. The name Ramathaim means literally “the double Ramah”, the old city and the new being built side by side—a dual city. The word zophim means “watchmen”, so possibly the old city was built on two hills, and watch-towers built on them would enable the citizens to guard against surprise attacks by their foes. Ramah lay among the mountains of Ephraim which extended into the territory of Benjamin, in which tribe the city lay.

In verse 2 we read the Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. It was God’s original ordination that a man should have one wife: Gen. ii. 24 makes that clear. The first man who violated this command was Lamech, the son of Cain (Gen. iv. 19). This practice apparently had spread throughout the East, and while in the Mosaic Law polygamy was accepted, it was never approved. The inspired writer in this narrative of the home life of Elkanah, quietly shows up the curse which almost invariably attended this miserable violation of the relations of home life to which in the days of Eden God had given marriage His sanction and blessing.

Hannah signifies “grace, or favour”, and together with its abbreviation “Anna” has ever been a favourite name among the women of the East.

Peninnah signifies “pearl” or “coral”, and we have adopted the same name in our language—Margaret.

It is evident from verse 3 that they were a devout family. The yearly pilgrimage to the Tabernacle of the Lord would be the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Passover. It was the great national day of remembrance of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the land of bondage, by their God, Jehovah. There were comparatively few at that time who honoured the name of the Lord like Elkanah. Many of the rulers and priests openly ignored their God, and worshipped idols, so the people fell away and worshipped the gods of the heathen nations around them.

It is interesting to note that here, for the first time in Scripture, we read the title “the Lord of hosts”, *Jehovah Sabaoth*. It occurs some 260 times in the O.T., but only once in the New in the epistle of James. It is a glorious title: Isaiah uses it about 60 times and Jeremiah about 80. The implication is that Jehovah was the God of all the hosts on earth and in the heavens. What a tremendous inspiration this would be to the few and feeble host of Israel when their enemies were strong and powerful. It would be a great encouragement to know their God to be the Eternal One, Whose sovereign power extended over all men, angels, sun, moon, and stars, the earth, and the heavens themselves. The Lord of Hosts: what a mighty title that Name implies!

Shiloh was the sacred city in Ephraim where Joshua had the Tabernacle pitched when he took possession of the land of Canaan. It would be considered the safest place, and protected by the mightiest tribe. The priests, the tribe of Levi, lived here, and Israel should have obeyed the command of the Lord to come up yearly to worship and to sacrifice. Few did at this time, but Elkanah remained faithful to his God. Whatever others did or did not do, his resolution was that he and his household should obey and serve the Lord. So this pilgrimage to Shiloh was made every year.

Eli was the High Priest at this time, and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas were among the priests. Both were notoriously evil men, debasing the high office they held and a prime cause of the indifference of the children of Israel towards Jehovah during this period of their history. Eli must have suffered terribly because of the conduct of these sinful sons of his. His efforts to correct them fell on heedless ears, and serves to illustrate the terrible state of corruption into which the priesthood had fallen.

Outwardly Elkanah's household was quiet and orderly, yet it was a divided family, and the divisions within it carried with them both guilt and grief. The two wives were bitterly opposed to each other. Peninnah, like Leah the wife of Jacob, had many children, but she was always very much the second wife and the less beloved. Hannah, like Rachel, was childless, but she was very dear to Elkanah, and he let her and others know that she was held so in his regard. Because of her advantage, Peninnah grew haughty and insolent; Hannah, on the other hand, melancholy and discontented. Elkanah did all he could to raise Hannah's spirits under her affliction. He invariably served her the choicest portion on feast days; but it was an unhappy household.

After one of these sacrificial meals, Hannah left the table and went alone into the courtyard of the Tabernacle, and in great bitterness of spirit she prayed that the Lord might give her a son, and we read that she “vowed a vow”. This vow contained two

solemn promises. One pledged the son she prayed for to the service of God all the days of his life; the second undertook that he should be a Nazarite. A Nazarite was committed to undertake three things: (1) Never to take intoxicating drink. (2) Never to cut his hair. (3) To avoid all ceremonial defilement by corpses, even of the nearest of kin.

These restrictions and customs had an inner significance among the nation of Israel. The abstinence from intoxicating drink typified that the Nazarite determined to avoid all sensual indulgence which might cloud the mind, and so render him unfit for prayer or work for the Lord. The untouched hair, unlike today, was an outward symbol that the consecrated one had determined to give up the pleasures of the world, and to devote himself wholly to the service of the Jehovah. The avoiding of contact with the dead was a public avowal of all moral defilement and indicated that a Nazarite gave up everything which could stain or soil the life dedicated to the covenant God of Israel.

Hannah had left the sacrificial Passover meal alone and sought the sanctuary of the Tabernacle courtyard. It is very likely that she was the only one that had come to pray there, for as we have said already, few in Israel were faithful to Jehovah at that time. The high priest, Eli, was very old, and sat on his chair of state overlooking the whole of the precincts. His eyesight was fading, and as he watched this young woman he became convinced that she was intoxicated: that she had, as so many would do that day, taken too much wine at the table and abused the celebration of the feast that commemorated God's deliverance of the people from the bondage of Egypt.

So Hannah prayed, and mingled tears with her petition. It was indeed an earnest prayer that really came from her heart. She was unconscious of anyone around her, concentrated as she was in expressing the one great desire that filled her thoughts day after day. This intensity of prayer is illustrated again in the N.T. by the example of Epaphras, a fellow-prisoner with Paul at Rome, who apparently was greatly convinced about the group of believers at Colosse. The apostle Paul writes in Col. iv. 12:

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

“Fervently” brings before us “an urgent, burning desire for”: the exact opposite of “being half-hearted” or “luke-warm”. God must have looked with favour upon the intensity of spirit of Epaphras as he prayed, especially as they were words that sought blessing for others and not himself.

Prayer must be sincere and fervent. We must avoid repetitions and hurriedly gabbled phrases. The Lord Jesus taught his disciples to avoid outward show and pretence and in Matt. vi. 6, 7 said to them:

“When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, Who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him” (N.I.V.).

The apostle Paul writing to the Thessalonians exhorted them to “Pray without ceasing” (I Thess. v. 17). We should not misunderstand him and think, as some do, that it is necessary to shut oneself up in prayer and meditation all day long. What he meant was that we should be constantly lifting our hearts to Him in thanks or praise, or in any matter that arises during the course of the day.

It is also essential for us to remember concerning prayer that the Spirit helps our infirmity (that is, our weakness, or inability), for we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us (see Rom. viii. 26). The next verse goes on to say “And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God”. How reassuring it is to know that our prayers are monitored by the Holy Spirit, so that they become acceptable to our heavenly Father, and used by Him in the furtherance of His own will.

In Hannah’s case, the old priest was wrong. His eyes deceived him, for she was praying, as we are exhorted to do, with her whole heart. Her entire being mouthed the words of her petition, but her feelings were so intense that no sound was audible. The words were choked by her emotion and her earnest desire.

Hannah’s prayer was for a son. Her husband Elkanah, a good and kindly man, had taken another wife because of her inability to have children. The second wife, Peninnah, had borne him sons and daughters and as a result continually showed her scorn and contempt for Hannah, particularly at the time when they went up to the house of the Lord year by year, and Hannah’s prayers had once again received no answer:

“And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat” (I Sam. i. 6, 7).

In reply to the accusation of Eli that she was drunk with wine, Hannah responds pitifully:

“No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto” (i. 15, 16).

Eli’s reply to this must have been very reassuring. She must have felt that the blessing of the Lord’s high priest would give her at last the answer to her prayers, for we read in verses 17 and 18:

“Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of Him. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.”

The character of Eli is a deeply interesting one. Weak and over-indulgent as a father, a lover of ease rather than action perhaps. Yet we catch a glimpse of a noble streak in

him, sterling patriotism, a devotion to Jehovah, real generosity, and a touching gentleness. These qualities light up not a little a life that ended in failure and disaster. Here, the old man is quick to understand that he had been insulting a blameless woman. He at once retracts his cruel accusation, and silently accuses himself and his unjust thoughts and words in his gracious words of blessing. As we have seen, Eli's benediction evidently reassured her that her prayers would be answered, and she went away with a strange peace in her heart willing to leave her affliction in the hands of the Lord.

In verse 19 we read "and the Lord remembered her; wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about that Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, Because I have asked him of the Lord" (-19, 20). We should pause here and reflect that the Lord does not always answer prayer immediately, even if it is in line with His own will. For reasons of His own, and doubtless for our own good as well, we are made to wait until the right time comes along. It is only then that fullness of blessing follows.

So Hannah's fervent prayers were answered and she at last bears a son. She and Elkanah must have been overjoyed. At last her reproach had been taken away, no longer would she have to bear the scorn and derision so long poured upon her by Peninnah. In the midst of her happiness, however, she did not forget the One Who had made it all possible, and so she gives her son the name Samuel. Some say this means "Asked of God", others "Heard of God": perhaps both are true for without asking there can be no hearing. Whichever is correct, however, the choice of Hannah would remind her every time she used it of the gracious mercy of her God. Not only that, the boy himself, and later when he became a man, would be perpetually reminded that he had been given by the Lord and dedicated to the Lord.

**No.2. i. 21 - ii. 3.
pp. 53 - 58**

In verses 21 and 22 we read:

"And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and his vow. But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever" (I Sam. i. 21, 22).

The age of Samuel which was taken to be the fulfillment of this vow varies considerably according to Hebrew scholars. Some say the weaning of a son in Israel went on until he was three years of age. Others say that the weaning here is "weaning from childish things", which would have meant Hannah waiting until he was about twelve (12) years of age. From verse 24, however, it would appear that Hannah brought Samuel to the Tabernacle when he was still a young child, and thus probably about three years old:

“And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: *and the child was young.*”

He was now to be brought up with the children of the priests to serve in the sanctuary, as Hannah had promised. Three bullocks were said to have been brought by the mother at the presentation of Samuel. The LXX reads “a calf of three years old”. Dr. E. W. Bullinger refers back to Gen. xv. 9, where God makes the covenant with Abraham concerning his descendants and the land, and commands him to “take an heifer of three years old”. On the other hand some scholars say that one bullock would have been the burnt offering by which the child would have been consecrated to the Lord, and the other two the yearly festival offerings brought at the time of the Passover. Whichever is true the fact remains that Hannah offered her son as a living sacrifice to the Lord through the shed blood of that one offering according to the law. Today we have no need for an animal sacrifice, but can offer ourselves in service to our heavenly Father through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ which is far more effective and acceptable.

The narrative continues in chapter i. as follows:

“And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of Him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord” (I Sam. i. 25-28).

Hannah here in a wonderful acknowledgement of God’s gracious answer to her prayer resigns the son that was given her. No tears, no mention of the hard tussle that must have gone on in her heart in having to part now from the son she had so long awaited. Hannah is a shining example of one who kept her word, no matter what the cost. The promise that was wrung from her heart was faithfully fulfilled. It certainly needed courage and resolution of a high degree to bring the son she cherished to Shiloh, and to leave him behind. All true service to the Lord must at some stage involve some degree of sacrifice like this.

The word ‘lent’ in verse 28 is not a true translation of the original text. It is the same Hebrew word which is used in verse 20, where we read, “Because I have *asked* him of the Lord”, and also in verse 27 “the Lord hath given me my petition which I *asked* of Him”. The sense of this passage would be “The Lord gave him to me, and now I have returned him whom I obtained by prayer, as one *asked*”. The only other occurrence where this word is translated ‘lent’ in Scripture is Exod. xii. 36:

“And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they *lent* unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.”

Here, once again, it does not mean that the Egyptians loaned the Israelites their jewels and clothes, for they could never hope to have them returned. The Israelites ‘asked’ and the Egyptians gladly gave them: they pressed them even upon their one time slaves in their anxiety to be rid of them. So Hannah gladly surrendered the boy she had prayed for

into the service of the Lord, and surely this is the spirit in which all true service and sacrifice should be offered to our great God and Heavenly Father. Not in a spirit of resignation or martyrdom, but in a spirit of joy which should characterize all our walk and witness. Whatever we give to God has first been received from Him, and gladsome giving is surely the moral of this story.

Chapter i. closes with the following words:

“And he (i.e. Samuel) worshipped the Lord there” (I Sam. i. 28).

The child played his part beyond that which could have been expected from one so young. He was no doubt exceedingly forward for one of his years. Hannah would have trained him up most carefully and instructed him for what was to be his life’s work. Among the Proverbs written for Solomon we find the words “Train up a child in the way he should go: (i.e. in the beginning of his way. Spurgeon applied it ‘in the way you wish you had gone yourself’) and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. xxii. 6). In Samuel’s case this was indeed so, though not, alas, in Solomon’s. God has given to each one of us the freedom of choice. None of us are puppets. But once we make the first step—He comes to meet us.

In the first epistle written by John we find the wonderful words:

“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (I John iv. 9, 10).

The word ‘propitiation’ takes us back to Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter iii., verses 23-26, where we read:

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”

The same Greek word for ‘propitiation’ is used in the Septuagint translation of the O.T. where we find the word ‘mercy seat’. In the Tabernacle the ‘mercy seat’ was found in the Holy of Holies. In Exod. xxv., we read God’s instructions to Moses concerning the making of the Tabernacle and its furniture. In verse 17 he was told to make a mercy-seat of pure gold. Unlike the ark of wood which was *overlaid* with gold; it had to be of pure gold. It had to be made in one piece together with the cherubims with their wings stretched forth on high covering the mercy seat, and with their faces turned inwards. In verse 22 we read these amazing words:

“And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubims” (Exod. xxv. 22).

What divine condescension is made known to us here. That the Almighty God should desire to meet with and commune with His earthly people Israel: this is beyond our comprehension.

The Hebrew word used for mercy seat is *kapporeth*, which is derived from the word *kaphar*, always translated “to make atonement”. Atonement is an essential part of the great sacrificial work of Christ. The meeting place, a beautiful symbol of the result of atonement, contains within itself the ideas of entrance, access, and acceptance. God spoke to Moses, and Moses spoke to God before the blood-sprinkled mercy seat.

Through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which He offered on Calvary’s Cross, He has made possible to all who trust in Him a Meeting Place, so that we, sinners though we are, may not only speak with God but may one day live in His presence. The N.I.V. translates Rom. iii. 25 “God presented Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood”. Propitiation—i.e. mercy on the grounds of a sacrifice. What a God! What a Saviour! Surely we, like Samuel, must worship the Lord Who has done such great things for us.

Chapter ii.

Hannah and Elkanah had brought their son, Samuel, probably about three years of age, to the Tabernacle at Shiloh, and given him into the care of Eli the high priest. This is what Hannah had promised to do. She had kept her word and here in chapter ii. we have recorded her prayer, or rather her song of thanksgiving for the gift of her son. It is, however, not only a hymn of praise, but also a prediction of the preservation and blessing of all in Israel who remain faithful to their God, and the destruction ultimately of all His, and their enemies. It closes with a prophetic reference to the glory of the coming Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ.

The chapter opens with the words: “And Hannah prayed”. It is rather a song of thanksgiving, dictated not only by the spirit of prayer, but by the spirit of prophecy. While its origin is the birth of Samuel, its burden is prophetic. She had returned to Shiloh to fulfil the promise she had made, and to give thanks for the mercy God had bestowed upon her in giving her a son. Unlike the nine lepers who were healed (Luke xvii. 12-17) and promptly forgot the One Who had made them whole, Hannah remembered. Thanksgiving is surely an essential part of prayer when we lift up our hearts to our heavenly Father.

Verse 1 of chapter ii. continues “My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord”. The trumpet, or the horn, was blown by the priests on the Day of Atonement in the Jubilee year of the Jewish calendar. Does the word ‘horn’ here refer to this, or could it be a reference to the strength and protection afforded, as by the horns of animals?

In the prayer or thanksgiving made by Zacharias after the birth of John the Baptist, which has much in common with Hannah’s hymn of praise, he speaks of “the horn of

salvation in the house of His servant David”. This expression can only refer to the Lord Jesus Christ, David’s greater Son. In fact, at the end of Hannah’s prayer she speaks prophetically (under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit) of the glory of the coming Messiah (verse 10). The prophet Ezekiel says “In that day will I cause the horn of the house of Israel to bud forth and they shall know that I am the Lord” (xxix. 21). Hezekiah in Psa. cxxxii. writes “There (in Zion) will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for Mine Anointed” (verse 17). The Lord was of the house and lineage of David, and these four occurrences of the word ‘horn’ refer to Him; so we know exactly what Hannah meant when we read the words “mine horn is exalted in the Lord”. Surely we understand her to say, “my spirit is lifted up—because I rejoice in the salvation of the Lord”.

We come now to verse 2 where she speaks of the supreme holiness of Jehovah:

“There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside Thee: Neither is there any rock like our God.”

Here we have the peerless Being of unparalleled perfection. Not only is there none *like* Him, but there is also none *beside* Him. All others are pretenders. This is the One Who Isaiah saw in the year that the leprous king Uzziah died, and heard the seraphims cry, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory” (vi. 3).

“Neither is there any Rock like our God” (I Sam. ii. 2).

It was a favourite simile among the inspired song-writers of Israel. The image, doubtless, is a memory of the long desert wandering; the steep precipices, and the strange, menacing, fantastic rocks of Sinai towering up in the midst of the shifting sands. This supplied an ever present picture of unchangeableness, of majesty, of security, and strength.

The title of the “Rock” as applied to Jehovah is first found in the book of Deuteronomy. The song of Moses recorded in chapter xxxii. just before his death on the very boundary of the promised land speaks of Jehovah as the “Rock” six times. It was the command of God that every child was to be taught this song in every family in Israel. Hannah, therefore, would know it well.

It is a good thing to learn portions of Scripture by heart. They can be a source of infinite comfort and joy, no matter where one may be. Enforced idleness can be enriched and turned into a period of profit as some of the amazing passages of Scripture which have been memorized are quietly turned over in the mind. We all have a song we can sing to the Lord, for all can say, “I rejoice in Thy salvation”.

“Talk no more so exceedingly proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed” (I Sam. ii. 3).

Was Hannah here referring to Peninnah, who had so cruelly humbled her, and maligned her so maliciously before Samuel was born? Or is she speaking to the people of Israel, who had forsaken their God and turned away from Him to worship, against His

express command, the gods of wood and stone that the heathen nations around them bowed down to? She could, of course, be thinking about those idolatrous enemies of Israel who continually raided the tribes of Israel in Canaan, and kept them in a state of subjection and fear. The iron heel of the Philistines was hard pressed on the people at this particular time.

No.3. ii. -3 - ii. 10.
pp. 73 - 80

The phrase in the latter half of this verse which reads “for the Lord is a God of knowledge” actually reads in the Hebrew “A God of knowledge is the Lord”. The Talmud somewhat quaintly remarks, “Knowledge is of great price for it is placed between the two Divine Names”.

Speaking of Israel’s enemies, Isaiah says:

“. . . . for it is a people of no understanding: therefore He that made them will not have mercy upon them, and He that formed them will shew them no favour” (Isa. xxvii. 11).

In other words, they had a knowledge of God, but did not acknowledge Him in their hearts and lives. Knowledge can be a head affair obtained from books, but if it does not lead on to action it remains abortive. True knowledge affects the heart. The apostle Paul, writing from his prison in Rome to the Ephesian believers, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus, prays for them, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (i. 17). The word ‘knowledge’ here is not the Greek noun *gnosis*, which is the usual word for the knowledge which is acquired by learning, effort, or experience. It has the prefix *epi* attached, *epignosis*, which implies “the acknowledgement” of Him.

Paul leaves us in no doubt as to what this acknowledgement meant to him. He had suffered the loss of all things he once held dear. The traditions of his fathers, of his race. He was an Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee who would go to any length to obey, and to see that others obeyed, the tenets of that faith. But he gave them all up, and why?—“that I might win Christ, and be found in Him” (Phil. iii. 8, 9). This is the meaning of “acknowledgement”. It is the canceling out of self, and the enthronement of the Lord Jesus Christ in heart and life. Moreover, this was the secret of Paul’s strength: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. iv. 13).

We now come to the next part of I Sam. ii. 3:

“For a God of knowledge is the Lord (literal), and by Him actions are weighed.”

To weigh is to consider, with a view to the choice of rejection or preferment. To estimate relative values. To balance in the scales. Job, in seeking to justify himself, cried:

“If I have walked in ways of falsity, or if my foot has hastened to deceit; then let Him weigh me in just balances, and let Eloah know my blamelessness” (Job xxxi. 5, 6, *The Companion Bible*).

But later on Job repented of these arrogant words, and confessed:

“Lo! I am vile! What shall I answer Thee? Rather, I lay my hand upon my mouth . . . I abhor myself. In dust and ashes I repent” (Job xl. 4 & xlii. 6, *The Companion Bible*).

When Job finally came to know himself, and to acknowledge that all the ways of God were just and true, he then received a double portion. Truly, by Him (the Lord) actions are weighed.

In Dan. v., the mighty king Belshazzar gave a huge feast, and had brought into his palace the sacred vessels of gold which Nebuchadnezzar, his grandfather, had plundered from the Temple in Jerusalem. He wanted to use them as drinking vessels for himself and his guests. Immediately after he had done so, the king saw the fingers of a hand write on the wall, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin”, Chaldee words for “Numbered, Weighed, Divided (or Split, or Broken)”. Completely shattered and unnerved, Daniel was sent for and asked to explain. God gave Daniel the key to this riddle, and he boldly gave the interpretation: “God has numbered your kingdom and it is finished. You are weighed in the balances and found wanting. Your kingdom will be given to the Medes and Persians” (Dan. v. 25-28). Just as when you or I go shopping and expect to receive 16 oz. to the pound (or grams to the kilo now), so does a righteous and just God expect the same. From those to whom much has been given, more is expected than those who have not received so much.

In Prov. xvi. 2 we read: “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes; but the Lord weigheth the spirits (Hebrew *ruach*, mind)”. He not only weighs our actions, but also our thinking. In other words he weighs the thinking or reasoning behind those actions.

We come now to verse 4 of I Sam. ii.:

“The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.”

Here we see that God reverses human conditions, bringing low the proud and wicked, and raising up the righteous. One ancient writer quotes this verse as follows:

“Every power which will be something in itself is destroyed by the Lord. Every weakness which despairs of itself is transformed into power.”

The bow at this time was the symbol of human power. While therefore the power of these mighty ones is shattered, the weak and puny ones are by Him made strong. Israel’s history was an abundant illustration of these words, both before and after they were uttered. A typical David and Goliath saga. So the Psalmist sang at a later date:

“Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken
for the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous”
(Psalm xxxvii. 15, 17).

“He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the
fire. Be still, and know that I am God” (Psa. xlvi. 9, 10).

Verses 5 to 8 of I Samuel ii. speak of the manner in which the Lord reverses the estate and condition of men, despite all their endeavours. The poor man can be raised up overnight to sit among princes, while the riches of another disappear overnight. Luke.xii.16-21 is an example of this: the rich man with much abundance of wealth said to himself, “This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater”, but God has the final word:

“Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke xii. 20, 21).

Here, in Hannah’s hymn of praise, the Lord is dealing with earthly riches. On the other hand the apostle Paul, as the prisoner of Christ for we Gentiles, in his letter addressed to the Ephesians, speaks of riches that are not earthly, but heavenly; of the “glory of the inheritance” which is to be seated with Christ at the right hand of God in heavenly places (Eph. i. 18-20; ii. 6). Is there anything this world can offer us today that can compare with such riches, remembering that He Who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might become rich. Moreover, from Eph. ii. 7 we learn that it is His intention to shew “the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”. These riches can never be earned or worked for, for they are beyond price:

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. ii. 8 & 9).

Incredibly as it may seem, they are the gift of God to His children that are members of that church which is the Body of Christ. No wonder the apostle Paul prays:

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge (acknowledgement) of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph. i. 17-21),

and again in chapter iii.:

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and

height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. iii. 14-19).

Let us make these prayers of Paul our own, believing that God will answer them so that we too, like Hannah, will burst out in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving for His amazing love and grace.

Returning again to I Sam. ii. 5 we read:

“So that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.”

Hannah here is evidently referring to her own experience. She mentions the number “seven”, which is the perfect number in Scripture. It will be remembered that in the last chapter of Ruth, after she had borne a son, the friends of Naomi said to her “your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons”. This is an evident comparison in perfection. The number “seven” will be found to represent the perfect work of God right throughout the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation.

Hannah actually had five more children., three sons and two daughters (chapter ii. 21), so the sacrifice that she made when she gave Samuel up to the service of the Lord was richly rewarded. Tradition says Hannah bore one child, Peninnah buried two, but there is no evidence that this is true.

In verses 6, 7 and 8 Hannah sings of the enemies of the Lord being silenced. She also brings out His sovereign power over life, death and resurrection:

“He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes.”

We find these words repeated in Psa. cxiii. 7, 8. This is one of the three “hallelujah” Psalms that commence with “Praise ye the Lord” (Psa. cxi., cxii. & cxiii.). Psa. cxiii., together with Psa. cxiv. were always sung before the Passover meal, and as a result must have been very well known throughout the whole of the nation of Israel. They bring to mind men such as Joseph; sold as a slave and imprisoned in Egypt, yet suddenly raised to be the equal with Pharaoh in the greatest nation on earth at that time. Daniel was another, taken into captivity, yet raised by the great king Nebuchadnezzar to be second only to himself throughout the dominion of his mighty empire of Babylon. David, a shepherd boy, taken from his flocks and herds to be the deliverer of his people Israel, and to become their powerful king. These illustrate the truth of the words of Hannah’s song of praise, “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory”.

We have a much better illustration, however, close to home in our own day; described for us by the apostle Paul in Eph. ii. We, as Gentiles, were outcasts in the flesh, children of disobedience (verse 2), children of wrath (verse 3), without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise. Having no hope, and without God in the world (verse 12). Literally written off and lying in the dust. But now, made nigh by the blood of Christ (verse 13), and believing in the glorious

hope have been sealed with the holy Spirit of promise (chapter i.), and reckoned to be buried, quickened, raised, and seated together with Him in the glory at the right hand of God. A most remarkable and glorious transition indeed!

Hannah's song continues in verse 9, "He will keep the feet of His saints". We are reminded of similar words in David's song, after the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of Saul, and out of the hand of the Philistines:

"God is my strength and power: and He maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet Thou hast enlarged my steps under me; so that my feet did not slip" (II Sam. xxii. 33, 34, 37).

The Psalms have many references to the feet of saints:

"Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for He shall pluck my feet out of the net" (Psalm xxv. 15).

Another Psalm of David reads:

"(Thou) hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: Thou hast set my feet in a large room" (Psa. xxxi. 8).

The setting of feet "in a large room" is quaint English in our A.V. The Septuagint reads "Thou hast set my feet in a wide place" which illustrates better the greater freedom of movement enjoyed by David when delivered by the Lord from his enemies.

We constantly need to be reminded of the words of Asaph in his Psalm, i.e. lxxiii., where he reflects on the prosperity of the wicked, of their corrupt words, oppression and violence, yet they themselves do not seem to be troubled. He says in verse 2:

"As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped, for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psa. lxxiii. 2, 3).

These thoughts were too painful for him, until he went into the presence of the Lord:

"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. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places" (lxxiii. 16-18).

In verses 22 to 24 Asaph acknowledges his foolishness and now can rejoice that the Lord is holding him by his right hand, guiding his steps to glory:

"So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before Thee. Nevertheless I am continually with Thee: Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me into glory."

It would be negligent to finish this thought without a reference to Psa. cxix. 105:

"Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

It is His Word that shines light upon our dark pathway here. It gives counsel and guidance. It points the way and ‘rightly divides’ our paths for us. It assures us that all enemies of righteousness, all evil powers both earthly and heavenly, worldly and spiritual, will be put under the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ and destroyed. Conversely, He will keep the feet of His saints and guide them into paths that are right paths. He will lift them up into a wide place and walk hand in hand with us, always at our side. Though our flesh and heart may sometimes fail, yet like Asaph we may say, “. . . . but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever” (lxxiii. 26).

Hannah finishes her song with the prophetic words:

“The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall He thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His King, and exalt the horn of His Anointed” (I Sam. ii. 10).

This is the first time that we read in the O.T. of “His King” and “His Anointed”. The Greek translation of the Hebrew O.T., the Septuagint (LXX) reads for Anointed, “Christos”, which is Christ. We can say then that this verse is Messianic in character, for it speaks of the glory that will come upon the earth when the Lord Jesus Christ returns a second time, this time to rule as King. In this verse those who would oppose Him are called “the adversaries of the Lord”. These, we read, “shall be broken in pieces; out of heaven shall He thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth”. David’s victories and dominions reached far, but “the uttermost parts of the earth” are promised to David’s greater Son, the Messiah. Men will either rejoice to acknowledge Him as King, or will be destroyed by His iron rod. God will “exalt the horn of His Anointed”. Every knee to Him shall bow:

“I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Be wise therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him” (Psa. ii. 7-12).

Eleven centuries later Mary and Zacharias praise God, and prophesy under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The link with Hannah’s song of praise is unmistakeable. Mary sings:

“His mercy is on them that fear Him (i.e. God my Saviour, verse 47) from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away” (Luke i. 50-53).

In the same chapter Zacharias at the birth of his son John, praises the Lord, saying:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began; that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us, to perform the

mercy promised to our fathers that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear” (Luke i. 68-74).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Hannah takes her place alongside Mary and Zacharias. All three sing similar songs of praise and triumph at the birth of their sons, Samuel, the Lord Jesus, and John the Baptist. The theme of their songs centres around Mary’s Son, Who has already faithfully fulfilled the O.T. prophecies of Redemption in His crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and ascension. When He comes to the earth the second time it will be in power and majesty to fulfil the remainder of these songs in His triumph as King of kings, Lord of lords.

**No.4. ii. 11 - 25.
pp. 95 - 99**

Hannah and Elkanah, having left their son Samuel with Eli at the door of the Tabernacle in Shiloh, returned to their home at Ramah. We read in verse 11, “the child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest”. Again in verse 18, “But Samuel ministered before the Lord, being a child, girded with a linen ephod”. The ephod was one of the sacred garments that the Lord had commanded Moses to make, which Aaron (and his successors) were to wear when they performed the service of the Lord in His Tabernacle. The linen ephod that Samuel was allowed to wear was but a simple replica, but it was a visible sign that though Samuel was but a child, he was dedicated to the Lord’s service. Undoubtedly Eli arranged this, and it is evident that he took a keen personal interest in the lad and kept him close to himself.

Elkanah’s faithfulness in presenting himself and his household every year at Shiloh to commemorate the Passover feast now had an added incentive. Together with Hannah they would see their son:

“Moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice” (I Sam. ii. 19).

How natural it was that Samuel’s mother would ensure that the boy had the clothes he needed. These little human touches recorded in the Scriptures are often very moving, and show that we do not have a God that is concerned with great things of this world only, but also of those little things which affect our comfort, welfare, or protection.

The sacrifice and devotion of Hannah were evidently rewarded, for we read in verse 21:

“And the Lord visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the Lord.”

The meaning of the words “And the child Samuel grew before the Lord” is made clear in verse 26, “And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and

also with men”. When Luke the apostle writes of the youth and boyhood of the Lord Jesus, he uses almost identical words:

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”
(Luke.ii.52)

It is evident that Eli realized that Samuel was destined for some great work in connection with the people of Israel, and that the Lord intended to use him in His service. In contrast to this boy was the baseness of his own two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. These must have been a tragedy to the saintly old man. Brought up in the shadow of the Sanctuary, to be the successors to their father in the position of high priest, instead of being honoured they are called “sons of Belial” (ii. 12). The word Belial simply means “worthlessness”, and does not signify either Satan or any pagan deity. It is used 9 times in I & II Samuel, but only 7 times in the remainder of the O.T., and once only in the N.T. by the apostle Paul in II Cor. vi. 15. “They knew not the Lord” cryptically sums up the condition of these two who, as priests of God, should have been the ministers of His holy law to the people.

Unbelievers base the conduct of their lives according to the dictates of their hearts. Some are good and some are bad. Some have strong sense of duty to society, others have none. Unrelieved by the light of the knowledge of the love and grace of God, some seek mental relief through good works. Others through selfish indulgence, and this was the course taken by Hophni and Phinehas. Despite their godly rearing and education, and the exalted position they came to occupy as sons of the high priest, it would have been expected that the atmosphere of the Tabernacle would have permeated their being and seeped into their hearts and minds. On the contrary, they used their sacred office merely as affording an opportunity for selfish extortions; their unbelief was the source of their moral worthlessness.

These two were evil men indeed, who basely abused the high office they held and the privileges they were entitled to under God’s generous provision as commanded by Moses. Hophni and Phinehas, not satisfied with the share of the peace offerings to which they were entitled, robbed the officers and seized for themselves some of the part of the sacrifice that belonged to the offerers:

“And the priests’ custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priest’s servant came, while the flesh was in seething, with a fleshhook of three teeth in his hand; and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or cauldron, or pot; all that the fleshhook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came hither” (I Sam. ii. 13, 14).

The priests were allowed by the Law to keep the “wave breast”, that is, the portion of the breast of the animal that was waved before the Lord. It was waved to the four quarters of the compass. The right shoulder of the sacrifice, called the “heave shoulder” was also lifted up to Jehovah. Both these portions were the legitimate rights of the priests. Not content with this, these two men sent their servants to demand more, both before and after the offerings had been made. Such was the veneration of the people who came to worship and observe the feast days, that they allowed this extortion to become a custom:

“Also before they burnt the fat, the priest’s servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if the man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now; and if not, I will take it by force. Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord” (ii. 15-17).

Evidently Hophni and Phinehas went further, and stepped in before God Himself by demanding a cut from the carcass of the animal (which included the fat) before the sacrifice was offered to the Lord. This was a direct affront to Jehovah, for His express command given to Moses was that the priest should offer all the fat upon the altar. In fact we find in Leviticus, chapter vii., that the Lord said the fat was holy to Himself alone, and if any ate of it—that person would be cut off from Israel.

To the honour of those that came up to the Tabernacle to worship on the feast days, it would appear they only agreed to do this under protest, and endeavoured to ensure that Jehovah would not be robbed. We read in I Sam. ii. 16, “Let them (i.e. Hophni and Phinehas) not fail to burn the fat presently”. They knew that unless God had the fat, they could feast with little comfort upon the flesh. In cases where the worshipper raised an objection, the demands of the priests were made by force. There could not be a greater insult to God, nor abuse of the people, and we read in verse 17:

“Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.”

So the life of the nation became corrupted at its heart. Worship was brought into disrepute through the conduct of its leading ministers. Was it likely that piety, justice, and purity would be honoured and loved in the land of Israel when the whole ritual of the sacrifices was openly scoffed at and made a mockery in the great Sanctuary by the chief priests themselves?

Inevitably their lives became evil, and they took advantage of their position among the women that came to the Tabernacle, and so immorality follows in the footsteps of their greed in desecrating their high office. Eli at last stirs himself to rebuke them:

“And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord’s people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them” (ii. 23-25).

The book of Proverbs should be noted here:

“Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: and he that hateth reproof shall die. Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men? A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him: neither will he go unto the wise” (Prov. xv. 10-12).

There are transgressions which may receive pardon and divine forgiveness again and again, but there comes a time when this may be withheld.

In Matt. xii. 23-25 we have the sin that can never be forgiven. After healing one who was possessed of a demon, blind and dumb, we read the people were amazed and said, "Is not this the Son of David?". When the Pharisees heard this they scornfully replied "This fellow casts out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons". Here is a sin that can never receive the Lord's forgiveness. Blasphemy, impious or evil speaking, even against the Son of Man, Yes, but against the Holy Spirit, No:

"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. xii. 31, 32).

One cannot help feeling that the reprimand of Eli was not severe enough. The blasphemy of his sons demanded drastic action, but instead of that his mild and gentle censure fell on unheeding ears. Instead of saying "it is no good report that I hear", something like "It is a shameful, scandalous behaviour, and not to be tolerated" that may have had some effect and caused a change of heart. Alas, the censure fell on deaf ears: their unbelieving hearts were unrepentant, and so no shame was felt.

Discipline is vital in every family, community, and nation, if crime and vice are to be kept in check. There is no doubt that discipline is necessary for each one of us if we are to order our lives in some measure of harmony and smoothness. We see lack of discipline all around us today and there seems little doubt that this is the cause of the fearful conditions of which the apostle Paul wrote in his second letter to Timothy:

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (II Tim. iii. 1-5).

In his epistle to the Hebrews, chapter xii., Paul speaks of the "chastening", or disciplining, needful not only for sons from their earthly fathers, but also for believers as sons from their heavenly Father. If our feet need to be channeled into a right path by our earthly father, how much more is it necessary that our heavenly Father should do likewise for us in the matter of the heavenly and eternal things. May the Lord give us grace to accept such chastening.

No.5. ii. 26 - 30.
pp. 119, 120

In direct contrast to the unbelieving, self-seeking, and undisciplined sons of Eli, Samuel's faith and faithfulness is introduced:

“And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men” (I Sam. ii. 26).

This child was the direct opposite to these priests. As the petals of a flower unfold in the rays of the sun, so the heart of this boy absorbed the spirit of the Lord. As the years passed, so he grew in knowledge and in grace, so that all who came up to Shiloh to worship became aware that he was indeed a child of God.

Suddenly, there appears at Shiloh a messenger who delivers his message and disappears from the record. Of this messenger we know nothing, except that from his special title “a man of God”, and also from the character of his communication, we must regard as one of the prophets:

“And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house? And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to offer upon Mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before Me? And did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Wherefore kick ye at My sacrifice and at Mine offering, which I have commanded in My habitation; and honourest thy sons above Me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel My people” (ii. 27-29).

The term “man of God” was given to Moses first, who was undoubtedly the greatest of all the prophets of the O.T. In Deut. xviii. he speaks of himself as a type of that great Prophet that was to come, the Messiah, in the amazing words:

“I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him” (Deut. xviii. 18).

This “man of God” as the spokesman for God came to Eli because he had failed in his duties as father, judge and priest. He had been slack and careless, and over-indulgent. Eli was descended from Aaron, the first high priest, through the fourth son Ithamar, and his sons should have carried on the privileges and responsibilities of their father Eli's exalted position. The words “Wherefore kick ye at My sacrifice and at Mine offering” are a reminder of the song of Moses in Deut. xxxii., where we read the ominous words:

“But Jeshurun (the ‘Upright One’—the ideal Israel as the chosen of God) waxed fat, and kicked then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation” (Deut. xxxii. 15).

The figure is one drawn from the pastoral life of the people; one they could well understand. The ox, or the ass, overfed, pampered and indulged, becomes unmanageable, and refuses obedience even to his master. Verse 29 then goes on to reveal that Eli bore an equal responsibility with his sons in this matter:

“Why do you honour your sons more than Me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by My people Israel” (I Sam. ii. 29, N.I.V.).

The messenger from God to Eli then continues:

“Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house and the house of thy father, should walk before Me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from Me; for them that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (ii. 30).

This is surely true of every dispensation. If the Lord by His Spirit has opened our eyes to those spiritual blessings that are in heavenly places (Eph. i. 3; ii. 6), and we lightly esteem them, are we likely to receive His commendation? It is only those who seek to honour Him by searching His Word and trying by His help to walk worthily of the truth that will receive His “well done” in that day.

No.6. ii. 31 - iii. 21. pp. 130 - 136

From what we read about Eli it seems inconceivable, however, that this God-fearing old man shared in the illicit wealth that his sons accumulated by their extortionate demands from those who came up to Shiloh to worship. On the other hand, he must have been aware of what they were doing and his fault lay in his weakness in allowing it to continue. So in verses 31 to 34 God’s judgment falls:

“Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father’s house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in My habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever and this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.”

So “the arm” that signifies “power and strength” will be cut off. His descendants would die at an early age, and Eli would see “an enemy in My habitation”, or literally, “you shall see the affliction (or distress) of the Tabernacle My dwelling place”. As the Psalmist records:

“He greatly abhorred Israel: so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men; and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy’s hand” (Psa. lxxviii. 59-61).

Hophni and Phinehas, Eli’s two sons, were to be cut off, both of them in one day. This would be the evidence to Eli that the sons of his descendants would die in the flower

of their youth. Thus none would become eminent in Israel. A certain Bishop Patrick records that a great while after this, certain Jewish historians wrote of a family in Jerusalem, none of whom commonly lived over 18 years of age. Upon search being made it was discovered that they were descended from the house of Eli. The literal fulfillment of the death of Hophni and Phinehas, and the capture of the sacred Ark of the holiest of all confirms the Lord's judgment upon Eli and his two sons.

“And I will raise Me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in Mine heart and in My mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before Mine Anointed for ever” (I Sam. ii. 35).

Here is the rainbow shining through the clouds. Here is salvation and hope. Jehovah will raise up a faithful priest. Because Samuel, though a Levite, was not of the sons of Aaron, some commentators say this could not refer to him. Yet, after Eli's death and the capture of the Ark of the Lord by the Philistines, when the regular exercise of the Levitical ritual was suspended, Samuel for a long period stood as mediator between Jehovah and His people. In sacrifice, prayer and intercession, he carried out the duties of the priesthood. He certainly walked before the Lord's anointed King. This prophecy, then, surely relates to Samuel, and there can be little doubt that Eli recognized this too.

The prediction “I will build him a sure house” did not come to pass in Samuel's own sons, Vashni (also known as Joel) and Abiah. It did, however, in Vashni's son Heman. He became “the king's seer in the words of God” and was placed by king David over the instrumentalists and choir in the house of God (I Chron. vi. 28, 33; xv. 17, 19; xvi. 41, 42; xxv. 1, 5). He certainly became an eminent man in Israel, and had fourteen sons and three daughters (I Chron. xxv. 5). God's promises never fail. It gives assurance for us today that the promises made by God to the apostle Paul as the prisoner of the Lord for we Gentiles will likewise be fulfilled:

“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will Having made known unto us the secret of His will according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself In Whom we have been taken for His inheritance, being predestinated (foreordained) according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph. i. 5-11).

No wonder Paul could exclaim, “Everything I once held dear in the traditions of the fathers of Israel, I count as nothing, in order that I might win Christ, and be found in Him: not having my own righteousness, but His”. To “win Christ”, and be “found in Him”, should surely be the aim of all of us who walk this pilgrimage journey, day by day.

We now come to chapter iii. of I Samuel:

“And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious (rare) in those day; there was no open vision” (iii. 1).

It is evident that Eli watched over Samuel with a tender, watchful care. He would keep him away from his two sons and their evil companions. Samuel would surely have benefited much from the loving care, wisdom, and experience freely given him by Eli,

whose own sons had spurned his advice and not heeded his warnings. Josephus tells us that Samuel had reached the age of twelve by this time. If this is so it is worthy of note, for it was at the age which the child Jesus disputed with the doctors of the law in the Temple of Jerusalem (see Luke ii.). It was at this age that every Jewish boy became “a son of the law”, a practice which is continued to this day. It was a very significant step in the life of every Jewish boy.

Thus, when Samuel came of age, we read that the “word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision”. The word “precious” is the Hebrew *yagar*, rare, therefore of high value. It occurs in Lam. iv. 2 where we read that “The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold” had become worthless and likened to earthly pottery. The word of the Lord was withheld from Israel, it became rare; there was no open vision. As a nation Israel no longer served the Lord. The impurity that prevailed in the Tabernacle had added to the corruption that pervaded the people. The eyes of their understanding were shut and darkness covered the land. Only a remnant remained faithful. As a nation God had been cast out, dethroned, forgotten, and ignored.

Vision in a nation necessitates communion with God. When that breaks down the result is blindness. Because sin is inherent in our nature, we by nature prefer darkness to light. Instead of the desire to look up to the light and seek the word and will of God, we close our minds and deliberately bury our heads in the sand. There is nothing strange about this, for where there is no vision, where the word of the Lord is not heard, the people perish, spiritually and morally.

With this background, with no open vision, the Lord comes to Samuel. Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. Samuel was lying down in the tabernacle of the Lord. The lights of the 7-branched lampstand had not yet gone out when Samuel hears a voice calling:

“Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, ‘Here I am’. And he ran to Eli and said, ‘Here I am; you called me’. But Eli said, ‘I did not call; go back and lie down’. So he went and lay down. Again the Lord called, ‘Samuel!’ And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, ‘Here I am; you called me’. ‘My son’, Eli said, ‘I did not call, go back and lie down’.

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel a third time, and Samuel got up and went to Eli and said ‘Here I am; you called me’. Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, ‘Go and lie down, and if He calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’.’ So Samuel went and lay down in his place” (iii. 4-9, N.I.V.).

There seems to have been no animosity or jealousy on the part of Eli. The word of the Lord had passed him by and was being directed to the boy, Samuel. If he was grieved at this divine call coming to Samuel and not to himself, and envious of the honour bestowed, he certainly did not show it. Perhaps in his heart he knew that he had forfeited the Lord’s favour and was unworthy of receiving it.

“The Lord came and stood there, calling as at other times, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’.”
(verse 10, N.I.V.).

This time it was not just a voice, it was a Person. It might have been thought that the voice would have come from the Shekinah glory in the holiest of all beyond the veil, but here we read that it was the Lord Who came and stood there, and called “Samuel! Samuel!”. His name being called twice. In the O.T. there were only three others who were called this way: Abraham, when he was about to slay his son Isaac (Gen. xxii. 11); Jacob, after the news was broken to him that his son Joseph was still alive and had invited him down to Egypt to live (Gen. xlvi. 2); and Moses, when he turned aside to see the burning bush in the wilderness, and received from God his great commission (Exod. iii. 4).

Samuel now obeys Eli’s instructions, but not quite. He forgot to say the word “Lord”, but as verse 7 tells us “he did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him”. From this time forth, however, Samuel was to know Him well, and to hear His voice often, for he became God’s mouthpiece to the nation of Israel. At the time he first heard that Voice, however, he would be uncertain who was speaking to him. Later, when he had come to know the Lord we are sure he would have given Him His rightful title as all true men of God have done. This is something we should all remember when we speak to Him or of Him, and honour Him with His rightful title “Lord”.

The message that the Lord had for Samuel was a very painful one:

“And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of everyone that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not, and therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever” (I Sam. iii. 11-14).

The statement in verse 11, “I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of everyone that heareth it shall tingle” are repeated twice elsewhere in Scripture, and both references are a prophecy of the judgment of Jerusalem at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The first reference is found in II Kings xxi., where Manasseh, though his father Hezekiah was one of the greatest kings of Judah, he himself was one of the infamous. Not only had he done wickedly above all that the Amorites did, but he made Judah also to sin with his idols:

“Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, and turning it upside down” (xxi. 12-13).

The second reference is found in Jer. xix.:

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. Because they have forsaken Me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents” (Jer. xix. 3, 4).

These two prophecies concerning Jerusalem were tragically fulfilled later when the army of Nebuchanezzar systematically reduced the city to a heap of rubble. When the Author of the Scriptures spoke through the men that wrote them and used the phrase “that whosoever heareth it both his ears shall tingle”, He is drawing the attention of all who read these words to the cataclysmic events which left so indelible a mark upon the history of the nation of Israel. Tragically, the event was repeated once again in 70A.D. when Titus and his Roman legion razed the Temple and the city of Jerusalem to the ground, after the Jews at Rome had manifested Israel’s final rejection of the King and the kingdom and the apostle Paul had pronounced upon them the sentence of blindness at Acts xxviii. 23-29.

To return to I Sam. iii. 13, the enormity of the sin of Eli and his sons which was to be punished so fearfully, resulted in their death and the capture of the ark of God by the Philistines. For a period of 20 years the Glory of Jehovah departed from among His people. The ceremonial service that should have enabled Israel to see the truth of atonement and sanctification was no longer possible. The priests and the people degenerated to the unclean heathen superstitions of the nations around them. This was the extent of the mischief that must be measured against the punishment meted out to Eli and his sons.

It is no wonder that Samuel feared to divulge to Eli the terrible message that the Lord had given him. Here was his first experience of a prophet’s responsibility. We are reminded of the terrible persecutions that Jeremiah endured because of the messages God gave him to declare to the people of Judah. He was derided and goaded almost to distraction, so that he cried out “I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I became weary with forbearing, and I could not stay” (Jer. xx. 9).

“And Samuel lay until the morning, and opened the doors of the house of the Lord. And Samuel feared to show Eli the vision” (I Sam. iii. 15).

The abominable behaviour of Hophni and Phinehas was not hidden, and though he was only 12 years of age, Samuel must surely have wondered how it was that the great Jehovah allowed such behaviour to continue. Nevertheless he undoubtedly loved and revered the old priest who had been a second father to him, and dreaded to show him the vision. When pressed by Eli, however, not to hide anything from him, Samuel concealed nothing and in the words of our A.V., “told him every whit”.

“Then Eli called Samuel, and said, Samuel my son. And he answered, Here am I. And he said, What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee? I pray thee hide it not from me: God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide anything from me of all the things that He said unto thee. And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good” (iii. 16-18).

Eli’s reception of the terrible news and his reply indicated that in spite of his weakness and foolish partiality for his sons, at heart he was a devoted servant of the Lord. He must have seen, as he looked back, how deeply he had failed in his high office and allowed

worldly considerations to influence his conduct. Now he had been tried and found wanting. Without murmurings or disputings he submits himself to the righteous judgment of his God, not trying to justify himself and his past conduct. He wisely realized he had sown the wind, and must now reap the whirlwind.

One of the major causes of the sickness in the world today is the over-indulgence of parents toward their children. Lack of discipline in the home inevitably leads to rebellion and disruption, and lack of respect and regard for others. Young people grow up suspicious and resentful of any restraint. Thinking they have freedom to do as they please they fall victim to the many abuses and snares that entangle the feet of many of the young and unwary today. Following the example of their elders they show little respect for God and His Word and account it foolishness. The words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians reveal why there exists so much indifference to the things of God, and especially of the Lord Jesus Christ:

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”
(I Cor. ii. 14).

In other words, it is necessary to have the mind and Spirit of Christ to discern the things of God.

Eli is an example to be noted by all who are believers, for he fell from a position of trust and responsibility. His zeal for God oozed away as he grew older. It was not his eyes only that became dim, but his mind and will as well. As we read in the epistle to the Hebrews, “if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him” (x. 38). On the other hand “let us go on unto perfection” (vi. 1), where the thought behind the word “perfection” is likened by the apostle Paul in Phil. iii. 12-15 to a runner in a race pressing towards a goal, finishing the course and touching the tape. In other words, pressing on to the end and not giving up.

The conduct of Samuel was quite a contrast to that of Eli:

“And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of His words fail to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord” (I Sam. iii. 19-21).

What a contrast is here! As Samuel grew to manhood the Lord was with him, giving him strength and wisdom, guiding and guarding him, and Samuel let none of His words fall to the ground. He caught them all and absorbed them in his heart and mind. In those dark days of sin and shame in God’s house, Samuel stood firm, having nothing to do with them; his life a perpetual protest against covetousness and iniquity. Then from Dan to Beersheba, all Israel came to know of the relationship between Jehovah and this young man. A prophet of the Lord had appeared among the people once again. There spread throughout the nation the universal acknowledgement that in Samuel there was the hope of a future deliverer. So Jehovah came to Samuel and revealed Himself, and gave him information concerning events that would take place, perhaps soon after. His reputation

as a prophet gradually took shape, and we read in chapter iv. 1, “And the word of the Lord came to all Israel”. He became the first of the prophets and the last of the judges.

No.7. iv. 1 - 22.
pp. 153 - 158

Although Hannah and Elkanah now disappear from the Scripture record, having served their purpose as far as the plan of God was concerned, yet one would hope that they had the satisfaction of living long enough to see their son rise to greatness in Israel, and have the joy of seeing their devotion and sacrifice rewarded when they brought Samuel to Shiloh to the service of the Lord. This was the leading of the Lord who foreknew the man that would develop from the small child, and doubtless also give joy and comfort to the mother and father who had waited so long for their son after years of a barren womb.

We now come to Chapter iv., the opening sentence of which in verse 1 present us with a problem:

“And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men” (I Sam. iv. 1 and 2).

To which portion of the narrative does the statement “And the word of Samuel came to all Israel” belong? Is it part of the Lord’s dealings with Samuel which closed at chapter iii. 20 and 21? Or does it close that brief narrative which tells of the Divine voice which called Samuel, and the vision seen by the young chosen servant? On the other hand, does it tell us that acting upon the word of Samuel and under his advice, Israel commenced this disastrous conflict with the Philistines? Again, does the “word of Samuel” refer back to the prophecy given him by the Lord against the house of Eli? If this was the case, Eli may have made known to his two sons Hophni and Phinehas the judgment of God revealed to Samuel in a further effort to restrain their abominable behaviour. One thing is certain, although Eli still remained the judge, or head, of Israel, his word was no longer heeded by the princes of the nation. It seems this was mainly due to the scandalous infidelity of Hophni and Phinehas and the apathy of their father Eli, and thus the people had forsaken the God of their fathers, and only a remnant remained faithful. So it was that the Lord gave them up, withheld His power and allowed their enemies to smite and defeat them and over-run the land. For twenty years, since the days of Samson, the Philistines had made themselves supreme in Canaan. This effort on the part of Israel to shake off the iron heel of their oppressors was doomed from the start, for it was done without seeking the advice or guidance of Jehovah. Immediately misfortune falls upon them, however, they lay the cause of it upon the Lord and forget their disregard of Him in former time.

“And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again” (iv. 3-5).

What hypocrisy it is when the elders of Israel cry “Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us before the Philistines”? For twenty years they had spurned the Lord, disobeyed His express commands, and sinned most grievously against Him. They boldly dispute the matter with Him, and seem unaware of the great provocation they had given Him. This wild and unreasonable attitude seems to have been in the mind of the writer of the book of Proverbs when he wrote:

“The foolishness of man perverteth his way (‘leads him astray’ is not strong enough, for the word includes the idea of ‘destruction’); and his heart fretteth against the Lord (fretteth = ‘is angry with’)” (Prov. xix. 3).

The defeat brings no realization, or change of heart. It did not bring them to their knees to seek Divine forgiveness. They did not consider whether they themselves were at fault. Instead, in their blindness, the rulers of the nation suddenly remember the ark of the covenant within the holiest of all of the Tabernacle. It had always been the symbol of God’s Presence among His people to their fathers, and they unwisely thought that they could oblige Jehovah to fight for them by wresting it from its allotted place in the Sanctuary without His express command or permission. It was a curious delusion that led the rulers to think that the unseen God was inseparably linked with that strange and beautiful symbol of His Presence. That coffer of wood overlaid with gold, upon which was the mercy seat and cherubims of pure gold, had many hallowed memories for it was the place to which the high priest once every year brought the blood of the sin offering, first for himself and then for the people, and where enquiry was made of God “There I will meet with the children of Israel” (Exod. xxix. 43). But it was not an object of reverence or worship in itself, like the idols of other nations.

There is no doubt that in the minds of the elders of Israel lay the memory of the days of old when glorious victories were gained in the heroic days of Moses and Joshua, but they never stopped to consider the fact that Jehovah was then worshipped and revered by the nation. It was different now. The Lord had been forsaken for many a year now, and His sanctuary had become a place of corruption and vice: his ministers prime examples of covetousness and immorality. The ark of the covenant was now a symbol of a broken covenant. The custodians of the ark were of course Hophni and Phinehas, and there was obviously no resistance from them that it should be removed from its sacred resting place and carried outside. They may indeed have even suggested it, thinking it might add to their prestige and glory.

“And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is

come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore” (I Sam. iv. 6, 7).

So the ark was brought into the camp, and the men of Israel gave a triumphant shout as if the battle was already won. So close were the Philistines that they heard the commotion, and when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp of the Hebrews they were much afraid:

“Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness” (iv. 8).

They evidently remembered the days gone by, but there was some confusion in the minds of the Philistines concerning the history of Israel, for the plagues were inflicted before the ark was constructed. It certainly represented the presence of the Lord God among His people Israel, but to look upon it as a personification of God Himself as they did with their own idols was of course a misunderstanding on their part.

The Philistines were doubtful warriors, however, for we read they nevertheless prepared themselves for battle:

“Be strong and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight” (iv. 9).

The apostle Paul uses similar stirring words when writing to the church at Corinth, “quit you like men, be strong” (I Cor. xvi. 13). The context there, however, is not one of fighting, but of standing fast and remaining faithful under adversity and persecution.

“And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain” (iv. 10, 11).

So Israel was smitten. This defeat at the hands of their idolatrous foe was strictly in accordance with those immutable laws which applied between Jehovah and His covenant people during that dispensation. As long as they remained faithful to their invisible Preserver, and served Him with their whole heart, and kept themselves pure from the pollution of the heathen nations around them, so long was He in their midst. So long were the people of Israel invincible. When they forsook Him, then God forsook them. To use the words of Asaph in Psa. lxxviii.:

“When God heard this, He was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men; and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy’s hand their priests fell by the sword” (Psa. lxxviii. 59-64).

So the Ark of God was taken. This was perhaps the greatest calamity that had yet happened to Israel. It was now apparent to the whole nation that their King had withdrawn His Presence from them. They stood alone. The Ark which Moses had made by God’s command at Sinai, and in which the Divine Presence was enshrined within the Holy of Holies in the Sanctuary, which had accompanied Israel through the wilderness

and before which the waters of Jordan had fled backward, and the walls of mighty Jericho had fallen down: that Ark was taken possession of by idolators. It had become a dead thing to Israel, and the living God does not bind His Presence to a dead thing. One is reminded of the words of Paul:

“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. vi. 11).

The two sons of Eli were slain. The word of God given to Samuel was fulfilled. They had polluted the Sanctuary and been the prime cause of the continued idolatry of the nation, and finally had betrayed the symbol of the Divine Presence in their midst by bringing it into danger without a warrant from Jehovah. This surely filled the measure of their iniquities. So God’s judgment fell upon the house of Eli as the man of God had foretold in chapter ii. 34.

The prophecies made by the Lord always come to pass. We need have no fear, therefore, concerning those spiritual blessings that He has promised through the apostle Paul which refer to that church that is the Body of Christ, of which He is the Head. This hope of ours today is based on the words of the One true God, and whatever He has promised, He will most surely perform.

“And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head” (I Sam. iv. 12).

Jewish tradition relates that this messenger was Saul. Without modern means of communication swift runners were the usual means of passing messages and information at this time. Occasionally we have their names recorded in the Scriptures. Cush and Ahimaz were the messengers sent by Joab to king David with the news that his son Absalom was dead (II Sam. xviii. 19-23). The rent clothes and earth upon the head were the usual indications that the information brought were tidings of evil.

“And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see” (I Sam. iv. 13-15).

Some make the original text to read “Eli sat by the side of the way of the watchers”, that is, the street or way in Shiloh so named from the watch-tower situated in it. Others translate “by the side of the gate watching the way”. The old judge was naturally anxious for news from the army. They had already suffered one major defeat at the hands of the Philistines, and his chief anxiety now was for the safety of the sacred ark. Quite probably he had sought to stay his sons from taking it from the Sanctuary. Blind and feeble as he was, he had no means of stopping them, so he waited with sorrowful forebodings the coming of a messenger. The words of the man of God in chapter ii. 27-34 which prophesied judgment on him and his two sons would doubtless come vividly before his mind. He then hears the tumult and the noise of grief and consternation, and the messenger comes before him:

“And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled today out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken” (iv. 16, 17).

The grim news is bluntly given, the army utterly routed, Hophni and Phinehas slain, and the Ark taken.

“And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years” (iv. 18).

The ruin and degradation of the nation and his house, he could endure, but it was when he learned of the Philistines capturing the ark of God that the awful realization of this calamity sent him reeling backwards on his seat. He could bear the judgment of Jehovah in the ruin and degradation of his house and descendants. He could bear to see another preferred before him and his family as the judge in Israel. He could endure the defeat in battle at the hands of the heathen. Even the news of the death of his sons. But when his ears caught the words from the messenger that the ark of God was taken, that was the calamity that caused his death. This was the fulfillment of the prophecy made known to the boy Samuel by the Lord “at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle” (I Sam. iii. 11).

The grief and consternation in Shiloh would be echoed in every town and village throughout Israel. Not only those faithful men and women who had remained loyal to the God of their fathers during the apostasy of the nation over the past twenty years, but the people as a whole would be filled with a strange foreboding that must have caused apprehension and fear. Yet nowhere do we read that repentance was felt, or that the nation turned back from their idolatry. Such is the blackness of the human heart when the mind is darkened by sin. Unless the light of the glorious gospel of grace had shined into our hearts and minds, we too would have treated the Lord Jesus Christ with the indifference which we see around us.

“And his daughter in law, Phinehas’ wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken” (I Sam. iv. 19-22).

This singular and circumstantial account of the death of the widow of Phinehas, the evil prior, the son of Eli, which follows directly after the great national disaster is recorded on the pages of Scripture because of the name she gave her son—Ichabod. Her concern for the death of her husband and of her father-in-law was an evidence of her natural affection, but her greater concern for the loss of the ark of God is made clear by the meaning of the name she gave to the son that was born. “*T*”, an exclamation of bitter

sorrow, “Alas!”, and “*chabod*”, glory; “Alas, the Glory”. No glory while the Presence of the Lord is removed from Israel.

No.8. v. 1 - vi. 21.
pp. 174 - 180

Chapter v.

Israel had been heavily defeated by the Philistines at Aphek, and the Ark of God taken by this heathen foe. We read something of the punishment meted out on Israel by them in Psa. lxxviii. 56-64. Jeremiah also makes reference to this occasion in Jer. vii. 12 and xxvi. 1-9. The loss of the Ark of God meant that He no longer dwelt among His people. The mighty covenant God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had forsaken them. The Ark was then taken in triumph to Ashdod, one of the five great cities of the Philistines. Built on a hill close to the Mediterranean Sea, it was known as Azotus in N.T. times. In Acts viii. Philip, having led the Ethiopian nobleman into the way of salvation, was caught away by the Spirit of the Lord and found at Azotus (Acts viii. 40).

The Philistines considered the capture of the Ark to be their greatest achievement. They carried it with care and placed it in the huge temple of their most popular god, Dagon. They attributed their success in battle to the gods they worshipped, so when they returned in triumph they placed their trophies before their altars, or hung them upon the temple walls. Dagon, and his so-called wife Derceto, were the chief divinities worshipped by the Philistines. The upper part of this idol Dagon was shaped like a man, and the lower part like the tail of a dolphin. In addition there was an Assyrian Dagon, and among the priceless treasures dug from the burning sands of Iraq, the old Assyrian empire, is a sculptured figure of this idol. It is depicted swimming through the sea in front of the Assyrian warships; evidently cleaving a way for them and leading them on to victory. Dagon was the “Baal of the sea, the Neptune of the ancient East”. When we remember that the Philistines were a maritime people, going down to the sea in ships and invading foreign lands with their fleets, we can well understand how the worship of Dagon had won the chief place among Philistine idols.

The Ark of Jehovah was accordingly placed at the feet of this venerated image as an acknowledgement of his superiority over the God of Israel. They would remember the humiliation this god suffered in the temple at Gaza when Samson called upon the name of his God, and when superhuman strength came upon him, he dislodged the central pillars which brought the mighty building crashing down, pulverizing to dust the huge figure of their god, Dagon. The insulted Dagon could now be avenged by the perpetual subservience of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The men of Ashdod, however, were about to receive a shock, for on the morrow, when their priests entered the temple to pay their devotions to Dagon’s image, they found their

god prostrate on the floor before the desecrated sacred coffer of the Israelites. In Isa.xli. we read of the great care taken by the heathen peoples when setting up the idols that they worshipped. They were fastened down with great care so that they should not be moved (Isa. xli. 7), yet the fastenings of this huge figure were of no avail: it had fallen before the Ark, lying as though in subjection and constrained to yield and do homage. The consternation and amazement of these men can be imagined; how they would speedily summon the work force to restore it to its place in great haste. The image did not seem to have sustained any injury, so the incident would no doubt be noised abroad in the city as an accident, or due perhaps to faulty workmanship in its fixing.

On the following morning, however, that explanation would be swept to the winds. Dagon again lay prone before the Ark, but not as before. This time the head and the hands of the image were severed; not broken off, but cut off and thrown upon the threshold of the temple—the entrance upon which the foot of every priest or worshipper as he passed into the temple must tread. We read in verse 4, “only the stump of Dagon was left to him”, i.e. the fish part. What an ignoble sight for these devotees to behold! Without head or hands, surely here was a chunk of stone without wisdom or power.

One would have thought that this incontestable proof of the impotence of their god would have convinced the Philistines of their folly in worshipping a man-made effigy, and turn instead to the worship of the God of Israel Who had so evidently shown forth His power. Alas, this was not so, for in verse 5 we read “Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon’s house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day”. So the threshold became holy, and strange as it may seem, this humiliation of their god was perpetuated, so that when their children asked their parents why they should leap over the threshold, the power of Israel’s God would be recounted.

There is an interesting reference to this superstition in the prophecy of Zephaniah. This man of God was probably the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah and prophesied during the early years of king Josiah in Judah. He speaks of the numerous idolatrous observances, which he condemns, and among them “On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold” (Zeph. i. 9, N.I.V.). When men withhold their allegiance to God, it would appear they lose their wits as well.

If the Philistines had considered the downfall of Dagon and been brought to repent of their idolatries and humble themselves before the God of Israel, it might have prevented the punishment that now fell upon them for the indignities done to the Ark. A painful and distressing plague raged throughout the city. The princes of Ashdod therefore summoned the council of the nation and insisted that the Ark be removed immediately. So Gath was the city chosen. The Philistines must have built a new temple here and installed a new image of Dagon, for this was the place that Samson had previously destroyed with his God-given strength.

For the second time, therefore, judgment falls upon this city, and the shameful and humiliating disease sweeps through the populace of Gath also. The Ark of God was then pressed upon the citizens of Ekron who quite understandably were absolutely furious:

“Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people. So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there” (v. 10, 11).

To faithful ones in Israel, this Ark, with its tables of the law, the golden pot of manna, and the rod of Aaron that budded, was a savour of “life unto life”. To the uncircumcised Philistines, that persisted in enmity to God and hostility to His people, it was a savour of ‘death unto death’. Their triumph in capturing the Ark was short-lived. It turned into fear, and the burning question now was what should be done with it. To destroy it was obviously not the way out. Jehovah was watching over this sacred emblem of His Presence, so no harm would come to it.

Chapter vi.

The Philistines were a superstitious people, so we read in this chapter of the curious way in which they dealt with this problem:

“And the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the Lord? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place” (vi. 1, 2).

They had grown up with an undefined awe of the golden chest which, as they supposed, had so often in the days of Moses and Joshua led the armies of Israel to famous victories. To yield it up now would be a sore blow to them, yet to retain it would only lead to plague, misery and death. This God of Israel was undoubtedly a powerful God and must be appeased. The advice of the heathen priests and diviners is given in vi. 3-6.

It was the general custom among nations of antiquity to offer to the deity a gift say for recovery from a broken leg of an offering in the shape of a leg, which seems to have influenced their decision:

“Then said they, What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to Him? They answered, Five golden emerods (tumours N.I.V.), and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords” (vi. 4).

This verse, together with verse 5, gives intimation for the first time of a plague of mice in the land. This was a serious affliction which could result in famine. It affected not only the five capital cities, but also the entire land of the Philistines. In the warm countries that border the Mediterranean vast hordes of mice would sometimes arise and covering the land would devour the crops. In Egypt the mouse was considered so dangerous that it was made an emblem of destruction.

The reference to Pharaoh, the Egyptians, and the Exodus of Israel from Egypt in verse 6 must have made a deep impression upon the surrounding nations. Hence the value they set upon the Ark as the visible symbol of the mighty Hebrew God. The

argument therefore of the priests and diviners could therefore be stated thus: 'You will remember the well-known story of the obduracy of the powerful Egyptians in connection with these Israelites, yet even they in the end had to let them go. You Philistines have had experience of two plagues, will you now, like those foolish Egyptians harden your hearts, till you like them have been smitten by ten'.

These 'diviners' in the counsels of this nation of antiquity occupied a distinguished place. We read of them under different names: magicians, sorcerers, soothsayers, oracles, etc. They plied their trade with the aid of arrows, the entrails of animals, observance of the stars, the flight of birds and dabbled in occult sciences. They could well have been aided by evil spirits, for Satan wields great power above the earth in the realms of darkness. To the question "What shall we do with the Ark of God?", their advice was to propitiate with gifts the powerful Hebrew Deity, and send it back before greater calamity followed.

"Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them: and take the Ark of the Lord, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return Him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go. And see, if it goeth up by the way of its own coast to Bethshemesh, then He hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that smote us; it was a chance that happened to us" (I Sam. vi. 7-9).

Honour must be given. A new cart must be used. No ordinary oxen, the customary beasts of burden, nor is it to have a driver. Milch cows, entirely untrained for the yoke must draw it. Their calves are to be kept at home, and the cows themselves left to their own devices.

Everything was done that would make it almost impossible for the cart to leave Philistia and ascend the heights to the land of Israel. The cows were bound to the calves they nourished, and to the crib where both were fed. They would be unacquainted with the road, and moreover it meant a long steady climb from the Philistine plain. It would be reasonable to expect them to turn home again. This was a test for the God of Israel. These diviners were not sure whether the plagues had been sent by Him, or whether they had fallen upon their land in the ordinary course of nature. This strange experiment would satisfy the minds of the Philistine people. If the cows, contrary to all expectation, kept on the road upwards to Bethshemesh, then this would be a sign that they were driven by a Divine power. It would be clear that this Ark was a very dangerous possession, and that they would be well rid of it. So the Ark with the golden images of both the plagues were loaded on to the cart and the kine hitched up:

"And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home, and they laid the ark of the Lord upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Bethshemesh. And they of Bethshemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Bethshemite, and stood there, where there

was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the Lord” (I Sam. vi. 10-14).

Bethshemesh means “house of the sun”, and as one of the cities given to the Levites by the tribe of Judah. It was thus a priestly city, a fitting place for the Ark to come to, and especially to a farm owned by a man with the name of Joshua. The Philistines must have watched it all the seven miles from Ekron to the border in amazement, but now quite sure that they could return to their homes knowing that they had removed the cause of all their recent sufferings.

Bethshemesh is today identified with a village called Ain Shems in the valley of Sorek, on the slopes of the mount of Judah. On the western side there are ancient ruins which shows that the place was once a town of considerable size. The fruitful plains still yield their harvests of wheat. When the cart appeared most people were apparently in their fields reaping, and their joy must have been great when they recognized the Ark upon it. The day probably turned into one of sacrifices, offerings and feasting. Perhaps the people feasted too well and lost all sense of reverence for the sacred Ark, for they took the opportunity of lifting the lid and peering inside. They looked upon those contents which no profane eyes in Israel had done since the day it was sealed up in the wilderness. The judgment of the Lord was swift:

“And He smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even He smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? and to whom shall He go up from us? And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the Lord; come ye down, and fetch it up to you” (I Sam. vi. 19-21).

The number of slain here, 50,070, has been the subject of considerable research among commentators. The translators of the Greek O.T. (LXX) wrote, “and the Lord smote among them seventy men, and fifty thousand men”. The Jewish Chaldee writers explain that the odd 70 were elders, and the 50,000 ordinary people. Josephus, the Jewish historian, in his account of this incident does not mention the larger number, but records that 70 men died. Bible scholars have asked, would this be counted as a great slaughter? Apparently the original texts are not quite clear, but there are some who believe that there are two smittings recorded, as follows:

- (1) And He smote the men of Bethshemesh, 70 men.
- (2) And He smote the people, 50,000 men.

The first judgment fell upon the men of Bethshemesh who had profaned the Ark, and the second upon the whole nation because there was no national humiliation, no confession of sin or entreaty of the Lord’s forgiveness: no national prayer for His gracious Presence to return and dwell among them. This could well be so. It is not to be marveled at that when God Himself seeks His people, and they reject Him and disobey His commands, that there should come punishment from Him “Who is a consuming fire”.

The Lord is a righteous Judge, One Who delights in mercy and has infinite patience, but this people were stiff-necked and entirely committed to going their own way. We have already seen that the loss of the Ark had been due to the fact that they were a permissive society, with no restraining irksome rules. Discipline was absent, and they felt free to enjoy the pleasures of their community as they thought right. How similar this is to today. We are fortunate that no judgment falls upon us as it did upon the chosen people of Israel.

We must remember that in I Sam. vi. God is dealing with His earthly people with whom He had a covenant relationship. With them He is JEHOVAH, the covenant God. They had entered into a special relationship with Him:

“Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exod. xix. 5, 6).

“Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who had God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for?” (Deut. iv. 5-7).

All the covenant and promises made to them could be summed up in the words: “If you remain faithful to Me, I will abide in your midst. I will dwell in the sanctuary in the Holiest of All, beyond the veil. If you obey My laws I will watch over you and you will be My special people. But if you turn away from Me and as a nation blot Me out of your life, I will forsake you and give you up”. This was to be a special relationship between Jehovah and the nation of Israel and has no connection with the present dispensation of Grace. Although we Gentiles are no better than Israel, because of this no judgment falls upon us as it did upon them.

Israel today is temporarily blinded. During this interim period until they are restored once again to their earthly kingdom to be a blessing to the nations, we Gentiles, once foreigners and strangers to covenants and promises, are offered an inheritance in heavenly places “far above all” (Eph. i. 21; ii. 6). We worship at no earthly sanctuary, but there, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. He is denoted as the Head of the Church which is His Body, a perfect Man (Eph. i. 22, 23; iv. 13). Its members are being built up into Him for a habitation of God, through the Spirit (Eph. ii. 21, 22).

In order to appreciate in all its fullness this holy calling, we have need, as good workmen, to rightly divide the Scriptures in order that understanding may be given concerning the hope of this calling (II Tim. ii. 15; Eph. i. 17, 18). The vast majority of Christians may not have had this particular hope and calling brought to their notice, or if it has they may not have had the spiritual insight to receive it. They have the inestimable gift of resurrection into eternal life, and of being in one of the many “abiding places” referred to by the Lord (John xiv. 2), but may not have been specifically chosen by God to be placed in the church which is the Body of Christ, a calling kept secret until revealed to the apostle Paul (Eph. i. 4, 11; iii. 1-10).

We are today all saved by grace, but it is a question of accepting by grace a hope and inheritance which is “better”. There is a parallel to this in the epistle to the Hebrews, where the apostle exhorted his hearers to follow the example of those indicated in chapter xi., who had looked beyond earthly promises and blessings to one which was heavenly, the heavenly city, New Jerusalem (Heb. xi. 16, 39, 40).

There is a further striking parallel in Numb. xvi. Korah, and some 250 others of the elect tribe of Levi, took a stand against Moses and Aaron, leaders chosen by God, saying “Ye take too much upon yourselves, seeing all the congregation are holy”. It is true that Israel was an elect nation, but they failed to see that there was an “election within an election” as ordained by God. The awful result of this rebellion was that they were judged and destroyed by God. This episode, and others related to it, are dealt with very fully by Charles H. Welch in his first hardback volume entitled *Dispensational Truth*, pages 223 to 233. It is our sincere hope, therefore, that the reader may be able to perceive the peculiar hope as revealed in the epistle to the Ephesians (and in the companion epistle Colossians) and rejoice in the acknowledgement of Christ as Head of the Church which is His Body, the Fullness of Him that filleth all in all.

No.9. vii. 1 - 17.
pp. 196 - 200

The Philistines had been forced by God to return the Ark they had captured from the army of Israel. They had sent it back to Bethshemesh, the nearest town across the border. The people here, however, had desecrated the sacred coffer and the Lord had punished them for their sin. As a result of this they ask the men of Kirjath-jearim to come and take it. Kirjath-jearim means “the city of woods”, so it must have been surrounded by forests. Situated only 8 miles west of Jerusalem, before Joshua’s conquest of Canaan the city had been a seat of the worship of Baal, and a notable “high place”.

“And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the Ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the Ark of the Lord” (I Sam. vii. 1).

So the Ark found a resting place in the house of Abinadab, and his son Eleazar was commissioned to keep it. He was “sanctified” for this work. In other words, set apart to give constant attendance to it and to act as a watchman over it. The faithful in the city would no doubt wish to worship before it, and perhaps the curious would want to go and see it. This young man’s job was to guard it and keep it in safety.

“And it came to pass, while the Ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord” (vii. 2).

There is something very touching in these words: a sense of sadness for the length of time. Those twenty years must have been a period of strenuous service on the part of Samuel.

The destruction of Shiloh had laid all Israel at the feet of their Philistine enemies, and we know that they made their supremacy felt. The restoration of the Ark in no wise signified that they had loosed their hold on the conquered people. The long years when the iron heel of their heathen foes pressed so heavily upon them was an important period in Samuel's life. During those twenty years he must have laboured incessantly to wake up the people to the old worship of Jehovah, and the purity of life ordained by Him for the nation He had called out to be His people. The fatal battle at Aphek, the capture of the Ark, the tragic death of the great old man Eli and of his sons, the devastation of the beloved Sanctuary at Shiloh, the continued terrible oppression of the Philistines, had opened his eyes. Taught by the bitter lessons of adversity, Samuel recognized that the only hope of salvation for Israel lay in their repentance as a nation before God. It was a change of heart that was needed before the lion standard of Judah could be unfurled, or the people be rid of the yoke that choked them. What means he used, or what his mode of life was, we are not told. Surely, however, he would travel the length and breadth of the land, visiting the twelve tribes. He would have sought to stir up all Israel to a sense of the greatness of their sins, and to the necessity of renewed trust in Jehovah and the vital need of returning to the faith of their fathers: to acknowledge their sins and failures and seek His forgiveness. Twenty years is a long time, but in the end the Lord rewarded His faithful servant's endeavours, for we read that "all Israel lamented after the Lord". A singularly happy turn of phrase, implying that the people as a whole had come to realize the blackness of their sinful manner of life and were prepared to do something about it. The words "lamented after" implying that they had now cast themselves down before their God, seeking His forgiveness. They realized the need for His cleansing, and looked to Him Whom they had so basely forsaken, and mourned as a nation.

In the prophecy of Zechariah we read that the children of Israel, in a future time, will yet again be estranged from Him, but will be brought to acknowledge their sin of the slaying of the Son of God, and of crucifying the One Who came as their King and rejecting His offer of restoration. They also refused to accept the word of His disciples when another opportunity was given to them during the Book of Acts. When the realization of what they have done draws upon them as a nation, they will repent, and at last accept Him as their Messiah. The Second Coming of Christ to His earthly people will then take place. This, of course, is still in the future; but here, buried in the past, is a turning back that was undoubtedly the result of Samuel's unwearied efforts during those twenty years.

"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only" (I Sam. vii. 3, 4).

'Baalim' is the plural form of Baal, referring to the numerous images dedicated to this god. 'Ashtaroth' is the plural form of the female goddess Astarte. They represented the productive power of nature and were generally worshipped throughout the East, usually with wild, evil, and degrading rites and ceremonies. Throughout the twelve tribes of Israel, therefore, these graven images and idols were thrown down and smashed, and

once more throughout the land the Invisible and Eternal One was acknowledged as the one true God. Samuel's faithfulness and tireless enthusiasm had at last been rewarded by the Lord. He had succeeded in opening the eyes of the people, unstopping their ears and softening the hardness of their hearts, so that they saw at last the real cause of their sufferings. He had made them as a nation hunger for the lost Presence of Jehovah.

“And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh” (vii. 5, 6).

Samuel now assumed the role of judge in Israel, and some rank him as their greatest leader, with the exception of Moses. Mizpeh was a city in the plain of Judah, some eight miles west of Jerusalem. Representatives from every tribe came at Samuel's command and water was poured out before the Lord. On this day of national mourning they fasted and confessed the sins of the nation against Jehovah. The pouring out of the water symbolized the pouring away of their old manner of life, the emptying of their hearts and minds of their former evil way of living, and neglect of the One True God. In humble repentance they acknowledged the God of their fathers, and recognizing the faithfulness of Samuel publicly acknowledged his leadership over the nation.

The sudden destruction of the Phoenician shrines throughout Israel, and the assembly of the people of Israel at Mizpeh immediately aroused the war-like Philistines. They promptly gathered a powerful force and marched to the plain of Judah. The men of Israel would be no match against this powerful foe, for they were poorly armed and ill equipped for battle. To their credit the people's new resolution held firm, and they remembered how Jehovah's power was given to Moses and Joshua in days of old. So in the supreme hour of testing and danger they turned to Samuel. Their cry was not 'what hope have we got, look what you have done for us now'. They did not turn to murmuring against Samuel as their fathers had done against Moses and Aaron during the wilderness journey; instead we read:

“And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines” (vii. 8).

Israel's repentance was now most surely being put to the test. Their new-found profession of faith was being proved and tried by the Lord. Was it sincere and complete? Would it crack when there was danger, and mortal fear held them in its grip? Samuel had evidently done his work well. The army was willing to go and meet the foe, unprepared as they were for battle; providing their leader continued to intercede for their deliverance to Jehovah. Let him not be silent, but instant in prayer on their behalf. This was real faith at last; complete trust in the power of the Lord.

“And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. And the men of Israel went out

of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them until they came to Beth-car” (verses 9-11).

So Samuel offered the lamb as a sacrifice and cried unto the Lord, and we read that the Lord heard his prayer and answered it, thus Samuel became the mediator between the Lord and His people. What a wonderful picture again of the one sacrifice that the Lamb of God made on our behalf, to procure deliverance and salvation and to deliver us from the power and dominion of sin.

Once more in His mercy the covenant God of Israel responded to the cry of His earthly people in their extremity. When they sincerely repented of their denial of Him and turned back from their evil ways, His Arm protected them. The Philistine ranks were beaten back by the fury of the storm (Josephus mentions an earthquake, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book VI.II.2.). Israel hurl themselves upon the enemy and the rout is complete.

We then read that “Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eb-en-ezer, saying, Hitherto the Lord helped us” (I Sam. vii. 12). “Shen” means “Tooth”, and was probably a prominent rock formation such as a crag or peak. Samuel set up a memorial to commemorate this great victory over the Philistines by Jehovah. This stone at Mizpeh would revive their remembrance of the mighty power of their God and cause them to be thankful. On the other hand it would remain a standing witness against them for their unthankfulness if Israel ever hardened their hearts against Jehovah again.

Samuel publicly acknowledges that the victory was wrought by the arm of the Lord alone. Eb-en-ezer means “the stone of help”, representing the timely help that was given as a result of fervent prayer. It must be noted that this prayer was answered only because the nation as a whole had thrown down the heathen images they had worshipped for so long. Having given up their idolatrous practices and wholly returned to the Lord in heart and life, He now turned to them and gave His mighty help in time of trouble.

“So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. And the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even unto Gath; and the coasts thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites” (vii. 13, 14).

This new spirit in Israel remained constant during the lifetime of Samuel. The petty jealousies between the tribes disappeared and gave place to the desire for unity. The power of the Philistines decayed, and the strength and prosperity of the people under the leadership of Samuel increased. The surrounding Canaanite tribes were content to submit quietly to the former limitations imposed upon them by Joshua, even also the mighty Amorites. No mention is made, however, of the brilliant statesmanship of Samuel, nor of his powerful influence for good that he exercised over the nation. Without any doubt whatsoever he is to be numbered among the very great characters of the O.T., and his name naturally finds honourable mention among those heroes of faith in Heb. xi.

“And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places. And his

return was to Ramah; for there was his house; and there he judged Israel; and there he built an altar unto the Lord" (I Sam. vii. 15-17).

For probably another 20 years Samuel judged Israel, dealing with the more complex cases of the law that baffled the local magistrates; having the final say in all the important affairs of state both internal and external. Shiloh having been destroyed during the war with the Philistines, he now lived in Ramah, his home town where his mother and father, Hannah and Elkanah, had lived and died. There he built an altar, as was the custom of the patriarchs, there being no formal seat of worship and no high priest of Israel until the end of his days, a position that was unique unless we are mistaken in the Scriptures. He was therefore a true type of the One Who is to come as Prophet, Priest and Judge, and Who alone can hold those titles.

No.10. viii. 1 - 7.
pp. 216 - 219

Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh, were all cities of holy memory to the children of Israel, where events had taken place that stirred the hearts of the nation. Bethel would always be associated with Jacob and his vision of Jehovah, and later the place where his name was changed from Jacob (supplanter) to Israel (prince with God). Gilgal was near Jericho on the river Jordan, where the nation spent their first night after crossing the river on their entry into the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. Twelve stones had been laid there in commemoration of that historic occasion. Mizpeh would be remembered for their recent triumph over the Philistines, given them by the mighty arm of the Lord. These three places were all in the southern half of the country and pilgrims from all over Israel would crowd there at different times of the year, so Samuel would be able to mingle with vast numbers of the people from all over the land.

"And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba" (I Sam. viii. 1, 2).

These were splendid names, for Joel signifies "Jehovah is God", and Abiah "Jehovah a Father". In I Chron. vi. 28 we read that the sons of Samuel were Vashni, the firstborn, and Abiah; so evidently the eldest son had two names. Vashni incidently means "Jehovah is strong".

"And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment" (viii. 3).

The glorious traditions of Samuel were quickly forgotten by these unworthy sons of Samuel. It is probable that when old age was beginning to enfeeble his strength, many of his duties devolved upon his sons. Their infamous conduct must have grieved him sorely. It would appear that he had had good hopes of their proving worthy of responsible positions in Israel, for they were made his deputies in Beersheba. This city

was far away from Ramah, in the extreme south of Canaan. We often read the expression “from Dan to Beersheba”, meaning from north to south.

How many good and honest men have been spoiled through preferment and power. It does not seem that Samuel’s sons were quite so profane or vicious as the sons of Eli, but love of money was their downfall. Whatever they were in other respects they became corrupt judges by accepting bribes. This base sin made a mockery of justice, and has been in the past fatally common, particularly in the eastern countries. In both the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy the command of God to Moses was “Take no gift, for the gift blinded the minds of the wise and perverteth the words of the righteous”. Samuel himself could say, “Behold, here I am; witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man’s hand” (I Sam. xii. 3, 4).

This honourable testimony to the integrity of Samuel throughout his long public ministry is left as a record concerning the character of this great servant of God. The apostle Paul, when writing to his young “son in the faith” Timothy, says also “For the *love* of money is the root of all evil, which while some have coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness but godliness with contentment is great gain”. It is impossible for any Christian to sincerely love the Lord and be covetous. If we put Him first in our heart and life we shall always be equal to this temptation. To do this, however, we have to know Him well, and love and believe His Word.

Despite his splendid life of service, even Samuel seems to have failed at the end of his life in relation to his sons. Aaron had a similar tragedy with his two sons Nadab and Abihu (Lev. x. 1, 2). Has there ever been in the history of our race so much sadness as there is today among families because of the disregard of the children for their parents? Brought about largely by the war, the desire for freedom from all restraints, and the neglect of the Word of God and turning away from the Lord Jesus Christ. We have only to think of Cain, the firstborn son of Adam and Eve. Then Noah whose faith and righteousness brought him and his family through the wrath of God, yet whose progeny included such evil people as Canaan, Cush and Nimrod. Further we have Abraham’s son Ishmael, Isaac’s son Esau, and finally the sons of Jacob who sold their brother into slavery for envy. So the Scriptures reveal that no man other than the Son of God was ever perfect. The O.T. characters with their outstanding typical qualities reveal the frailty, failure, and sin of even the greatest men that have ever lived.

In the book of Samuel we find illustrated another principle that is revealed in the Scriptures as being characteristic of God’s dealing with men. Contrary to what we may expect, God takes the second place, not the first. Note, we said “in his dealings with men”: thus we have Adam, the first man, before Christ, the second Adam: Cain “who was of that wicked one” before Abel, Ishmael before Isaac, Esau before Jacob; Saul is

made king over Israel before David, Antichrist before Christ Himself, and finally the kingdoms of this world before the Kingdom of God. Charles Welch explained it in this way: in the Scriptures we find that God is dealing with men as responsible moral creatures. In other words, being created “in His own image and likeness”, man has been given a brain, a most marvelous and intricate mechanism that unlike the remainder of creation enables him to think, reason things out, to judge and weigh up, and to create. It enables him to make decisions and so have a mind of his own. Had Adam never been allowed to exercise his choice of action the human race would probably have been convinced that man could stand unassisted against all temptation. Had Israel not failed so lamentably man would doubtless have believed that it was possible to accomplish a righteousness by works. Had rule and government never been entrusted to the nations of the earth, they would never have been convinced that the only true ruler and king appointed by God to establish righteousness and judgment on this earth is the Lord Jesus Christ. This lesson is yet to be learned.

In the Book of Samuel we have this illustrated most strikingly as Israel place Saul upon the throne, and anoint him as their king, whereas David, God’s chosen man, the man after God’s own heart, came second:

“Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (I Sam. viii. 4, 5).

The two sons of Samuel followed him in his office, but did not walk in his ways and serve the Lord as splendidly as he did. Taking advantage of their exalted position they sought to line their pockets by taking bribes, and by extortion of money from the people they abused the privilege God had laid down to be given to His servants who had been given authority. This failure on the part of the sons of Samuel was undoubtedly a contributory factor in the iniquitous demand by the people of Israel for a man to be appointed as their king like the nations around them. This was a rebuff to God, for He Himself was their king. As Jehovah, the Covenant God of Israel, He was the One Who should rule and reign over them. The blessings He had heaped upon them and their fathers were without number, yet such is the hardness of the human heart and the tendency of man to trust in himself and go his own way, that these people forgot their true King, and blindly demanded an earthly ruler, and so He says to Samuel:

“Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (viii. 7).

Sin separates from God. It removes Him from His rightful place in our hearts and from the centre of our lives. We become warped and twisted, and not desiring fellowship with Him we become, as a consequence, the willing dupes of Satan.

No.11. viii. 6 - 18.
pp. 230 - 233

Samuel was now old and his two sons had turned out to be utterly unworthy to carry on the leadership of Israel. As a result the elders of the people now came to Samuel and demanded that he anoint them a king. Their words are: "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (viii. 5). These words must have been a severe blow to Samuel. All his life his one aim had been to keep Israel faithful to Jehovah, their covenant God. He recognized the sinfulness of this demand. It was in direct opposition to the will of the Lord, for His word was clear that HE, Jehovah, was Israel's King. So the desire to anoint one of their number as king was to depose Israel's true King, and put in His place one "like unto the nations".

The Lord who knows the hearts of all men had foreseen this, however, for He had made provision for such a request in His instructions to Moses:

"When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me; thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses: forasmuch as the Lord has said unto you, 'Ye shall henceforth return no more that way'. Neither shall he greatly multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levite: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel" (Deut. xvii. 14-20).

Jehovah would not allow a foreigner to reign over His people. Polygamy and wealth to excess were not to be permitted. He must not rely on horses and chariots, and he must write out a copy of the law and meditate upon it all the days of his life. The prophetic words of Deuteronomy we shall see were going to be fulfilled with unfortunate consequences as Israel's kings failed to comply with these requirements. We read that Solomon had 40,000 horses and 12,000 grooms in his stables. No wonder his heart was lifted up. It was David, the Lord's anointed who wrote "Some trust in chariots and horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Psa. xx. 7), and "The king shall joy in Thy strength, O Lord; and in Thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!"

(Psa. xxi. 1). What a pity Solomon did not heed the wise words of his father. We do well to remember this today; salvation and true happiness can only be found in God's provision for our peace, the Lord Jesus Christ. To look elsewhere for salvation and strength is useless.

It takes a great deal of courage to remain faithful to the Lord when all around are heedless of His love and grace. The apostle Paul, writing to believing Hebrews, said: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. ii. 1). The R.V. reads "drift away from them". Others make the words read "lest we should fall or stumble". Another "lest we forgot". How absolutely vital it is for us today to keep close to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to keep His Word. Not to become so engrossed in the things of this world that we neglect the spiritual things, and let them "drift away" from us.

Though Samuel was greatly displeased, as his custom was he brought the matter before the Lord:

"But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: *howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them*, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them" (I Sam. viii. 6-9).

These three features: (1) the demand for a king, (2) the rejection of the Lord, and (3) the significant reference back to Egypt, are repeated again in x. 18, 19, and again in xi. 15, and finally in xii. 1, 6-12. In this way the root of Israel's failure is emphasized. Yet despite this evidence in Israel's history, no action was taken by them or by later generations to learn the lesson that so patently stands out. This initial rejection of the Lord as their king, therefore culminated in His final rejection when their descendants uttered the tragic word to Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar".

Nevertheless, the Scriptures show us that the Lord is long-suffering and very gracious, not quenching the smoking flax. So another chance is given to the nation to repent during the Acts period, when once again times of refreshing and restoration would come. But hardness of heart and opposition continued. There is nothing that God can do when heart and minds are completely shut out to Him, so the book of Acts ends at chap.xxviii. with the sentence of blindness and deafness foreshadowed so many years before in Isa.vi.9-13, and warned by the Lord in Matt. xiii. 13-15. Just as their fathers were turned back into the wilderness for 40 years wandering, so Israel has wandered among the nations of the earth, persecuted and hated, and will find no rest until they recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as their King, and at last cry "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord" (Luke xiii. 35).

Consequent upon the instructions given him by the Lord, Samuel tells the people plainly what they must expect if a king of their own choice is placed over them. Their sons and daughters would be taken as servants. Taxes would be levied on seed, crops and

cattle, and after a long list of such extortions Samuel warns them: “And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day” (I Sam. viii. 18). Thus the “manner” of the king they shall have chosen in verse 11 corresponds to the “manner of the kingdom” which Samuel refers to in x. 25.

A Word in Season

“All power is given unto Me, in Heaven and in Earth”

(Matthew xxviii. 18).

p. 80

The oft quoted verse 19 “Go ye and teach all nations” etc. frequently omits the word ‘therefore’. Because “all power” was His, *therefore* could they go. Whilst Christ lived on earth, He told them not to go into the way of the Gentiles, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but, in Resurrection Power, He now includes the nations. Heaven and earth are worlds linked together very often with reference to the Millennial Kingdom, and Christ stands here, in the consciousness of the fact that He is yet to be the King on God’s Holy Hill. The word “power” is frequently connected with Resurrection and the Second Coming, see Matt. vi. 13; xxiv. 30; xxvi. 64; Mark ix. 1; Romans i. 4; I Cor. xv. 43; II Cor. xiii. 4; Eph. i. 19; Phil. iii. 10 (these passages use a different word); Luke iv. 6; John x. 18; Eph. i. 21; iii. 10; vi. 12; Col. ii. 10, 15 (in these passages the same word is used as in Matt. xxviii.).

Oh for grace, even now, to remember with Whom *all power* is found and to “cease from man” and “lean” upon the Lord.

“What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee”

(Psalm lvi. 3).

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The above words were uttered by David in the midst of daily conflict (verses 1, 2). Trust in the Lord, is very closely related to trust in His Word. Immediately after David says “I will trust in THEE”, he adds, “In God I will praise His WORD” and balances it with “In God I have put my trust” (4). Trust in the Lord and His Word dispels fear, even before deliverance itself comes. This was David’s experience as may be seen from verses 10 and 11:

“In God will I praise His Word; in the Lord will I praise His Word. In God have I put my trust; I WILL NOT BE AFRAID what man can do unto me.”

We commence with “what time *I am afraid*”, we end with “*I will not be afraid*”. There is also a direct effect upon the cause of David’s fear, as well as upon David himself:

“When I cry, then shall mine enemies turn back” (9).

The very cry for help becomes a weapon of defence. Trust begets trust, even as fear begets fear. David’s confidence grows stronger as prayer leads him to the Most High (2). He looks at what God has done in the past, and makes an *Ebenezer* of it, a starting point for future deliverances:

“For Thou hast delivered my soul from death; wilt not Thou deliver my feet from falling that I may walk before God in the light of the living?” (13).

The “soul” is greater than the “feet”, and ‘death’ is more than ‘falling’. He Who delivered from death and translated into *life* will surely continually deliver from falling that we may walk in the *light*.

Psalm lvi. should be read through, noting the progress of thought. David’s opponents are spoken of as ‘man’ and ‘flesh’. David’s deliverer is called “God”, “The Most High”, “The Lord”. There are many things that occur around us that send the chill of fear into our hearts, but let us take courage and say with the Psalmist:

“What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee.”

The Ministry of Consolation

“If the foundation be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psa. cii. 7).

he Companion Bible points out that the foundations here refer not to much to buildings as to “the settled order of truth or institutions”. In Isa. 19:10 the word is translated “purposes”.

It is not our intention here to discuss the evident prophetic character of the Psalms, but there are few who have received the illumination of Scripture who do not realize that the foundations *are* being destroyed at this present time. There is also no scriptural warrant to make us expect that these foundations will ever be restored before the Lord Himself comes.

“*What can the righteous do?*”

It is exceedingly difficult not to attempt to do something. One will feel stirred to great activity in witness, another will seek to form a league or a crusade. All these things may be perfectly right, yet on the other hand they may be wrong. The Psalmist seems to supply the first great answer to his question “What can the righteous do?” in the very next verse. What does he say?:

“The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord’s throne is in the heavens” (verse 4).

It is evident that something is implied between verses 3 and 4. It is as though the Psalmist said, What can the righteous do? Well, before he “does” anything let him remember this. First, his utmost “doing” is vain except the Lord deign to own it. Secondly, the crumbling foundations *here* do not by any means indicate that the foundations of the Lord’s throne are crumbling. Heaven is higher than the earth. At the very time when the earth will be seething cauldron, ruled by a man possessed by the Devil, the throne of God will be surrounded by a sea as smooth as though made of glass. When therefore you feel that the time has come for you to “do” something in view of the breaking down of the very foundation of truth, of society, of order; just take your place in spirit for a moment *there* where the temple still stands unsullied and the throne unshaken.

In correspondence with the words “What can the righteous do?” come the words of verse 5, “The Lord trieth the righteous”. The breaking up of the foundations is the work of the wicked (verse 6), but the Lord is overruling the work of the evil one to purge and try His people.

Think twice and thrice therefore before plunging into anything that may, after all, prove but a snare of the wicked one. Our testimony will not be less decisive because we have weighed our plans in the balance of the sanctuary:

“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Lord is in His temple. The Lord’s throne is in heaven”.

The Ministry of Consolation

No: 1

A word in season (Isa. 50:4)

One of the most enviable gifts that we can possess when seeking to minister to those in distress or sorrow is the ability to speak a word “in season” to him that is weary. There are many weary hearts that cry out for comfort, yet how many are rebuffed and chilled simply because the word of comfort has not been spoken “in season”. The word in season cannot be learned by rote, neither can it be acquired by an artificial means. Words that reach the heart must come from the heart.

In Isaiah 50:4 we may learn the precious secret.

1. The Tongue

“The Lord God hath give me the tongue of the learner, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary”

The gift of tongues surely never included a more precious gift than this. It is most important for us to observed that the word rendered “learned” in the A.V. should be “learner”. Of all the people most unfit to speak to sorrowing ones is the “learned” on as such. Isaiah uses the word so rendered, four times. “Disciples” (8:16); “Taught of” (54:13); and “learned” (50:4 twice).

The learner, the one who has passed through the school of experience, is alone fitted to minister comfort to the weary. How is the tongue of the learner obtained?

2. The Ear

“He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learner” (Isa. 50:4)

Here is the blessed secret. The tongue is influenced by the ear. This is so in the physical world. There are many who are dumb solely because they are deaf. They do not know that they can make an articulate sound, therefore they never speak. It is the same in the spiritual world. Many a believer is dumb in testimony, in prayer, in proclamation, because he is deaf. To have the tongue of the learner we need the wakened ear. The wakened ear means more than merely “hearing”, for “to hearken” in the Scriptures includes obedience. So, in Isaiah 50:5, the opened ear is associated with meek subjection:

“The Lord God hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back”.

3. *The Face*

The tongue can only speak as the ear is opened, and the opened ear cannot be disassociated from suffering and reproach:

“I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isa. 50:6).

The words reveal the Saviour here. He was and is the One Who preeminently has the tongue of the learner. As the great High Priest He is able to succour the tempted and tried, because He has suffered, being tempted, Himself: He does give a “word in season” to the weary. In Matthew 11:28, 29 we have those memorable words:

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls”.

The context is instructive. The cities wherein the Lord had done many mighty works repented not. Humanly speaking His ministry had been most discouraging. Yet:

“AT THAT TIME Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Matt. 11:25, 26).

Here is the glorious illustration of Isaiah 50. He Who was so meek and lowly that He could look up under these circumstances and say, “Even so”, He was the One Who could say “Learn of Me”. He could speak a word “in season” for He was not rebellious. He had the tongue because He had the ear and the heart.

Shall we not learn this lesson, and in our pilgrimage be better fitted to pour oil and wine of comfort, speaking a word in season to the weary ones whom we meet, and learning not only *what* but *how* to speak the word that shall minister true consolation?

The Ministry of Consolation

No. 2

“Fret not thyself” (Psa. 37).

The English word “fret” comes from the Anglo-Saxon *fretan* = to gnaw. The Hebrew word used here means to burn, to kindle (Gen. 44:18, Num. 11:33). The LXX translates the Hebrew *parazelloo*. This word is also used in the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 32:21, 1 Kings 14:22, and Psalm 78:58, and in the New Testament in Romans “Fret not thyself” in Psalm 37 must not be rendered by the English idea of to fret, to be peevish, to mourn, or to grieve.

One has only to look at the context of the command in Psalm 37 to see that the word contains the thought of envy and jealousy. It is not the fretting because of the wickedness of men, but fretting because of their prosperity. It is not the overburdened mourner that is addressed, but the believer, tempted by the temporal successes of the ungodly, to leave the pilgrim pathway. In verse 7 this thought finds expression:

“Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass”.

This kind of fretting leads to evil. Verse 8 shows this by immediately following with:

“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; fret not thyself in anywise TO DO EVIL”.

This kind of fretting is the result of forgetting, and of shortness of vision. David assures us that those successful wicked men,

“shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb” (verse 2).

Later, in verses 35 and 36, he enlarges upon this saying:

“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not; yea, I sought him, but he could not be found”.

Instead of envying the wicked and their successes, the Psalmist urges the more excellent way of trust in the Lord:

“Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the DESIRES OF THINE HEART, Roll thy way upon the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall BRING IT TO PASS...Be silent to the Lord, and wait patiently for Him” (verses 4-7)

What words are here! How they breathe the very atmosphere of quiet confidence and simple trust! “Delight thyself”; how much better this than “fretting thyself”! “Roll thy way” instead of bearing the burden alone. “Be silent”; “wait patiently”; what holy calm!

Peace with God is unalterable. The *enjoyment* of that peace is another thing. Philippians 4:5-7 is a far-off echo of Psalm 37:

“Be anxious for nothing, in everything by prayer...with thanksgiving...AND THE PEACE OF GOD...”