

# The Old Paths – July / September : 2024 – № 43

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**B**ut be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. ... But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (James 1:22,25)



## From the Editor's Desk

### THE OLD PATHS

**“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, ‘Where is the good way’, and walk therein, And ye shall find rest for your souls”**

**(Jeremiah 6:16)**

Jeremiah was given a message from the Lord to a people who had lost their way, they were at a crossroads, they had a choice to make. The issue was obedience to the Word of God. Some said, “We will not walk therein” (6:16). Others said, “We will not hearken” (6:17). The Lord sent a watchman to sound the trumpet of truth. Jehovah said, “They have not hearkened unto My Words, nor to My law, but rejected it” (6:19).

“Stand ye in the ways, and see”. We are all travellers on the road of testimony and testing as we await the Lord’s coming. At the crossroads, we need a clear decision, as we stand and look. The choice is “the good way” of God’s Word, or to the left when we become travellers who have lost our way.

“Ask for the old paths”. The title of this magazine is NOT a sectarian name. Lest any should think it has become a divisive label we ask the reader to consider the solemn choice. It is a choice between right or wrong: of Scriptural Truth or Error; of Godly fear and obedience to the paths of Bible doctrine or falsehood.

It is a choice of life or death for collective assembly testimony in the House of God. The charge in Jeremiah's day was that the majority were straying from the ancient paths of the O.T. patriarchs to the ways of the nations around them listening to false prophets crying, "Peace, peace; when there was no peace" (6:14). They had formal worship, importing costly items from afar, but God's Word was rejected for new things.

"Where is the good way, and walk therein". This is "the good way" of repentance and reconciliation toward God, and reverent obedience to God's Word.

"And ye shall find rest for your souls". The result of studying the Scriptures and walking in simple obedience is the restful, peaceful conditions of unity, purity and Spiritual prosperity.

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## Daniel – The Image of Gold and the Fiery Furnace

### Chapter 3

(All quotations are from Daniel Chapter 3, unless otherwise stated)

#### **Introduction**

Possibly many years had passed since Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image in chapter 2. The king now commissioned an image of gold to be erected in the plain of Dura (v1). All representatives of the Babylonian kingdom were summoned (not invited!) to its dedication (vs. 2-3) and then commanded at the sound of music to fall-down and worship the image (vs. 4-5). Because of their refusal to do so (v12), Daniel's three companions were bound and cast into the burning, fiery furnace (v21). Their courage and ultimate deliverance has been an inspiration to believers in times of trial! The king then saw four men unharmed in the furnace and one like unto "the Son of God" (v25). This was another incident in Nebuchadnezzar's life regarding his dealings with God, yet he was still a long way off regarding a personal relationship!

#### **The Image of Gold**

This image of gold was 90 feet high and 9 foot wide and erected in the plain of Dura, possibly 10 miles south of ancient Babylon, in the Euphrates valley. It is unlikely that it represented any of the gods of Babylon, as it would have been named. We don't know if it had the resemblance of a man or the resemblance of Nebuchadnezzar, but we believe it certainly represented Nebuchadnezzar, his kingdom and his glory. It seems incredible that the king of chapter 2 is the same person here in chapter 3!! He had experienced the sovereign workings of God through Daniel in interpreting the dream-image yet he is still "unregenerate" and no genuine or lasting working of God has been seen in his life. The worshiping of the image would have been a sign of allegiance to and a recognition of the personal power and authority of the king!

#### **Why was the Image Erected?**

Why did the king set-up this golden image? Was it his pride? (See Dan. 4:30). It seemed like a perverted departure from the "dream-image" of chapter 2 where he and his kingdom were interpreted as being the head of gold. In that interpretation Daniel had also told the king that other kingdoms would follow, and that God alone had given the kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar until the next kingdom supplanted it (Dan. 2:37-39). There was no silver, brass, iron or clay in this new image. It was all of gold! There was no allusion to a successor. It seemed as if Nebuchadnezzar was rejecting the sovereignty of God, and really saying "I am the sovereign"! The king was still in spiritual darkness at this stage, although some "light" had been given him.

Perhaps he had a selected memory, and just wanted to remember that which spoke of himself – the gold. He seemed like a man obsessed with his own glory!

### **The Worship of the Image**

This golden image must have been impressive to look at and the sound of the many instruments playing most appealing to the ears. There was a sense of occasion at the gathering together of the most influential personnel in the kingdom. Yet the “worship” was the result of a self-centred obsession of one human-being (the king) and the object behind it was to enforce a submissive unity of the adherents! Whatever the image may or may not have looked like, there would be no doubt who this golden image represented! No preparation was required for this worship, it was just a mere formality; neither was it the result of any desire of the people to be there – they were gathered (vs. 2-3) and then commanded (vs. 4-5) to worship, with a final death-threat (v6) to those who did not comply and conform!

### **Real Worship**

What a contrast to Biblically-based worship today in simple, called-out companies of the Lord’s people, where Christ is the object and subject of our gathering. We don’t gather in architecturally impressive buildings that would take our eyes off Christ; neither do we gather to the sound of sensual music – there can be a danger of being taken-in by “the sweetness of the music rather than the harmony of the worship” (see Ephesians 5:19 and Psalm 50:23). Our worship is Christ-centred and enjoyed by willing participants, happy to acknowledge who He is and what He has done! Neither is our worship a mere formality (or it shouldn’t be!), but the result of being led of the Spirit. Unlike those in Nebuchadnezzar’s day, we don’t just turn-up; there is continual preparation.

### **Faith in the Furnace**

The three companions now faced the greatest test of their faith yet! Despite the 7-fold heated furnace before them, what calm confidence they showed of God’s power and His ultimate purpose. They had faith in God (see Hebrews 11:34) and never for one moment doubted God’s ability to deliver them from the furnace, yet they never presumed to know God’s will in the matter! The only things burned by the fire, apart from the king’s servants, were the bonds of the three faithful friends. Do we recognise that sometimes God’s plan for our lives might be different from our desires? Whatever God’s will was, they were prepared to submit to it. (Think of Job 13:15; “Thou He slay me, yet will I trust in Him”). They believed what Scripture clearly teaches us today, that God was able to deliver them from trials and situations but also able to deliver them in and through the same. God has promised His people not to fear through flood or fire (Isa. 43:2). What a comfort for us today as we think of the courage and faith of these three Hebrews, standing for what they believed and submitting whole-heartedly to God’s will in the matter!

### **Other Options**

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were wholly committed to the will of God in the circumstances – absolutely nothing is mentioned of any alternative way-out or compromise in the situation! Their reaction to the demand for submissive worship could have been so different:

- Everybody else is doing it; why be different? Yet they were willing to be different, and seemingly stand alone for God. They were not willing to conform to the pattern of popular, current opinion!
- It’s just a “one-off” situation; we might not have to do it again. Why forfeit our lives for a few minutes bowing down? Yet their consciences and their faith knew better!
- It’s easier to comply. Don’t cause a fuss. It is easier to comply and conform, but these faithful three valued the worship of the one true God more than they valued their lives!

### **Faith Today**

It’s unlikely any of us will ever be called to experience what the three companions went through, yet in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century believers can, at times, be under pressure and exposed to situations that demand them to comply and conform. Circumstances can change dramatically in life – what a difference from the privileged

and exalted position the three friends enjoyed at the end of chapter 2 (v49) to where they were now, facing persecution for their beliefs. Christians in many lands have faced persecution for a long time, but changes of attitude and the law in the West have put many believers on the spot, e.g. pro-abortion, sex education, LGBT+ issues, etc. God's people who refuse to compromise or to conform can often feel as if they are "in a furnace" – of loneliness, ridicule or suffering! We can be labelled as "bigots" and "narrow-minded"; there will be no acclaim for standing for the truth (not down here anyway!). May God give us all the courage and grace to stand for what is God-honouring in a dark and difficult day.

### **The Purpose of the Flames**

We have seen how the three Hebrews experienced the presence and power of God in a very real way, despite the circumstances. We too can know God's presence when passing through trials. For Nebuchadnezzar and those looking on, it was a witness of God's faithfulness to His own people. Never underestimate God's desire to witness to others through our trials! The king was then the most powerful man on Earth, being in absolute control of this vast Babylonian empire; yet he couldn't control his own rage (cf. the Sanhedrin gazing on Stephen, Acts 7:54). This all-powerful monarch was impotent to see his evil demands carried through. When the three companions came out of the fire unharmed, he acknowledged that it was God that had "changed the king's word" (v28). He then blessed their God (v28), made a decree that no-one was to speak anything amiss of God and that no other god could have done this (v29). The king now had an appreciation of the greatness of God, yet he still had not grasped that He was the only true God and still lacked a personal appreciation of Him.

### **Pre-incarnate Appearing**

We believe that the king's declaration of seeing four men, instead of three, walking unharmed in the midst of the fire is an example of an O.T. pre-incarnate appearing of Christ. Other examples of this happening in the O.T. could include the appearance of a "man" to Abraham (Gen. 18), the "man" wrestling with Jacob alone at the brook Jabbok (Gen. 32:24,30), the appearance to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:2-18) and Isaiah's vision in the temple of the Lord on a throne (Isa. 6:1-4).

### **A Picture of Future Events**

The deliverance of the three Hebrew friends from the fiery furnace foreshadows Israel's future deliverance at the time of the Tribulation period. The king forced everyone to worship the golden image that he had set-up, while in a coming day a one-world religion will be set-up and there will be enforced universal submission to the worship of the Beast or be slaughtered! (Rev. 13:15; Matt. 24:15). There is a difference, however, as Nebuchadnezzar would ultimately be a changed man (Dan. 4:37) – the Beast will never be! As the faithful three friends experienced the fiery furnace so the Lord will watch over the faithful remnant in a coming day, even though they may yield their lives; yet ultimately preserved and coming out at the end to serve! This incident is surely a warning to all Earthly rulers who challenge and seek to displace the rule of God!

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## **The Living God (1)**

This divine title occurs 31 times in the Bible. There are 15 references in the Old Testament and 16 in the New. It is interesting that the first New Testament reference (and therefore the central reference in the Bible) is Matthew 16:16: "And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'", where the Lord Jesus is seen to be the one foundation of the church, against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

The use of this title is twofold: bringing before us the foolishness of idolatry and the fullness of a relationship with the living and true God.

The first mention of “the living God” takes us to Mount Sinai where Israel heard the voice of the Lord announcing His ten commandments. In Deuteronomy 5:26 the people express their terror at hearing God’s voice: “For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?” and they ask that Moses should be the mediator between them. In Deuteronomy 18:18 the Lord expands His response to promise them another prophet and mediator, like Moses, but greater than he – “the Man, Christ Jesus”.

Should this not be our expectation whenever we read or hear the word of God today? It should be much more than the mere perusal of an ancient text. Through the mediation of One who is better and greater than Moses, we can hear “the voice of the living God” bringing glad tidings of “grace and truth”.

The next reference is Joshua 3:10, where Israel is finally on the eastern bank of Jordan. “And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites”. Now it is not just the voice of the living God, but His presence among them. Typically, the Jordan River speaks of death – death to self and the wilderness world. The living God Himself takes us across the dismal flood to enter the land of victory and to “lay hold on eternal life”. Paul describes this in Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me”.

Next, 1Samuel 17 takes us to the valley of Elah where, many years later, the armies of Israel are still struggling to keep hold of their possessions against the inhabitants of the land – the Philistines. The formidable giant warrior Goliath of Gath mocks the trembling forces of Israel under king Saul, issuing his arrogant challenge for someone to fight with him. David, recently anointed as God’s king of Israel, who would eventually replace Saul, responds, as we read in verse 26, “for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” and again in verse 36 before king Saul, “Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God”.

Probably, the trembling troops of Israel did not look or feel much like “armies of the living God”. But to David Israel was God’s special people and their armies went forth in His name. Let us have the same respect for God’s people today. Let us not “despise the church of God” however small and weak we may have become. Let us always recognise that the smallest and weakest assembly is still, “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Timothy 3:15). We can count upon His blessing to use the feeblest means, like a sling and a stone, to bring down the proud strongholds of the enemy.

A similar reference is found in 2Kings 19:4,16 and Isaiah 37, where the representative of the king of Assyria mocks the God of Israel as if He were just another idol. The response of Hezekiah and Isaiah was simply to pray to the living God, and one angel of the living God was sufficient to eliminate the Assyrian army of 185,000 men. Our God is not like the idols which have ears but hear not, He always hears and answers prayer in whatever way will be best for His people and honouring to His name.

In the Psalms the emphasis is on a personal desire for the presence of the living God, in Psalms 42 and 84. The Psalmist speaks of his thirst for the living God. It is not just a hunger, it is a thirst. We may be able to live weeks without food, but without water we would only survive a few days. The Psalmist didn’t just need the presence of God, he was desperate and could not survive without Him, like the deer panting for the water brooks in a time of drought.

Daniel exemplifies this thirst. In chapter 6 of his book, his colleagues in the Persian government were envious of the position Daniel had obtained through his integrity, for “an excellent spirit was in him” (v3). They persuaded Darius the king to decree that no prayer should be offered to any god or man except to himself for thirty days, and that any who did so should be fed to the lions. When Daniel heard that the

decree was signed, he just continued to pray to the living God. To Daniel the divine presence was more important than life itself, and even the horrors of a den full of hungry lions could not deter him. His enemies found him praying and soon he was shut in with the lions.

The next morning the king came to the den and cried: “O Daniel, servant of the living God...” (v20). What a powerful testimony Daniel had had before the king! Dead idols only produced deceivers and traitors; Daniel was the product of the living God. So, Daniel’s voice came from within the den, “O king, live for ever” (v21)! Soon Darius made another decree: “I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end” (v26).

The prophet Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem in days when God’s people were seeking gods of silver and gold like the other nations. Jeremiah repeatedly warned them by the word of the Lord of the inevitable consequences of such spiritual adultery, but his message was unheeded. In Jeremiah 10:10 he shows how different is the true God to the manmade gods of the nations: “The LORD is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting King: at His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide His indignation.”

Although Jeremiah’s message was rejected, he knew that what he spoke were “the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God” (Jeremiah 23:36). False prophets were speaking of their “burdens”, but all their messages came from their own heads. Rejected or not, Jeremiah’s words were from the Lord. Today, many, perhaps the majority, reject the word of God, but all the words of the Bible are still “the words of the living God”, “they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). It is unique and will always be unsurpassed, let us hold it fast in heart and life.

The final Old Testament reference is in Hosea 1:10 where Israel is spoken of as an unfaithful wife and her children as “not my people”. Israel could never be restored to His favour under the old covenant. But God would make a new covenant and fulfil all its conditions Himself on the cross. When Israel returned to Him by repentance and faith, He would once again call them “my people” and individually they would all be “the sons of the living God”. Today, Israel is still largely refusing God’s mercy and rejecting His Son. But wondrous grace has brought in those of other nations who come to Him as sinners on the same basis of faith alone. To “as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God” (John 1:12). “Sons of the living God”! Members of His family, partakers of His life, welcome in His presence! Let us show to the world around, the great things He has done for us and in us.

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## The Acts of the Apostles

### Chapter 14:19-28

#### **Persecution at Lystra (v.19)**

We recall that Paul and Barnabas had to leave Antioch of Pisidia because “the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts” (Acts 13:50). Also, at Iconium, “unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected towards the brethren” and “there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them” (Acts 14:2,5). It wasn’t enough to expel the preachers, or to have malicious intent toward them, but such was their antagonism that they followed them to pursue their persecution.

How quickly the scene can change! The preachers only narrowly avoided veneration by the pagans at Lystra only to receive violence from them at the instigation of these pursuing Jews. These malevolent Jews could

easily manipulate the hurt pride and indignation of the pagans whose worship of the preachers was refused and so they “persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead”. What the Jews plotted at Iconium, now took place at Lystra. This is not a judicial stoning but mob violence akin to a lynching. This was a unique experience in the many perils endured by Paul; “once was I stoned” (2Cor. 11:25). Paul entered the experience of Stephen. No doubt he remembered the day when those who martyred Stephen, “laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7:58). Did Paul remember the words of Stephen’s dying prayer: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60)?

With disdain they dragged the body of Paul, as refuse, outside the city. True discipleship involves obedience, which may be costly and persistently so. While Paul was delivered from stoning at Antioch and Iconium, he was not from the stoning at Lystra.

The memory of this experience remained with Paul until the end of his life. In his last epistle he wrote “Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2Tim. 3:11-12).

While we recognise the extreme and brutal violence occasioned to Paul, there was evidently a divine compensation. He later wrote, “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2Cor. 12:1-4). Paul does not specifically associate this experience with that of his stoning at Lystra, however it would be difficult to avoid that conclusion!

### **Not forsaken at Lystra (v.20)**

There were a number of people saved as a result of the gospel coming to Lystra as “the disciples stood round about him”, that is around Paul’s body hoping to be able to minister to Him. This was exceedingly brave of young converts who could easily have become the focus of similar hostility. Some have wondered if Timothy was one of these disciples as he came from Lystra. However, this is probably unlikely as his name doesn’t appear in the record until Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-2).

It is such an event that Paul had in mind when he said that he was “persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2Cor. 4:9). Miraculously “he rose up, and came into the city”. Courageously he stays the night in the very city that had cast him out. Neither flattery nor opposition changed Paul. The next day Paul departs with Barnabas to go on to Derbe.

### **Preaching at Derbe (v.21)**

The comment about Derbe is concise: “and when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many”. Despite opposition they preached an unchanged gospel with fruitful results followed by a period of time spent in teaching the new converts. Perhaps Gaius was saved at this time (Acts 20:4). Paul’s primary focus was as an evangelist to sinners and a teacher to those who were saved. The Lord’s commission to the twelve included “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Paul is no less assiduous in that regard. Biblical evangelism aims not only at the salvation of sinners, but also the establishment of local assemblies and the edification of believers.

### **The return journey (v.21-26)**

Derbe was the furthest point of this first missionary journey. Paul and Barnabas now retrace their steps, “they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch [of Pisidia]”. Revisiting Lystra took special courage.

The focus in this return journey is in “confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith”. This apostolic instruction is intended to encourage and strengthen the saints, enable them to

lean on, and find their resource in, God and His word. This attention to teaching is surely a rebuke to any who think that salvation is the end product of evangelism. There can be no 'stand still' position, or drift, in the Christian life but a pressing on with resolution based firmly on the body of Christian doctrine. Salvation is by faith, but the evidence of the reality of salvation is continuation. However, it must be stressed that continuation is not a condition of being justified, but it is the natural outcome and gives evidence of genuineness.

Paul and Barnabas do not minimise the many hardships that may be encountered in the Christian pathway. However, the pathway leads ultimately to a glorious destination: "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God". They are emphasising the demands of real commitment to Christ. The kingdom is referred to here in its future sense, not something already realised (2Tim. 4:18; 2Pet. 1:11). The suffering of tribulation does not merit us entry into the eternal kingdom, our entry was guaranteed when we believed. However, the Lord Himself said to His own disciples, "in the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33), "but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world".

An important responsibility was discharged on the return journey, "they ... ordained them elders in every church". It is vital to note that there was a plurality of elders in every assembly. Ordain means to signify by stretching out the hand, that is they were identifying or publicly acknowledging those men in the assembly who had demonstrated spiritual growth and development and who could act as spiritual shepherds and teachers in the assembly. Here apostolic authority instituted and validated the leadership structure of local assemblies. The apostles clearly believed that the assemblies could function independently without the need of apostles or visiting preachers.

There are a number of words in the New Testament to describe the work of these men. We have the word "bishop", which means one who looks over, hence an overseer. While the religious world uses the word "bishop" to denote one man who has responsibility over a number of churches; Scripture is clear that there are a number of bishops or overseers in each assembly! The "bishop" word emphasises their sphere of responsibility and rule. In addition, we have the word for "pastor" or "shepherd", which emphasises their work of caring. The third descriptive word for these men is "elders", which does not describe their age, but their spiritual maturity. The men chosen evidently shewed the qualifications of elders as were later outlined in detail in, for instance 1Timothy 3:1-7.

Paul and Barnabas in identifying these men "prayed with fasting", just as had happened when they themselves had been sent out from Antioch as missionaries (Acts 13:3). This shows that the actions taken in regard to elders in each assembly were taken in dependence upon God and not as a result of any consideration other than spiritual qualifications. They also "commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed", that is the young assemblies as well as their elders. Paul and Barnabas know that they can rely on Divine faithfulness. The Lord is the focus of faith, not preachers, nor an organisation, nor any headquarters on earth. Each assembly is fully autonomous, responsible alone to our Risen Head, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Having completed the task of establishing elders in the various assemblies they had seen established we read, "And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia". So they crossed the Taurus Mountains from north to south coming down to the coastal plain. "And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia". They did not bypass Perga this time (Acts 13:13-14) although we are not told what resulted from their preaching there.

Attalia was their point of departure by sea "and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled". Having completed the work for which they had been committed to God's grace, return to Antioch would provide opportunity for a much needed time of rest and recuperation. The grace of God was empowered for their missionary service under divine direction. What they had started, they finished. In two years they had covered some 500 miles by sea and over 700 miles on foot, journeys that had dangers. Persecution had been experienced and, for Paul, a murderous beating.



### **Return to Antioch (v.27,28)**

“And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them”. This was no report meeting of self-congratulation! It was with becoming modesty: it was what God had done using Paul and Barnabas as His instruments, agents and co-workers. As God had given them the grace, so He must be given the glory.

Of special interest was the fact that God “had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles”. This “door” metaphor is used often by Paul: 1Cor. 16:9; 2Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3.

“And there they abode long time with the disciples”, presumably again fully involving themselves into the service of the local assembly as they had done in Acts 13:1-2. After all, God’s servants do not retire! It is in this, possibly 2-year period, that we may best place the events of Galatians 2:11.

(To be continued D.V.)

...Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. (2Timothy 2:10)

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## **Virtuous Women**

### **ESTHER**

**“Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”  
(Esther 4:14)**

The Name of God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther but the Hand of God is seen in every chapter. There is no supernatural interventions or direct heavenly communications found in these verses. The last twelve historical books of the O.T. give us lessons of Divine Sovereignty, balanced with Human Responsibility.

Who gave favour to a poor unknown orphan girl, a Jewish exile, to become Queen of Persia? A Divine hand moved to give the king a sleepless night, to guide the attendant to read the right passage in the book of records of the chronicles of the royal court. In the palace, amid the pomp, plots and politics of the greatest world empire then known, stretching from India to Ethiopia, it was not by human arrangement that Esther the Queen obtained favour in the sight of the Great Gentile monarch, and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre of acceptance to his presence (5:2). The Gentile queen Vashti was banished, the Jewish maiden Esther was crowned, Haman was hanged, Mordecai was honoured all in God’s plan, at God’s bidding and precisely at God’s time. The date appointed by earthly decree for the slaughter of the Jewish people was replaced by, “a great feast, and a good day”, of Jewish deliverance (9:1,18-19).

Of virtuous O.T. women, Ruth was a Gentile among Hebrews, but Esther was a Jew among Gentiles. Ruth by grace alone, was used in the preservation of the inheritance, whereas Esther played her vital part in the preservation of the people.

### **PROVIDENTIAL**

God stands in the shadows watching over His own. It was Sovereign Grace that made choice of us, “In Him

we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The decisions, choices, sicknesses of life, the trials of family life and assembly testimony are allotted to us by Divine Wisdom. We may work out, in the small daily things of life, what is our own will and responsibility. Yet, in the larger outlook of life, where we live, where we serve, what we do, what we achieve in perfect freedom of activity is governed by the purpose of God. Ahasuerus controlling nations and peoples, Haman erection gallows, Mordecai guiding Esther in the court, are all actors contributing to Divine purpose. The sphere of operations is God's will in undeviating righteousness. Divine election cannot be explained by human reasoning. We cannot compress the Eternal God of the Bible into a theological argument or man's philosophy. We willingly bow in worship and exclaim: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

### PROPHETIC

The book is written to give pictures of coming events, by allegories (not types), e.g. Hagar in Galatians 4. In Exodus, at the beginning of the history of the nation in the O.T., the enemy plans the extermination of Israel, God redeems His people and destroys their oppressor. In Esther, near the end of the O.T. history of God's people the enemy plans the destruction of the Seed of the Jews. The wicked are themselves defeated and a feast of deliverance is observed, not the Passover, but the feast of Purim. These writings will serve as an encouragement to the persecuted people of God through the ages, scattered among the nations. While the enemy plots against these, like Haman, like Iran today, and the antichrist in the future, God will take care of His people and preserve a remnant of the faithful. New Testament assemblies are under fierce attack without and within as this dispensation advances but faithful companies, will not deny the Lord's Name and will be preserved until the "Rapture".

### PRESERVATION

The story of Esther is the story of Divine Sovereignty in the darkest parts of the earth to preserve His people, the Seed of the Jews, in captivity, threatened with annihilation. God's name is not recorded but this very fact proves the Divine inspiration of this book. A human forgery could not reveal God's plans or God's time in such detail through one woman in the midst of sin, cruelty, debauchery and human depravity where God is not acknowledged.

Today, in modern times, God's name is not heard (except in blasphemy) on the lips of most world leaders. His name does not appear in the daily press in our time. The Word of God is violated, God's claims are ignored, Christ is rejected, and moral standards are that of the brute beast. Corruption rules in the corridors of power. There is abomination approved in the halls of legislation. Sin poisons the well heads of justice. Administration of rule is by a band of robbers and terrorists. Government is mixed in sleaze and scandal.

The rise and fall of the characters in the story of Esther continue the golden theme of God's rule and control in the kingdom of men. God will preserve His people in famine through Joseph in Egypt; from persecution through Moses cared for by the daughter of Pharaoh and through Daniel in Babylonian captivity. In our present study God foreknew the planned annihilation of His people by the wicked Haman. God took an unknown orphan girl, a Jewess and placed her as Queen on the throne of Persia for five years before she was needed in the time of great crisis.

A woman was first in transgression in Genesis bringing about, with her husband Adam, the fall of mankind. Yet we read of virtuous women of Genesis, Exodus, Ruth, Esther and even at the Cross. In Revelation, there will be an adulterous scarlet woman but the bride of the Lamb will be dressed in beauty, clean and white.

Today, a faithful spiritual sister in her own sphere can fulfil a vital role of godly influence in modesty and becoming deportment in the home, in support of her husband, in prayerful support of the truth of God. The book of Esther begins with six months of feasting and drunkenness, in preparation for war and disastrous defeat. Queen Vashti refused to exhibit her womanhood to the gaze of a crowd of drunkards. She was right. It was the violation of eastern custom, and an outrage of her modesty. Ahasuerus, degraded his wife and reflected upon her royalty. He was embarrassed before his princes and servants. The most

powerful man on earth was exposed publicly as having no authority in his own house. In fact, he revealed to all that he could not control himself. Domestic affairs did not require a decree of the laws of the Medes and Persians that Vashti; "Come no more before the king" (1:19). The modern form of festivities and celebrations in society by gluttonous feasting in hotels and the scanty immodesty of women will be avoided by the virtuous woman as a scene where, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccles. 2:26).

The woman, whom God used in chapter 2, was the opposite to this sinful background of lust and depravity. Esther wore no adornments or no jewellery; she required no lavish garments to enhance her unadorned beauty. When Esther was to come in unto the king, "She required nothing" (2:15). "The king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight ... so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen" (2:17).

### IF I PERISH, I PERISH

The key verse to subsequent chapters is spoken by Mordecai to Esther; "Who knoweth whether thou are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:14). Esther said, "So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" (4:16). It was clear to Mordecai that God ordered this. As a result of the scheming and bribery of Haman the Agagite, a foreshadowing of the antichrist, the Jews enemy; "Letters were sent by posts into all the kings provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and woman, in one day" (3:13). God not only CHANGES circumstances, God CREATES circumstances. On the advice of the godly Mordecai, it is now time for Esther to declare her identity and boldly declare to the king that these people who are to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish, are "my people" (7:3).

So serious was this murderous scheme of Haman that it was a rehearsal of the cross; the plotting of religion and politics, the charge that this Man, "speaketh against Cæsar"; the bribe of "thirty pieces of silver" and the crime at Passover Time, "outside the gate", witnessed by faithful women.

The practical lesson we can learn from the stand taken by the faithful Esther is the value of solitary witness for God even when it seems that everything is against you. It is possible for a true hearted believer, brother, or sister in her own sphere, in a time of general departure, to keep the Word of God, and cost what it may, identify with God's people. Standing firm, when there may be few to stand with you, holding fast and faithful to the Word of God will be blessed by God. "Them that honour Me I will honour" (1Sam. 2:30).

Esther acted with becoming restraint and wisdom. She made no passionate appeal or acted on impulse. Her invitation to the first banquet was preceded by a three day fast which would not improve her appearance. Who but God, gave her favour before this heathen monarch? (5:2). She took sensible precautions to disarm Haman of any suspicion before the second banquet when she charged him openly before the king. Esther, at this point of crisis, erect, strong, her perfect form rises, her eyes flash, her finger points; "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman" (7:6).

### PURIM

Mordecai honoured; Haman hanged on his own gallows followed by his ten sons. These are pictures of the beast and the ten king confederacy of the future Day of Jacob's trouble. It was well known even in the dark days of captivity that the Jews scattered among the nations were special objects of Divine care. Even Haman's wife knew this (6:13).

The decree of death (3:13) was reversed by the decree of life (8:13). The message of the Gospel is tidings of the cancellation of the penalty of death. The message was sealed with the king's authority, no man could reverse it. Let us speed with all haste to spread the good news of saving grace. "Many of the people of the land became Jews" (8:17). Only twice do we read of large numbers of Gentiles becoming Jews; here and in the coming Kingdom (Zech. 8:22-23).

"Now in the twelfth month, that is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them

that hated them;)" (9:1). God's sovereign preservation of His people was manifest throughout the then known world in one day, when all seemed to be lost.

"Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of PURIM" (9:29). The fourteenth and the fifteenth day of the month Adar, called the feast of PURIM were remembered yearly through every generation, as the time when great mourning, and fasting, and weeping and wailing "was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day" (9:22).

"And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of PURIM; and it is written in the book" (9:32). Thus the virtuous woman Esther, the orphan Jew, fulfilled the vital work that God appointed to her and now quietly retires from the page of Scripture to allow the "declaration of the greatness of Mordecai" (10:2-3) to be the closing item of the book.

"The laws of the Persians and the Medes" (1:19) and the "book of the chronicles" of the royal court (2:23; 6:1) have long since ceased to be relevant. The sacred writings of the lovely story about Esther, the Virtuous Woman, have been preserved to us over the centuries and will yet be used by the Lord to encourage His people until His Eternal Kingdom.

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## REST

### **Rest for the Sinner – Matthew 11:25-30**

These familiar and deservedly, well-loved verses, show the Divine and sovereign side of "rest" for the soul (vs. 25-27), "Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight.", and also the aspect of human responsibility, "Come unto Me..." (vs. 28-30). As in other passages of Scripture where these things are dealt with, they are found together and alongside one another. In verses 25-27, the Father is the Revealer of the truth concerning the Son, which is hidden from "the wise and prudent", to "babes" (vs. 25-26) and then the Son is the Revealer of the Father to "whomsoever" He will (v27). God has the right to reveal the truth to babes and to hide it from the wise and prudent. Salvation is a sovereign work of God and here, the subject is dealt with as "rest" for the seeking sinner.

In verses 28-30, the same subject of "rest" is in view, both in verse 28 and verses 29-30. It is dealt with in two aspects, first of all drawing attention to the Giver, "I will give you rest", and secondly, from the point of view of the Receiver, "and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

These verses do not deal with the careless sinner. The soul is labouring under a heavy burden of ritualistic duties, not idle and lazy. "For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light", is in contrast to the yoke of Moses (Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1). The burdened soul can labour from dawn to dusk under the false illusion that keeping the commandments will bring rest of soul and the assurance of heaven but it will never be found in that way. It is not the yoke of Moses but taking the yoke of Christ upon oneself, that provides rest.

### **Rest for the Saint – Psalm 37:1-11**

Psalm 37 reminds us that we live in a world of inequality and injustice, in which the wicked prosper, are "in great power", and cause difficulties for the righteous. As we read the psalm we can see the psalmist anticipating what we are in danger of doing, i.e. questioning God's ways and taking matters into our own hands. Why does God allow this and that? Do we think that we could run the world better than He does? The psalmist tells us where rest is to be found – "in the Lord".

There is a series of exhortations in verses 1 to 8. "Fret not thyself because..."; "Trust in the LORD, and do

good...”; “Delight thyself also in the LORD ... trust also in Him”, leads up to a climax in verses 7 and 8, “Rest [‘Be silent, instead of complaining’] in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him: fret not thyself because ... Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise [‘under and circumstances’] ... but those that wait upon the LORD [‘in contrast to the wicked’], **they** ... For yet a little while ... But the meek [again a contrast] shall ... and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”

Here is an absolute abundance of counsel for when we find matters upsetting. Even when we cannot possibly be expected to understand the Lord’s dealings with us, we know that He is always right. We are not to murmur but to wait. He will sort matters out in His own way and in His own time. We should not try to resolve them ourselves by becoming angry etc. Do good. Do not allow yourself to be disturbed because of what others are doing. See that you do good. And do not forget the Lord’s words, “Blessed [‘happy’] is he, whosever shall not be offended [find no occasion of stumbling] in Me [in whatever I do]” (Matt. 11:6; Luke 7:23).

### **Rest for the Servant – Mark 6:30-32**

In the gospel of the Servant, Mark tells us of the way in which the twelve had been very busy, “and the **apostles gathered** themselves together unto Jesus, and told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves **apart** into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure [‘opportunity’] so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship *privately*.”

Again, the Lord is the source of “rest”. He does not say, “Go” somewhere else, to someone else, but “Come...” It was imperative to come **apart**, to a private place. It is possible for there to be too much frenetic activity, to be too busy, to become burnt out, dried up. We do need times of quiet and rest in private, alone with the Lord. It was only for “a while”. We do not necessarily need to get away. We do need to get something from the Lord, to be at leisure to feed our souls, to be refreshed by Him. Not much time away on holiday, is spent in seeking the Lord’s presence. We lose much if we do not avail ourselves of this vital ministry, which He alone can supply.

### **Rest for the Sufferer – Revelation 14:13**

This verse is specifically for those who suffer martyrdom during the period of the great tribulation but it is a message for us all. They “rest from their labours” and from suffering in their testimony for the Lord. They “die in the Lord”, according to His will, sealing their testimony with their blood. They have kept the faith of Jesus and have been “faithful unto death”. Affliction has ceased, They are carried into a scene of rest. It is complete rest. They “rest from their labours; and their works to follow [with] them. All is over except review and reward.

### **His Rest – The Rest of the Saviour and Sovereign – Isaiah 11:10**

“And *His rest* shall be Glorious.” He will have put down every foe, they will be made the footstool of His feet. There will be no more uprisings or disturbances of peace. The nations will “beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD” (Isaiah 2:4-5).

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# Get to Know Your Bible

## NEW TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 22.

### Revelation

#### CHAPTERS 21 AND 22

##### THE ETERNAL STATE (Ch. 21:1-22:5)

(21:1) THE NEW CREATION (Cf. 1Cor. 15:24-28 and 2Pet. 3:13)

“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth”. This means “new” in character as 21:5, “new” in kind, as time has given way to the eternal. The old is not renovated or purged but “passed away” (21:1,4), “fled away” (20:11), not just changed. Distinction between heaven and earth will be of condition rather than distance. The sea as a separation, “exists no more” (JND); water will still exist (22:1), but the hydrological cycle will cease. The restless, ruthless sea as John the fisherman understood it, would give way so that only peaceful, stable conditions exist.

(21:2-22:5) THE NEW CITY

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” (21:2).

The former earthly city of Jerusalem has fulfilled God’s purposes. This is a Holy City of heavenly origin (21:2-3,10), a literal, real city of structure, dimensions, and inhabitants. “Prepared as a bride, (the metaphor, the figure) adorned for her husband” (21:2). This description of radiance, beauty and purity is given to us in great contrast to the city of Babylon described as an ostentatious, filthy, immoral whore (Ch’s 18-19). It is to be noted that the word “prepared” qualifies “city” and “adorned” qualifies “bride”. This is not the church under the figure of a bride as this view would introduce a figure of a figure and in fact, reverse the metaphor. Subsequent verses describe a literal city of essence and community.

(21:3-7) THE TABERNACLE OF GOD

The most outstanding feature of the new creation and city is God’s dwelling place. “The Tabernacle of God is with men” (v3); His Presence, His People and His Power. His Pity is manifest in that every trace of sorrow and even the faculty to weep will be removed. The fourfold evidence of sin will be “no more” (v4). The whole drama of human existence from the fall of man until the Eternal State is finished (vs. 5-6). The “overcomer” is the faithful of all ages who have overcome the present conditions of their lifetime by faith and given the standing of “son” before God (v7).

(21:8) THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAKE OF FIRE

The eightfold characteristics of the eternally damned are listed in their rejection of God, their unnatural desires and wicked depravity; ending with “all liars”; manifesting the very features of Satan.

(21:9-27) THE BRIDE OF THE LAMB

John is invited to see “the Bride” (vs. 9-10 – the figure), “he shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem” (the reality) (v10). The description which follows brings the vision into the scope of human understanding. What he saw transformed earthly experiences which are described in meaningful terms. “Descending out of heaven from God”; as not descending to earth, but elevated above earth with access for the peoples of earth to come and go freely (v24). “He carried me away” (v10); there are two occasions when the angel transported John, compare 17:3 when he showed John, the “harlot”. “The Bride, the Lamb’s wife” is a figure of beauty, purity and love, now in permanent manifestation.

(21:11) THE GLORY OF GOD

“Her light”, radiance, out shining brilliance, sparkled as a diamond, “jasper”; a transparent crystal (4:3). These are things costly to men, lavishly used and manifesting “the Glory of God”.

#### (21:12-14) THE WALL, GATES AND FOUNDATIONS

The number “twelve” is the number of completion. “Twelve gates”, manifest the administration of the city in a scene of no hostility. “The twelve tribes,” the number of administration as an O.T. figure. “The twelve apostles” as formative in God’s N.T. programme are especially linked to Christ as “the Lamb” in suffering.

#### (21:15-17) THE MEASUREMENTS

Human standard of measurement is applied, whether “man” or “angel” measured it, the dimensions of the vast city would be the same. The “four square” pattern, is the shape of the Holiest. Since we have considered the duration of the Millennial Kingdom to be literally measured out as “one thousand years” (20:2-7, 6 times) consistent interpretation of the Scriptures must consider these to be the actual numerical measurements of the literal city.

#### (21:18-23) THE BEAUTY OF GOD’S TEMPLE

The city John sees is a spectrum of brilliant colour and dazzling beauty. The “street” (singular) perhaps a plaza, was of “translucent gold” (only here). “I saw” (v22), now describes the inside of the city with emphasis upon uninterrupted communion and unrestricted worship. “The Lord God Almighty (last of nine references) and the Lamb are the temple of it” (v22). The immediate presence of God, full access to the Holy of Holies, the most intimate fellowship with God is enjoyed because “the Lamb is the light thereof” (v23). These are Eternal not Millennial conditions, because the “sun” and the “moon” gave the former earth light.

#### (21:24-27) THE PEOPLES OF EARTH

“The peoples” (v24); the population of earth (not nations as political entities), shall conduct their life in the “light of the city” (The nation of Israel will be recognised forever, Isa. 66:22.) “Kings”; government does not imply status but direction and well ordering of things as they acknowledge the mandate of the city. They will habitually have access, but not citizenship, as the peoples of earth they can come and go freely. No emergency or danger will necessitate the closure of the “gates” (v25). “For there shall be no night there”; there will be eternal day; the light shall not be dimmed. Their “glory” and gifts of appraisal will be accepted (v26). All who enter will be objects of Grace and Forgiveness purchased by sacrifice and “written in the Lamb’s Book of Life”.

#### (22:1-5) THE THRONE OF GOD AND THE LAMB

In chapter 21 the background is the TABERNACLE OF GOD which is with men, emphasizing the earthly side of the Eternal state. In chapter 22 the centrality of the THRONE OF GOD and of THE LAMB (vs. 1,3) indicates the heavenly aspect of the Eternal state. These five verses do not revert to Millennial scenes but continue to describe conditions in the Eternal state, describing the same city where there will be “no night”, and where glorified bodies will need no rest for, “His servants shall serve [keep on serving] Him” (v3). “And He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the Throne” (22:1). Endless supplies of delight, satisfaction and sparkling purity will flow from the Throne. The Euphrates “dried up” (16:12).

The tree lined banks of the crystal river in the midst of the city bore a continual changing variety of fruit for the therapy of the peoples (v2). There was free access to the “Tree of Life” for all, in contrast to the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:17). “There shall be no more curse” (22:3), brought in by sin which will be banished forever in contrast to the Millennium kingdom (Isa. 65:20). “His servants”; God and the Lamb are One. They will receive priestly service, not arduous toil. The seven negatives; “no temple” (unsurpassed fellowship); “no light of the sun” (uninterrupted Glory); “no night”, “no candle” (unceasing light); “no curse” (undefiled purity); “no more sea” (undisturbed rest); “neither sorrow” (unending joy); no closed “gates” (unrestricted society) describe, in terms that we can understand, the bliss of the Eternal abode.

“In the land of fadeless day  
Lies the city four-square;  
It shall never pass away,  
And there is no night there.

And the gates shall never close  
To the city four-square;  
There life’s crystal river flows,  
And there is no night there.

There they need no sunshine bright  
In the city four-square,  
For the Lamb is all the light,  
And there is no night there”.

John R. Clements (1868-1946)

“And they shall see His face” (v4). This is the climax of the prophetic visions given to John in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. “They shall reign for ever and ever” (unto the ages of the ages, undisturbed peace) (v5).

### **“THE THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY BE DONE” (22:6-15)**

The Apocalypse, to the spiritual apprehensions of the believer, the unveiling of Jesus Christ as promised (1:1), have now been declared in words that are “faithful and true” (v6). God sent His “words” through the prophets and now shows His Word to “His servants”, to communicate the Divine programme that impending events will be sudden. “Behold, I come quickly” (I am coming without delay) (v7). The Rapture will begin the sequence of judgements to follow. The responsibility of the believer will be to allow his life to be controlled in light of these “words”. John who witnessed the cross, wondered and wept in earlier chapters, is now told to “worship God” (vs. 8-9). “The time is at hand”. The season is right for prophecy to be made known.

To the “unjust”, if the warnings are not sufficient, then God has nothing more to say. If the words are received by the righteous, nothing more is needed (vs. 10-11). “Behold, I come quickly”; from Christ Himself “each man” will be rewarded at the Judgement Seat for his lifetime of “work” (v12). Revelation, Creation and Finalisation is manifest in the “I am” of Deity (vs. 13-15). “Blessed are they that wash their robes (1:5; 7:14, JND), that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (v14). A profitable study in the last book of the Bible is to compare and contrast God’s ultimate reversal of conditions brought in by sin in the first book of the Bible, (Ref. “Tree”, Gen. 3:6). Those that are “without” bear the five characteristic sins of the devil and will be with him in the lake of fire (v15).

### **THE MORNING STAR (22:16-21)**

“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches” (v16). These special messengers, literal “angels” were sent to each church (Chapters 2 and 3). “I am the root (the ancestor) of David”, His Deity: “the offspring” (descendant), His Messianic links with Israel: “the bright and the MORNING STAR” (heralds a new dawn) as promised to the overcomer in the church at Thyatira (2:28).

“And the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’” (v17). The Holy Spirit and the Church re-echo the call to Christ to come as the Morning Star. “And let him that heareth say, ‘Come’”. John invites all who hear to join the cry; all saints call to Christ to “come”. “And let him that is athirst come”. An evangelical call to the thirsty sinner. The verb changes from the 1<sup>st</sup> person (Christ) to the 3<sup>rd</sup> person (the sinner) – let him come; “let him take the water of life freely”. This is the Gospel call of urgency.

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, affirm the completeness of “the book of this prophecy” (vs. 18-20a). Without the possibility of any doubt, He says, “I am coming”. No Scripture needs to be fulfilled. His coming is imminent.

As we conclude this New Testament commentary, we join to pray; “Amen, Even so, (yes) come, Lord Jesus” (vs. 20b-21).

...We know that, when He shall appear,  
we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him  
as He is. (1John 3:2)



## “When I Look on His Face”

By and by when I look on His face,  
Beautiful face, thorn shadowed face;  
By and by when I look on His face,  
I'll wish I had given Him more.

More, so much more,  
More of my life that I e'er gave before;  
By and by when I look on His face,  
I'll wish I had given Him more.

By and by when He holds out His hands,  
Welcoming hands, nail riven hands;  
By and by when He holds out His hands,  
I'll wish I had given Him more.

More, so much more,  
More of my love that I e'er gave before;  
By and by when He holds out His hands,  
I'll wish I had given Him more.

In the light of that heavenly place,  
Light from His face, beautiful face;  
In the light of that heavenly face,  
I'll wish I have given Him more.

More, so much more,  
Treasures unbounded for Him I adore,  
By and by when I look on His face,  
I'll wish I had given Him more.

Grace Reese Adkins

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## CHRIST – Our Redeemer

**Israel's Redemption by power and by blood from Egypt's intense bondage (Exod. 1-15) was but a faint foreshadowing of the far greater Redemption and blessing that Christ has wrought for us.**

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“Christ hath **REDEEMED** us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, ‘Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree’ ... But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To **REDEEM** them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” (Galatians 3:13; 4:4-5)

“Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: In Whom we have **REDEMPTION** through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins:” (Colossians 1:13-14)

“Who gave Himself for us, that He might **REDEEM** us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (Titus 2:14)

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal **REDEMPTION** for us.” (Hebrews 9:12)

“Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not **REDEEMED** with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.” (1Peter 1:17-20)

“And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou was slain, and hast **REDEEMED** us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;” (Revelation 5:9)

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## Diligence

### Repression against the Believer

When Peter wrote his first epistle to a suffering and persecuted people, he warned them to beware of the great enemy of God and man who would appear as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. By the time he writes his second letter he is concerned about a quite different danger in which the enemy would now appear as an angel of light seeking whom he may deceive.

For what was troubling Peter was the entrance among these saints of false teachers, emissaries of Satan masquerading as ministers of righteousness, who would by their subtle and evil teachings seek to seduce the saints from the doctrine according to godliness, in preaching a spurious liberty which was nothing but licence.

In Peter’s judgement the great antidote to this evil was to encourage the saints’ preservation by promoting their solid spiritual progress. His philosophy is, “grow” or “fall”.

It has been said there is no standing still in the Christian life, and Peter certainly seems to take that view.

He commences the epistle with a more detailed exposition of his alternatives (2Pet. 1:1-11) and he concludes his epistle with a further, final reminder of the same idea (2Pet. 3:17-18).

Looking briefly at his analysis of the situation in chapter one, we notice that he speaks firstly of the Christian’s **Resources** for spiritual progress (vs. 1-4), secondly of his **Responsibility** in the matter (vs. 5-7) and thirdly of the **Results** of such progress (vs. 8-11).

### Resources for the Believer

As to the Christian’s resources, Peter writes of God’s rich, sovereign grace in granting to His people by His own unique power “all things that pertain to life and godliness”. Evidently Peter regards godliness in the same way as Paul when, for example, he says “Exercise thyself unto godliness” (1Tim. 4:7). He is thinking of the athlete who rigorously trains with a view to attaining the peak of physical fitness. So obviously godliness is regarded as the spiritual equivalent of health and fitness.

God has not only given us all that pertains to the possession of divine and spiritual life, He has given us all that is necessary to develop that life into healthy and vigorous spiritual well-being.

Godliness is not God-likeness but God-fearingness, or even more precisely, good fearingness. In Greek it is “*eusebeia*” from “*eu*” (good) and “*sebomai*” (to reverence). The Latin language gives us the translation “piety”.

There is a bad fear which is the result of bad relations with God and conscience of sins which produces terror at the thought of having to do with God and to experience His judgement (1John 4:18).

But there is a good fear which is the result of a knowledge of God, His greatness and His grace (Psalm 96:4; 130:4). The better we come to know Him the more we will fear Him in this good sense. Intimacy with God will beget a holy boldness, but will never beget undue familiarity, flippancy or casualness, either in respect of God’s Person (Jer. 5:22-24), God’s Word (Psalm 119:161; Isaiah 66:2,5) or God’s House (Psalm 89:7). Casualness of dress or language or conduct in God’s presence is no mark of spiritual growth or maturity, but rather the reverse. And if it should be thought that this was true only in a past dispensation before Christ revealed the Father, we should consider such Scriptures as Acts 9:31; 2Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:21; 1Pet. 2:17.

This bounteous provision of God is described to us in the form of two “precious” things.

Peter first describes God’s people as those who “have obtained like precious faith” (v1). The word he employs, “obtained”, is most remarkable, signifying “to cast lots”, or “to obtain by lot”. Since so many Christians seem confused by the ideas of casting lots and casting votes, we might just pause long enough to say that they have nothing in common but are complete opposites. In the casting of lots the choice is left entirely to God, man is left quite out of the matter (Prov. 16:33; Acts 1:24-26) in the casting of votes, what is secured is the will of man, and God is left right out of the matter; it is democracy rather than theocracy.

So what Peter is saying is that the faith we need as a starting point (v5) has already been given to us as a bestowment of God’s sovereign grace. Compare 1Peter 1:7, where faith’s trial is said to be precious, more precious than gold.

But faith needs the word of God to rest on, so another “precious” provision of God’s grace is “exceeding great and precious promises”. As faith appropriates these promises, whether of present help or future reward, spiritual life develops and godliness increases.

This is depicted in a twofold way, positive and negative, as so often in Peter. The verbs in the two clauses are in the same tense and describe two contemporaneous effects, becoming partakers or sharers of the divine nature and escaping the corruption in the world in (lit.) lust, in other words, becoming more and more like God and less and less like the world. Partaking of the (or a) divine nature is not the new birth but the practical matter of conformity to God’s character in the manner Peter proceeds to explain. “Love” (v7) is the moral, though not chronological climax of this progress, and love is the divine nature (1John 4:8,16).

### **Responsibility of the Believer**

But having detailed for us the bountiful provision of God’s rich and sovereign grace, Peter now turns to the matter of our responsibility. The literal rendering of verses 5 to 7 is beautiful and significant: “But for this very reason also having brought in beside all diligence, in your faith fully (or abundantly) supply virtue, and in virtue knowledge, and in knowledge temperance, and in temperance endurance, and in endurance godliness, and in godliness love of the brethren, and in love of the brethren love”. Far from God’s wonderful bounty enabling us to sit back and suppose all is done, it challenges us to lay beside God’s gifts our own contribution of “all diligence” and to supply fully on our part the graces Peter proceeds to specify.

Notice Peter does not exhort his readers to supply faith; that comes from God, and Peter assumes that his readers already possess it.

It is true that sanctification (like salvation) is a work of God (Rom. 15:16; 1Thess. 5:23), but just as the careless and lazy sinner will never be saved, so the careless and lazy saint will never be sanctified. Peter here is quite emphatic that what we must provide if divine resources are to be effective in promoting spiritual growth is all diligence, that is, all manner of diligence, diligence in supplying all the following graces, and diligence at all times.

These graces are not like separate building blocks that must be added one after the other as in building a tower, as the Authorized Version rendering might suggest, but are more like links in a chain, the strength of which is the strength of the weakest link. The progression in the list is not chronological, for many new believers who are greatly deficient in knowledge are overflowing with love; rather it is moral, culminating in what is the moral climax of the divine nature, love.

**VIRTUE** – The word “virtue” has greatly changed its meaning over the centuries. The Greek word is “*arete*”, from the same root as the Greek word for “man”, because of his strength in lifting. Mr W.E. Vine says it frequently has the sense of power. Alford suggests that the idea in “glory and virtue” in verse 3 “by” (lit.) which God has called us, it that of God’s attributes and energies. It seems in verse 5 to be the first characteristic required to translate faith into works. Faith without works is dead, and spiritual energy and vigour are required as the first mark of practical progress. For this diligence is required. We might think of Abraham and the diligence with which his faith was translated into works, as James describes (Gen. 22; James 2:21-22) but it has marked all faithful souls of all states and conditions (1Tim. 5:10).

**KNOWLEDGE** – But energy needs to be directed aright. If we are to do God’s will, it is needful to know it. Zeal without knowledge may be worse than useless (Rom. 10:2). We need to apply ourselves diligently to study God’s word. Some are happy to be always busy in God’s work, but they hate to sit down and apply themselves to diligent study, whereas others are just the opposite. So we see why we need to bring in “all diligence”, not just diligence for those aspects of spiritual growth we prefer. Peter has spoken in his first epistle of the Old Testament prophets as examples of this kind of diligence (1Pet. 1:10-11). Other relevant references are Exod. 15:26; Deut. 28:1; Josh. 1:8; Ezra 7:10; Psalm 1:2-3; Jer. 12:16; Acts 17:11; 1Tim. 4:15-16. The words of God to Joshua in the references are especially appropriate and should be pondered.

**TEMPERANCE** – But knowledge is not the end in itself; the knowledge of good and evil must be followed by doing the good and shunning the evil. Since knowing God’s will must be fulfilled by doing God’s will, and God’s will cuts diametrically across man’s will, self-control will be continually needed. Temperance today is used almost exclusively of refraining from alcohol, so self-control is a better rendering. Paul speaks of it in relation to “all things” in the case of the athlete (1Cor. 9:25). Every fresh revelation of God’s will requires a fresh exercise of it, and it must be applied to every matter of life. We must make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the desires thereof (Rom. 13:14). And possibly no better example of “all diligence” in “fully supplying” it could be found than Paul himself who proceeds to write, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1Cor. 9:27, lit. “disapproved”).

Perhaps in placing “self-control” after “knowledge” Peter is anticipating the false teachers who taught that knowledge emancipated from restraint and brought in liberty which was nothing but license for fleshly lusts and indulgence.

Galatians 5:22-23 reminds us that self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, which stresses what has already been remarked, that this “supplying” is only possible by diligent appropriation of the divine gifts and resources, especially by faith laying hold on the inspired promises.

**PATIENCE** – But self-control is neither easy nor pleasant, and the exercise of it will call for endurance. The word in Greek is “*hupomone*”, literally an abiding under (“*hupo*” under, “*meno*” to abide). It may denote what is passive, endurance or what is active, persistence or perseverance. Both aspects are needful for Christian development, enduring wrong and persisting in what is right.

If an athlete needs self-control in his training he needs endurance in his competing. Endurance or persistence is one of the most commonly mentioned graces in the New Testament. It is one thing to start well, quite another to hold on steadfastly to the end. If the promises are to be effective in a man’s life, he will need both faith and endurance (Heb. 6:11-12). James says, “Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience [endurance] of Job” (Jam. 5:11). In this verse “endure” and “endurance” are the verb and noun forms of the word we have here in Peter. Job was often impatient, but

he endured, that is what mattered. What evils he suffered at the hand of Satan, and what provocations at the hand of his “friends”; but he endured!

But endurance may be a natural quality. The believer is to endure wrong and to persist in right, not out of any natural doggedness nor of any stubborn pride, refusing to be beaten, but just because it is the will of God that he should do so, and because he fears and desires to please God. So in endurance he is to supply godliness, good-fearingness, the same word as in verse 3. He endures, but humbly, in dependence on God.

**GODLINESS** – If self-control is a right relation to one’s self, and endurance is a right relation to one’s circumstances, godliness is a right relation to God. We are to react to every trying experience in the fear of God. He has allowed it; He has a purpose in it; He can be glorified in it. The more diligently we lay hold on His precious promises, the more readily we will understand these things and be enabled to live up to them.

In the day when Israel worshipped the golden calf, Levi was preserved and remained “on the Lord’s side” because he feared God (Exod. 32:26; Mal. 2:5). When Abraham was tested, he triumphed by the fear of God (Gen. 22:12). The Psalmist in Psalm 119 speaks frequently of the many trials he had had to face, and how he had endured because of his godly fear (e.g. vs. 87,157,161).

**BROTHERLY KINDNESS** – If, however, we stand in right relation to God, we will stand in a right relation to His children, our brethren. So in godliness we are to supply love of the brethren. This is a point the apostle John makes frequently in his epistle (1John 4:20-21).

Godliness is not a self-righteous, self-centred isolationism, nor a gloomy, solitary existence. Respect for our Father, should be accompanied by affection for our brothers. This is a point of emphasis in Peter’s first epistle. There should be a spontaneous affinity with, and affection for, all God’s children, just because they are God’s children, of the same Father and of the same family, possessing the same divine life through the same new birth. Differences of association and tradition may obscure this, but should never be allowed to obliterate it.

**CHARITY** – Then finally the apostle exhorts to love. In brotherly love they are to supply love. The two words are not related, though the ideas are similar. The thought would seem to be that although our brethren command a special affection, just because they are our brethren, love is not to be limited to them. Paul says in 1Thessalonians 3:12, “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you”. The Christian’s heart is to be filled with the love of God and to reflect in it all his ways. He is to love all men, not excluding his enemies, for this is God-like (Matt. 5:43-48), to be perfect as He is perfect.

But love is practical, and to love in truth requires much diligence (1John 3:17-18). Jacob is an example of the “labour of love” (Gen. 29:20. Compare – 1Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:10).

Love is the climax, and may well be said to be, as far as God is concerned, the divine nature, and as reproduced in us, a divine nature.

### Results for the Believer

Finally, and briefly, Peter speaks of the results of this spiritual progress. Firstly, and positively, “these things” will make us to be neither “idle nor unfruitful unto the full knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (lit.). Secondly, and negatively, the lack of “these things” (notice three times in three verses, “these things”) evidences spiritual blindness. Compare Revelation 3:17-18. This blindness is not total but relative. The thought here is not inability to see the eternal future, but rather that the vision of the past has grown dim. It is not so much forgetting that he has been purged, but forgetting his purification, the manner of it and especially the cost. What is lost is all too evidently the vision of Calvary.

So with another plea for diligence, the apostle urges the believers to make their calling and election sure. Since these matters are the divine side of salvation, it is clear that we can make them sure only evidentially. We are so to live that no doubt can exist as to our having been called of God, and therefore chosen of God. If we do so diligently we shall surely be preserved from stumbling all through life.

But besides, there is an eternal result, and it is surely significant that the word “minister” in verse 11 is exactly the same as “add” [lit. fully supply] in verse 5. If we on our part supply these graces, God in recompense will supply on His part, and that “richly”, an entrance into “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”.

Every soul, born again from above, will have an entrance into this kingdom (John 3:3-5), but the faithful will be furnished with a far richer entrance. They will be like sailing ships with every sail set and filled with the wind, all flags flying and every plank spotlessly clean, sailing triumphantly towards a rousing yet gentle welcome into the heavenly harbour and eternal rest at last.

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## MEN OF GOD SERIES

### (15) ELISHA

**“And he (Elisha) took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, ‘Where is the LORD God of Elijah?’”  
(2Kings 2:14)**

Elisha started his long period of service for God with the sight of the *ASCENDED MAN*. Elijah was the man of God who ascended into heaven without dying. Elisha was the prophet of God who in death displayed triumph over death. “They cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet” (2Kings 13:21).

Elisha said, to Elijah; “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me” (2Kings 2:9). Elisha served longest as prophet. He spent ten years with Elijah then fifty-six years after Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven; in total sixty-six years; he performed twice as many miracles as Elijah. The eight miracles performed by Elijah were in the administration of love and truth, often destructive of the enemy. The sixteen miracles by Elisha were constructive, miracles of grace in the blending of God’s purposes as they both served in the northern kingdom.

The lesson is that God encourages younger men to seek to follow the path of godly men who have gone before from generation to generation. Joshua was strengthened in the battle below while Moses interceded on the top of the hill. David defeated the Philistines and brought peace before Solomon enjoyed those peaceful conditions to build the house. Younger sisters should also be encouraged from older godly women, as Mary, the handmaid of the Lord was blessed by her visit to Elizabeth in the hill country. Timothy, the younger man was sustained by the prayers of Paul in prison. “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses (the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation) **the same** commit thou to faithful men (3<sup>rd</sup> generation), who shall be able to teach others also (4<sup>th</sup> generation)” (2Tim. 2:2). Notice “the same”, not new men, new means or new methods.

### THE CONDITIONS OF FAMINE

Elisha was tested as the farm labourer of Abel-meholah in the wilderness of Damascus (1Kings 19:15-16). There had been forty-two months of famine. Under king Ahab the nation had turned to idolatry. The prophets Baal were four hundred and fifty. The prophets of the groves, which sat at the table of the wicked Jezebel were four hundred. Yet, God had preserved a faithful remnant. Elisha was among seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal (1Kings 19:18).

Drought conditions brought bareness to the land, the grass was withered, the trees were bare, the streams and rivers were dry, and the people were in starvation. When Ahab met Elijah and said unto him, “Art thou

he that troubleth Israel?" (1Kings 18:17). Ahab's biggest "trouble" was that he could not find grass for his horses and mules while the people perished with thirst and hunger. In these conditions Elisha was found, "plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth: and Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him" (1Kings 19:19). Elisha would labour with others to feed themselves and provide food for his people. This means that there were eleven men with oxen and Elisha was the twelfth. Elisha began his work with small things, home life and farm life, labouring in unity with those likeminded, providing food for the people of God.

The lesson is that God does not call failures. When God called, David was minding sheep, Amos was the herdsman of Tekoa, Gideon was threshing wheat by the winepress, Peter's nets and his boat were full of fish. Young believers must first develop an appetite, to feed upon the Word of God, to feed and nourish themselves and help others in the daily duties of home life and in the assembly of God's people.

### THE COST OF FORSAKING ALL

"And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said 'Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee'. And he "took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, and boiled their flesh with the instruments (implements) of the oxen, and gave unto the people, and they did eat. Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him" (1Kings 19:20-21). Elisha is finished ploughing with his oxen, he will not need them anymore. After the courteous response of love to his parents, this decisive act showed that a new phase of his work had opened up to him. If it costs nothing, then our service is worth nothing. "Present your bodies (once instruments of fleshly lusts) a living sacrifice (surrender ourselves to His will, put all at His disposal, a priestly offering), holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The claims of Christ, means we are not our own. We are not servants of men or even of our own will. To serve God means sacrificial love to Christ leading perhaps to a lesser job, poorer material circumstances, less social time but more time to pray, to study the Scriptures, to abound in the work of the Lord, to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

### THE COMMITMENT OF FOLLOWING

"And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal". "Went with" (1Kings 2:1); "went down" (2:2); "came to" (2:4); "they two went on" (2:6); "they two stood by" (2:7); "they two went over" (2:8); "they still went one" (2:11), till "Elijah went up" (2:11). These were seven steps of progress for Elisha from obscurity. Start low if you want to grow. Youthful zeal is good but in the service of God, maturity, development in the Word and ways of God takes patience, time and testing. We either make progress, go forward or go back. There is no neutrality. Are we advancing or backsliding?

#### **GILGAL – THE PRINCIPLES OF GOD (2:1)**

This is where Israel first camped when they entered their inheritance. Elijah goes out where Israel came in.

*It was the place of separation; "Rolling away", the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt: THE WORLD.*

*It was the place of the sharp knives; circumcision is painful to THE FLESH.*

*It was the place of sanctification unto God. We are called to be a holy people unto God.*

Gilgal was central as the armies of Israel under Joshua went out to defeat the foe. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of THE DEVIL" (Eph. 6:11).

#### **BETHEL – THE PRESENCE OF GOD (2:2)**

Jacob first camped at Bethel (Gen. 28:16-19), where he took of the stones of that place for a pillow. When he awakened, he said, "Surely the LORD is in this place", "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven". He took the stone that he had put for his pillow (Christ laid down in death) and set it up for a pillar, (Christ raised up in resurrection). The local assembly of God's presence and God's people is, "The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1Tim. 3:15). Our service for God should be going out from the church of God with a view to seeing souls saved and

added to the church of God. We may find Bethel a hard place with many difficulties in the testimony but God is at the top of the ladder (Gen. 28:12-13).

#### ***JERICHO – THE POWER OF GOD (2:4)***

This was the scene of Israel's first victory, the key to obtaining the inheritance when the walls of Jericho fell down. Patience is always required before the power of God is manifest. For six days they encompassed the city, and seven times on the seventh day, before the trumpet sounded and the shout of victory. The lesson is that we must pray then pray again before the strong walls of opposition fall and the power of God is manifest.

#### ***JORDAN – THE PURPOSES OF GOD (2:6)***

This was the scene of Israel's first crossing when priestly men bore the ark through the waters, speaking of the death and resurrection of Christ "Who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). The Passover brought an end to bondage. The Red Sea saw the end of Pharaoh. The crossing of the River Jordan, brought an end to their murmurings and wanderings in the wilderness. The lessons for us are the end of worldliness, the devil's power, and the end of self.

"As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee". Tested at each of these places on the journey, Elisha's commitment to the path was reaffirmed three times (2:2,4,6). Elisha said to Elijah, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" (2:9). Elisha was content, confident, committed to the same places, portion, and principles. He desired no change, just a double portion. In days of departure and the desire for new things, we need young brethren and sisters to reaffirm their willingness to follow the old paths of Scriptural truth and to seek a double portion of the same.

#### **THE CHARIOT OF FIRE**

And Elijah said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so ... As they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it" (2:10-12). Elisha's work started after a man went up onto heaven.

May we be given eyes of faith to focus on the ascended Christ and to live with a sense of the spiritual, eternal, and invisible, above the clouds of doubt, disappointment and sometimes despair.

Israel in the Valley corrupted themselves and fell into idolatry when they lost sight of Moses who had gone up to commune with God upon the mountain (Gen. 32:1). On the slopes of the Mount of Olives, the disciples beheld the Lord ascending, "They looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up" (Acts 1:10). In the next chapter, they "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

The writer of the Hebrew epistle constantly causes us to look up by faith to the Enthroned Sin-Purger Who, "Is passed into the heavens (the outer court) (Heb. 4:14); He is "Made higher than the heavens" (the Holy Place) (Heb. 7:26); He is gone "Into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (the Holiest) (Heb. 9:24). "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith: who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Are we looking up? Looking beyond? Looking off? Looking away from the tangible, transient, passing things of earth? Christ has set down at the right hand of Majesty on high. That is His position but He is not inactive. Hebrews views Him sitting, Stephen saw Him standing, John saw Him walking, and Paul speaks of Him coming.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above (incorruptible, glorious, eternal) ... not on things on the earth (trifling, transient, temporal)" (Col. 3:1-2).



## Questions Frequently Asked

**Question:** “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife” (1Cor. 7:10-11). Does the word “depart” mean legal separation?

**Answer:** The straight Scriptural answer to this question is simply NO. The context of the two verses quoted completely rules out the idea of legal separation or divorce. The following verses stress the necessity and advisability of reconciliation. If conflict or trouble between a believing wife and husband has caused the sad and inadvisable step of one leaving the other, this must be temporary and the situation should be remedied by confession and humble reconciliation as soon as possible.

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**“And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit’” (1Corinthians 15:45-47)**

**W**e are all linked to the **“First man Adam”**, the federal head of mankind, as his natural descendents by procreation, regardless of race, religion or culture. But it could well be that we are not vitally linked to Christ, the **“Last Adam”**, the federal head of a redeemed people by spiritual birth from above. The Bible clearly teaches that in resurrection, we remain the men or women we were on earth. But our eternal destiny and experience are critically dependent upon us being linked spiritually to the **“Last Adam”** before we die, not only physically to the **“First”**.

### **The First man Adam was made a Living Soul**

The **“First man Adam”**, being **“the first man is of the earth, earthly”** (v47); he was formed from the dust of the ground with an intricately complex body suited for soul-life on earth. God **“breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul”** (Gen. 2:7). He was the crown of God’s creation, made in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-28) possessing features beyond that of other creatures over which he was given dominion. He had the ability to forward think and reason, with personality and especially created to have communion with God his Maker. As ‘family members’ we still bear such features today, albeit in a fallen world.

But this **“Adam”** disobeyed God in eating forbidden fruit from the **“tree of knowledge of good and evil”**. He became a sinner, plunging his offspring yet within his loins into the same state of depravity, severing himself and them from union with God as an outcome, despite solemn warning of the consequence: **“For in the day that thou eatest thereof THOU SHALT SURELY DIE”** (Gen. 2:6-17). **“And Adam ... begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth”** (Gen. 5:3) bearing his own inherent sinful condition, desires and expectations. Our Adamic lineage is via Seth! **“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”** (Rom. 5:12), and **“...the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience”** (Col. 3:6).

Some protest, ‘this is unfair, unjust! – Why should I be held accountable, suffer the consequences for the

action of another?’ While it is true that being born into this world we cannot avoid being sinners due to our link with the **“First man Adam”**, it should be pointed out that, **(i)** those who protest are as much in wilful violation of God’s moral law as the most “blatant of sinners”; a little probing into their lives soon uncovers harboured sinful conduct that they are not so willing to admit to, let alone forsake – we call this hypocrisy, **(ii)** God has provided a remedy in the **“Last Adam”** for their reconciliation to Him, enabling them ultimately to live in a sinless state in the ages to come; yet strangely this path is often unacceptable to them!

## The Last Adam was made a Quickening Spirit

In contrast to the **“First ... Adam”**, who was **“the figure of Him that was to come”** (Rom 5:14), the **“Last Adam”** being **“the second Man is the Lord from heaven”** (v47). He, from His pre-existing realm, entered our world as a real man with a physical body, not just as spirit, through Mary’s virgin womb yet remaining uncontaminated by the sin of the **“First ... Adam”**, death having no just claims upon Him. But destined to die voluntarily yet violently, vicariously and victoriously, He **“came into the world to save sinners”** (1Tim. 1:15). Whereas **“by ONE man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of ONE shall many be made righteous”** (Rom. 5:19). As the **“Last Adam”**, He is the Federal Head of a new redeemed race of men; as **“the Second Man”**, He came to establish a new order of manhood.

As a **“Quickening Spirit”**, as per His initial birth, this does not presuppose that His glorious resurrection from the dead was in spirit only as there is plentiful evidence that He repossessed the same body in resurrection with many eyewitness to that fact (Luke 24:36-48; 1Cor. 15:3-8), albeit now suited for the eternal realm. There is a mortal **“natural body”**, governed by the soul with expectance of death and corruption and a **“spiritual body”**, governed by the spirit, to be characterised by immortality and glory to reside in a heavenly realm (1Cor. 15:42-44). As a **“Quickening Spirit”**, it emphasises that those linked with Him by His resurrection life through salvation, draw their life from Him, a life that can be entered into now by the indwelling Holy Spirit, but enjoyed in full blissful measure in future days when God’s eternal purpose in the **“Last Adam”** reaches its determined consummation.

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In light of the above, you must consider urgently whether you are still only linked to the **“First man Adam”**, an earth dweller, seeking earthly things with no hope beyond death **“but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries”** (Heb. 10:27). You will be raised from the dead but with a body suited for eternal torments, never to be consumed by the flame.

But God has much better things for those linked to the **“Last Adam”** through whom His eternal purpose will be fulfilled, regardless of mankind’s indifference, who think the world will go on indefinitely as it is. Acknowledge and forsake your sin, believe on the Son of God, **“the Lord from Heaven”**, resting completely upon His offering for you on the cross to receive His life and to become part of His church. Then you can serve Him for the remainder of your days on earth with the certain expectation of one day having a body, **“fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself”** (Phil. 3:21).

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