

The Old Paths – April / June : 2026 – No 50

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O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)



From the Editor’s Desk

GIVE ATTENDANCE TO READING

“Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine”

(1Timothy 4:13)

In the context of departure from the faith in the latter times (1Tim. 4:1), Paul the apostle, is advising the younger man Timothy. Firstly, he is to exhibit the personal qualities of being an “example of the believers” in...

(i) **GRACE:** In manner of speech, in life style, in charity, in fidelity, in faith and in purity (1Tim. 4:12). He then mentions three matters of priority using the definite article, “the”; “give attendance (pay heed) to” (4:13), **INSTRUCTION:** “the reading”, the public dissemination of truth. **EXHORTATION:** “the exhortation”, public encouragement from the Scriptures to reach the will and practical life of his hearers. **APPLICATION:** “the doctrines”, the body of truth, enlightening those that have ears to hear that they may be taught.

(ii) **GIFT:** “Neglect not the gift that is in thee” (4:14), by Divine enablement, apostolic authority, and the public confidence of his brethren. Our authority now is the apostolic teaching from the Scriptures.

(iii) **GROWTH:** “Meditate (attend carefully to) upon these things; give thyself wholly to them (be in them, make them your business, your absorbing interest); that thy profiting (progress, advancement, growth) may appear to all” (4:15).

By the grace of God, we humbly commit the teaching of the Word of God in another issue of the Magazine, to the reader for meditation, profit, practice and growth.

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The Prophetic Page

“THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY COME TO PASS” (Revelation 1:1)

“For yourselves know perfectly” (1Thess. 5:2). What is going to happen next? Where is this all leading to? It can’t go on like this! Even sensible people, though not born again, stare into an abyss of uncertainty fearing some life changing disaster internationally, nationally or locally is going to happen.

Bible-believing Christians can say that we know “perfectly” assuredly, accurately and in detail. We know intuitively by Divine Revelation. The Saviour said; “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1). The Thessalonians lived in a troubled city, it was in “uproar” due to heathen idolatry and Jewish bigotry, saying they have turned “the world upside down” as in Acts 17:5-6. The knowledge which the believers had was based on the experience of their “work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Thess. 1:3). They TURNED IN FAITH, TOILED IN LOVE and TARRIED IN HOPE. They lived by ATTRACTION, they “turned” to the living God from dead idols; ALLEGIENCE to “serve” as bondservants of the genuine God; in ANTICIPATION, to “wait”, wait up for, eagerly, expectantly, “to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1Thess. 1:9-10). He is the COMING ONE.

In the OT, He is the One to come. In the Gospels, He is the One who has come. In the Epistles and in Revelation, He is the One who is COMING AGAIN.

The only safe, sound, Scriptural source of information about what is going to come to pass is in the Bible, the Inspired Word of God. The prophecies of the Old Testament were forthtelling and foretelling. What was written was future when it was first recorded but has now been fulfilled. One half of the OT is prophetic and its predictions have proved to be certain and reliable. Details prophesied regarding the first coming of Christ have been remarkably fulfilled in literal detail. “Things which must shortly come to pass”, will come to pass.

Of His Body, He said, “I will raise it up”. Of His Church He said, “I will build My Church”. As to His return, He said, “I will come again”. He said “I go”, He said “I come”; “I will ... receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3). He will come, actually, literally, certainly and imminently. These words in John 14 were given in answer to DISTRESS. When He told the disciples in the upper room that He was going to leave them, Peter said “Where?” Thomas said “How?” Philip said, “Shew us”. Judas, (not Iscariot) said “Why”? He answered, “Now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe” (John 14:29).

In 1st Corinthians 15, the answer is given to DENIAL, “How say some among you that there is no resurrection

of the dead?" The answer is "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1Cor. 15:12,52).

First Thessalonians 4 answers a DOUBT about what happens at the Rapture to the bodies and spirits of believers who had already died. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1Thess. 4:16-17).

In Revelation 2 and 3, the promise of the Lord to the churches that He is coming, is the answer to their doctrinal DEPARTURE from the Word of God. To the remnant at Thyatira, the Lord says "hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:25). To the faithful at Philadelphia, He promises "I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation (tribulation), which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Rev. 3:10-11).

The inspired writers of the New Testament always wrote about the Lord's coming for His church as being imminent. There is nothing else to come to pass before He comes to the clouds to receive His own. "He (God) raised from the dead, even Jesus (who at His first coming, come to seek and to save), which delivered us (our Deliverer) from the wrath to come" (1Thess. 1:10). "For God hath not appointed us to wrath (the coming wrath of God upon earth, tribulation wrath), but to obtain (the obtaining of) salvation by (through) our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us" (1Thess. 5:9-10). This is the fruit of His death, the final instalment of Eternal Salvation. This is the pre-tribulation Rapture of believers in Christ, whether we die before the Rapture or are still living when He comes for us, we shall "live together with Him".

We belong to Him, He purchased us through His precious blood, nothing can separate us from Him, nothing can hinder us rising to meet Him in the air, nothing more needs to be fulfilled. In fact, our presence on earth, as living saints is holding back the coming wrath. It cannot begin until we are caught up, received by the Lord to be with Him, where He is in "My Father's House" (John 14:2-3).

What happens next? He is coming for us, surely, suddenly, soon, it must be very soon! He said, He MUST suffer, and He suffered for us. He also, MUST reign, and He will reign. "These things MUST shortly come to pass". "I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches". "He which testifieth these things saith, 'Surely I come quickly'. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:16,20).

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Daniel's Third Vision – The 70 Weeks

Chapter 9 – Part 2

(All quotations are from Daniel Chapter 9, unless otherwise stated)

Introduction

In our previous article on Daniel chapter 9, **Part 1**, we noted how Daniel, now in his mid 80's, was still faithful and close to his God. This godly man was aware by his reading and understanding of Jeremiah's prophecy (v2) that God's promised restoration of the nation after 70 years of captivity was imminent. As he interceded before God in prayer, Gabriel revealed to Daniel this "70 weeks" prophecy!

It has been said that "prophecy is just history in advance"! What a revelation of God's future purposes was revealed to Daniel that day, almost 2,600 years ago. When we consider the accuracy and precision of Bible prophecies that have already been fulfilled, it gives us, as believers, renewed confidence in Divine

inspiration of Scripture; it also gives us guidance for our present situation and continuing hope for the future!

Importance of the Prophecy

The book of Daniel was authenticated by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 24:15 and a careful study of this book is really essential if we are to understand the order of events in Bible prophecy. This vision that was revealed to Daniel concerned God's prophetic plan for Earth history, and there is a great emphasis on restoration in the prophecy. Later revelations in the New Testament (the Olivet discourse in Matt. Ch. 24, the "day of the Lord" in 2Thess. Ch. 2 and the detailed account of the Tribulation in Rev. Ch's 6-19) all directly or indirectly endorse Daniel's prophecy to predict future events!

Scriptural Interpretation

In Scripture there are many ways of expressing time periods e.g. hours, days, weeks, years, etc. In interpreting God's Word, the basic rule is that if what we read makes common sense in its ordinary, literal meaning then we take it to be such, unless it indicates otherwise. Consider the word "day"; the days of Creation are literal 24-hour days, while the Day of the Lord is a protracted period of time and is associated with judgement, wrath and destruction (Joel 2:11 and Jer. 46:10).

So, as we study the "weeks" of Daniel 9:24-27, we need to ascertain what they are really telling us, and what a "week" actually is. The expression "seventy weeks" to the Jewish people could equally mean a week of days or a week of years (Exod. 13:6-7 and Lev. 25:8). Used here, it cannot be "weeks" as we know them (a period of 7 days), for 70 weeks of 7 days amounts to just approx. 16 months. This was much too short a time for "the command to restore and to build Jerusalem" to have occurred.

The "70 Weeks" (vs. 24-27) – The First "69 Weeks" (v25)

These "70 weeks" (Heb. "*shavuim*", literally "sevens" or "period of sevens") are weeks of prophetic years, i.e. 70 of these sevens, giving 490 Biblical years! The prophecy has no explanation if it means weeks of days or weeks of months. A Biblical month is 30 days (Gen. 7:11,24; cf. 8:3-4) and a Biblical year is 360 days (Rev. 11:2-3 and 12:6,14). These "70 weeks" (of Biblical years) are divided into 7, 62 and 1 week(s) respectively in Daniel chapter 9.

The first division of 7 "weeks" (49 years) refers to the time taken to rebuild Jerusalem after the captivity, from the going forth of the commandment of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, as recorded in Nehemiah chapter 2. From the completion of the building of the wall and the city of Jerusalem unto "Messiah the Prince" seems to refer to the triumphal entry of Christ through its gates; riding upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass (Matt. 21:5,9). The year this happened completed the next 62 weeks of years, i.e. 434 years. So, from the original command of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem to Messiah's entry into the city was: 7 + 62 = 69 weeks of years = 483 Biblical years. This is supported historically!

The 70 "Weeks" (vs. 24-27) – The 70th "Week" (vs. 26-27)

After these 69 "weeks" Messiah was cut off (v26) and the 69th week of years ended, and the prophetic clock stopped. Therefore all 69 "weeks" of the prophecy are now historical, leaving the last "week" still to be fulfilled! This last "week" describes a covenant being established that leads to "peace" (1Thess. 5:3) and the re-establishment of temple worship in Jerusalem, but it only lasts 3½ years ("midst of the week") before the "Man of Sin" will break the covenant of peace and desecrate the temple ("abomination") and claim to be God (v27 and 2Thess. 2:3-4). This will all happen after the Rapture of the Church takes place (2Thess. 2:1 and 1Thess. 4:14-5:9).

The Prophetic Gap

The explanation for why the 69 "weeks" are all fulfilled, and that the last "week" (70th week) is still future is that there is a gap/time-lapse between the 69th and 70th "week" of Daniel's prophecy. The period in the "gap" is the Church age, that is, the age we are in now. This 70th week (7 years) has to do with the nation

(more specifically, Judah) – “upon thy people and upon thy holy city” (v24); the Church is not mentioned, as it will be in Heaven when Daniel’s 70th “week” (the Tribulation period) takes place on Earth.

Examples of the Prophetic Gap

All unfulfilled biblical prophecies have been temporarily suspended since the rejection of Christ by the nation. This situation, known as the prophetic gap, will continue until after the Rapture; then, and not before then, will Daniel’s 70th “week” begin to unfold! The reader is encouraged to look at Matthew 10:1-42 where there is a prophetic gap between verses 15 and 16. The first section (vs. 1-15) has been fulfilled with the Lord’s commission to the disciples; however, the second section (vs. 16-42) is completely different and still future.

In Acts 1:6, the disciples asked the Lord if He would restore the kingdom to Israel. The Lord replied that these things were not for them to know at that time, but in the meantime they would receive power after the Holy Spirit was come upon them. The time of the operation of the Holy Spirit was a gap until their question would be answered in the prophetic future. In Romans 11:17-24, Israel is seen as a broken-off olive branch. The gap occurs at that stage, since afterwards God is able to graft them in again. Isaiah 9:6 states “unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given”. The prophetic gap then occurs, followed by “the government shall be upon His shoulder...” The reader is encouraged to look at Zechariah 9:9-10, where the prophetic gap occurs between verses 9 (fulfilled) and 10 (unfulfilled).

The Two Princes

We need to be clear that “Messiah the Prince” (v25) and “the prince that shall come” (v26) are two completely different persons! “Messiah the Prince” is a clear reference to the Messiah, the One for whom Israel waited and Him being “cut-off” (v26) immediately points to our Lord Jesus Christ. The words of Isaiah 53:8 – “cut-off out of the land of the living” were prophetic pointers to the experience of Christ. However, “the prince that shall come” is a future personage on the world scene setting himself up in complete contrast to Christ. Daniel’s prophecies from chapter 7 focused on two main figures – the coming Messiah (Christ) and “a little horn” who opposes the Prince of Peace. This second prince here in chapter 9 must be the “Antichrist”!

The Antichrist and the Tribulation Period

After the Rapture God’s future prophetic programme will begin to take place. At this point the 70th “week” of Daniel’s prophecy will begin to unfold and “the prince that shall come” will take centre-stage during the Tribulation period. He (the Antichrist) initially will sign a 7-year covenant with the nation of Israel (v27), but after Satan is cast out of Heaven and down to Earth (Rev. 12:12) he will begin to enact his deadly hatred against Israel using the Antichrist and the False Prophet. The Antichrist will break his covenant with the nation after the first 3½ years (“in the midst of the week”, v27) and then severe persecution of God’s people will begin! Thus 3½ years of deception will be followed by 3½ years of desolation (v27).

The Final Three and a Half Years

While the first three and a half years will be “the beginning of sorrows” (Matt. 24:8), the time will then arrive for the “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21). What will have caused this change? The Antichrist will demand universal worship and his image will be set-up in the Temple. Thus will begin a time of unparalleled persecution of God’s people and for those who believe the Gospel of the Kingdom (Tribulation saints). This final half of the Tribulation period/Daniel’s 70th “week” is set by God as 3½ years, 1,260 days (Rev. 11:3) or 42 lunar months (months of 30 days) (Rev. 13:5). Yet there is an end in view “that determined” (v27). The prophecy confirms the end of the Tribulation period after 7 years, but also the destruction of the Antichrist!

Conclusion

What a revelation this “70 weeks” vision was to Daniel of God’s prophetic plans for the Earth. It was given to a man who knew and believed the then revealed mind of God in the Scriptures and whose life was

gauged and guided by such! With the destruction of the Antichrist and his armies at the end of the 70th “week” (Rev. 19:20) and the national repentance of Israel (Rom. 11:26-27) the nation will **finally** be restored and then all that Daniel prayed for will be accomplished!!

“...And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive unto the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:20-21)

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Thoughts on Ephesians Ch. 4

Ephesians 4:14-16 – The Goal of Collective Growth

At the close of the previous article in this series we began to consider the goal, the aim of the gifts bestowed upon the church by the ascended Lord. We saw first of all that this goal is conformity to Christ in faith, knowledge and spiritual likeness (verse 14). From verses 15 to 16, this is seen collectively in spiritual growth, and then, from verse 17 and into the next chapter, individually as genuine godliness.

The Goal (Continued – Verse 14) – Stability

The second reason that the gifts are given is to enable the saints to resist the influence of those who want to divert us from the purpose of God in Christ. Two figures are used here: little children and things blown about by the wind.

“That we henceforth be no more children” – the need of maturity. The word translated “children” specifically means “infants”, tiny children. Everyone delights in a newborn baby, but if it is still looking the same and making the same noises as years pass by, there is obviously something very wrong with it. How sad it is when Christians, perhaps even whole churches, show no signs of growth or of increasing maturity. The last written words of the apostle Peter were: “beware lest ye also, being led astray with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Peter 3:17-18).

“Carried about with every wind of doctrine” – the need of stability. Two things are especially prone to being carried away by the wind – feathers and leaves. Feathers are so light that the slightest breeze will carry them away. But feathers on a bird help it to fly. Leaves likewise are important when they are fixed to the tree as aids to its life and fruitfulness, but when they fall off, they are scattered wherever the wind will take them. In the same way believers also need to “abide in Him”. Apart from Christ we can do nothing. Apart from Christ we are exposed to every “wind” of doctrine invented by godless men to keep us in a state of instability.

Growth (Verses 15-16) – Collectively

The apostle now highlights the contrast between the unstable, divisive and unfruitful methods of men and the stable, united and fruitful growth which has its source in Christ the head.

First, we notice the difference in the matter – “speaking the truth” – holding fast the truth in everything we say and do.

Secondly, we notice the difference in the motivation – “in love”. This expression occurs several times in Ephesians, beginning with the position in which God’s wondrous grace has placed us – “before him in love” (1:4; see also 3:17; 4:2,16; 5:2).

Thirdly, we notice the difference in the manner – “grow up ... in all things”. No area of life or service should be outside the scope of this spiritual increase. His will, His grace and His glory should be everything to all the members of the body.

Fourthly, we notice the difference in the mindset – “into him ... which is the head”. The obvious meaning of the figure of the head and body to represent Christ and the church is that every part of the body should obey the Head, reflect His character and give Him the glory.

And **fifthly**, we notice the difference in the means – “even Christ: From whom...”. The methods and organizations of men may seem admirable, but there is no substitute for the spiritual power and wisdom which come from Christ alone, through the Spirit, guiding and energizing every part to promote its collective growth.

Verse 16 demonstrates how this collective growth takes place. This was to be true of “the whole body”.

ORDINATION: “fitly joined together and compacted by”. Ordination is, of course, a word used by religious organizations to describe the appointment of clergy to govern the laity. God’s plan for the true church is very different. It is an organism rather than an organization, hence the figure of the body. The only person ordained to be the head is the Lord Jesus. All others are ordained to be members “fitly joined together and compacted (sometimes rendered “knit together”). “God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1Corinthians 12:18).

COOPERATION: “that which every joint supplieth ... in the measure of every part”. “Every” makes it clear that no one is superfluous. Each one has been placed in the body to cooperate with the rest. In Colossians 2:19 they are called “joints and bands”. Joints have to do with activity and bands with unity. Therefore, every member has something to supply for the good of the whole in works and welfare. Romans 12:1-8 teaches us the need to have consecrated bodies and renewed minds in order to function together as “members one of another”.

OPERATION: “according to the effectual working”. This does not mean that the life of a church is a kind of “free for all”. Among the members of the body there are those who guide and those who are guided. But every member needs to be in constant contact with the Head, through His word and His Spirit. For each one it is “according to the grace that is given to us” (Romans 12:6). It is the same Spirit who provides gifts, the same Lord administers the service, the same God, who “worketh all in all” (1Corinthians 12:4-6).

EDIFICATION: “maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”. Paul often combines the metaphors of an organism and a building. It is the Lord Jesus who is building His church (Matthew 16:18), but on a local level He uses all the members of His spiritual body, to promote its own growth. There is only one thing which can enable such diversified members to contribute to united growth – “in love”, in the power of that unselfish, sacrificial, love which was demonstrated in all its fulness at Calvary.

To close, this teaching should impress us with the need to be always praying for every other member of the local assembly, and to be always sensitive to one another’s needs and abilities. No one should be seeking pre-eminence, or any kind of eminence, but just “by love to serve (i.e. bond-serve) one another” (Galatians 5:13).

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The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 16:32-40

The change salvation makes (v.32-34)

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” are the words spoken by Paul and Silas that are easiest to recall; but the additional words “and thy house” are crucial as well. Also, “they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house”. The preachers’ initial response was followed up by further explanation, showing that the Gospel message was more than the fourteen words of verse 31. They open the way of salvation more fully including to those of the jailer’s household. Evidently they were all people of an age making them capable of believing. We recall that all who were in Cornelius’ house believed and were baptized (Acts 10:44-48). Similar responses to the preaching occurs here as well.

The subsequent actions on the part of the jailer and his household evidences the reality of their conversion: “he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes”. This showed that not only did he believe but he had also thoroughly regretted, indeed repented of, his earlier ill-treatment of the preachers.

Teaching was clearly given to the new converts as they were “baptized, he and all his, straightway”. This may have taken place between the prison and his house, likely somewhere in the prison courtyard.

Following the baptism “he ... brought them into his house”, just as Lydia had done after her conversion and baptism (v15). This was not an illegal act as the jailer’s responsibility was to keep the prisoners safely and, in effect, produce them to the magistrates when ordered to do so. In addition, “he set meat before them, and rejoiced” expressing practical Christian fellowship and giving evidence to appreciation and inward joy. The reason for that joy was because he was “believing in God with all his house”, which represents a major contrast to his former “trembling” (v29).

Salvation always makes a change in every aspect of life, whether in the discharge of public duties and in domestic relationships and responsibilities. It is also important to note that God is interested not only in individuals but in complete households. While everyone was responsible to believe for themselves, nevertheless it is an encouragement that God has such an interest and disposition to bless in households. Indeed, God has an interest in every single person: “God our Saviour; Who will have all men [a generic expression embracing both males and females] to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1Tim. 2:3-6).

It is also interesting to note that the nucleus of the Philippian assembly came from such a diverse group of newly saved people: a prosperous businesswoman and her household, a slave girl and a jailer and his household. What a testimony to the saving grace of God!

Events the following day (v.35-40)

The next morning in Philippi commenced with a resumption of normal administrative procedures, which raises the question as to how extensive the “great earthquake” had been? Had it been miraculously confined to one specific location? Anyhow, “when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants [literally the lictors or rod-bearers], saying, ‘Let those men go’”. Presumably the magistrates thought that a public flogging and a night in jail would teach Paul and Silas such a lesson that there was no further need to keep them imprisoned.

The keeper of the prison conveyed the magistrates’ decision to Paul, “The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace”. This indicates that there was no intention to further investigate the case, yet this falls short of being a “not guilty” verdict. It appears as if the terms of their release was a requirement for Paul and Silas to leave Philippi quietly and immediately.

To the surprise of the jailer, the sergeants and the magistrates, the prisoners ‘turn the tables’ and become the prosecutors, putting the activities of the magistrates under judicial scrutiny: “But Paul said

unto them, 'They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.'"

Paul is here asserting that the actions of the previous day violated their Roman citizen privilege to have a fair trial. Perhaps in the previous day's mob rule excitement the Roman citizenship wasn't mentioned, or heard. But, as was earlier noted, Philippi was very proud of its status as a Roman colony with its privileges, tax concessions, etc. Such inappropriate action against Paul and Silas as Roman citizens would not therefore be well received by the Imperial authorities at Rome; so Paul is not prepared to allow the Philippian magistrates to get rid of them quietly and concealed. Essentially he demands that the magistrates come in person and in public escort them out, so demonstrating that they were not guilty of any charge. Having them formally conduct them out would also indicate the discourtesy of the actions and the beatings of the previous day.

Often the assertion by a Christian of civil rights and/or recourse to law can be unwise and counterproductive. Public scrutiny and comment, not least by the media, may produce results over which there can be no subsequent control. Financial resources and time may be squandered to no good effect. In addition, there may be unintended adverse consequences of such actions. The advice of Peter is "For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God" (1Pet. 2:19-20). Also, "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing" (1Pet. 3:17). In both cases Peter goes on to make reference to the submissive attitude of the Lord Jesus Christ when under, always totally unjustified, suffering. So 1Peter 2:21-24; 3:18, should be considered carefully and prayerfully.

The question to be addressed here is why Paul took this action in relation to the magistrates at Philippi? First of all, we should note that this was not to achieve any personal advantage or vindication. Second, he acted in this way for the benefit of others, namely for the freedom and wellbeing of the individual believers and the assembly being left behind in this city after the missionaries had left.

So "the serjeants told these [i.e. Paul's] words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans". Well might they be concerned! Due legal process had not been followed. Indeed, those responsible for the administration of justice had allowed their position to be compromised by their active participation in mob rule. The implications of the fact that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens and thus were entitled to the highest possible standards of a fair hearing, including the right to make their defence, were concerning for these magistrates. What might be the outcome if news of this got to Rome? They had every cause to be seriously alarmed!

The magistrates therefore "came and besought them", which means they came to the prison and sincerely apologised to the two missionaries. The fact that this apology was made in their official as well as their personal capacity would help to protect the Philippian converts from any subsequent persecution.

As well as giving an apology, the magistrates "brought them out", which implies actually formally escorting Paul and Silas out of the prison. At this point they "desired them to depart out of the city". They asked this of the two preachers on the basis of equality, because Roman citizens convicted of no crime could not be expelled from a Roman city! So this was a rather delicate proposal by the magistrates, recognising that they could not impose upon Paul and Silas an official exclusion order, yet being conscious of the excited situation in the city stirred up by those who had lost their income following the deliverance of the demon-possessed slave-girl.

However, Paul and Silas did not allow themselves to be placed in a position which could be used to infer that they had been summarily expelled from the city. So on coming out of the prison they went to the home of Lydia. It may well be that there they received medical attention, opportunity to wash, change their clothes, have a meal, etc. However, only that which is of a spiritual dimension is mentioned in the Scripture record: "And when they had seen the brethren [both brothers and sisters in the Lord], they comforted them, and departed". That is, they encouraged the new converts, said goodbye and left Philippi, satisfied

they had been vindicated and that their mission had been cleared of illegality. It would have been expected that Paul and Silas were those in need of the comforting! But suffering for His sake was a source of spiritual strength.

However, it must never be assumed that Paul and Silas were of such a robust constitution that the treatment and beating they had received had no effect upon them. Sometime later when Paul was writing to the Thessalonian assembly he made reference to their recollection, "But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi" (1Thess. 2:2). There was suffering and shame. Possibly after the physical wounds had healed, the psychological impact and shame remained vibrant in the memory.

Luke, apparently, remained to continue to support the work in Philippi. Philippians twice contributed to Paul's needs when he went onward to Thessalonica; and later during his first Roman imprisonment (Phil. 4:10-18). So the work which commenced in Philippi in very difficult circumstances continued to flourish; and we have the benefit of Paul's later epistle sent to these believers.

(To be continued D.V.)

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Meditate Therein

All around us things are changing at an unprecedented rate. Disturbances, upheavals and disasters are occurring in countries, economies, societies and in the lives of individuals. It is wonderful, in the midst of all the instability, turmoil and strife, to know that God is in control (Dan. 4:17), and that He never changes (Mal. 3:6).

The written Word of God never changes, for it is "the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1Pet. 1:23). Those who have not been saved cannot understand the teachings of the Bible for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God". The indwelling Holy Spirit reveals the truths of the Bible, for these things are "spiritually discerned" (1Cor. 2:14). The Word of God is true. Its truth is eternal and unchanging. We read, "For ever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven" (Psa. 119:89), and "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but My words shall not pass away" (Luke 21:33).

The Scriptures are not the product of men's imaginations, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2Pet. 1:21). The Word of God is inspired by God: it is "God-breathed" (2Tim. 3:16). Not only were the writers inspired but the very words used were divinely inspired. The Scriptures are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness so that the believer may be complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work (2Tim. 3:16-17). The Scriptures tell us the way of salvation (John 20:31; Eph. 2:8; 2Tim. 3:15), and give us assurance of our salvation (John 3:36; 1John 5:11-13). They tell us how to behave so that we might please God, both as individuals and as assemblies of God's people, and they give us some insight into future events and the eternal state.

In the Scriptures we read of the birth, life, sufferings and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord said, "he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). He is "the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), and the "express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3). If we study the Scriptures and the deeds and words of the Lord Jesus, He will be exalted and we will learn the mind of God and the will of God. If we are obedient to the truths revealed to us by the Holy Spirit we shall be enabled to serve God and be more conformed to the image of His wonderful Son.

Meditate upon These Things

Paul, writing to Timothy, stressed that Timothy was to be careful in all that he did because his behaviour would influence other believers (1Tim. 3:15; 4:7,15-16; 5:22). Timothy was to be diligent: he was told to “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2Tim. 2:15). Timothy was to spend time meditating, musing on the Word of God so that he might apply it to every aspect of his own life and, using the gift God had given him (1Tim. 4:14), be able to teach others. Paul wrote to him saying, “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all” (1Tim. 4:15).

As a result of meditating on the Word of God, a believer will profit spiritually, he will learn more of God, of His will, of His great and precious promises, and will experience joy and peace. Study and meditation will cause the Word of God to be retained in the mind and the Holy Spirit will enable the believer to use it in the varying circumstances of life for the blessing of himself and others, and for the glory of God.

Thou Shalt Meditate Therein

The Holy Spirit says to us, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1Pet. 2:2). Appetite for the Word of God increases as a believer feeds on that Word and grows spiritually. The Word of God will reveal a believer’s spiritual condition and the way forward in the things of God (Psa. 119:105). If we are to grow spiritually we must not restrict ourselves to quick and superficial reading of the Word but should meditate prayerfully on what God says to us. The believer should pray for his meditation to be controlled and guided by the Spirit, that God might be glorified, the Lord Jesus Christ exalted, and the believer blessed. David prayed, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer” (Psa. 19:14).

Godly men of the past meditated on the things of God (Gen. 24:63). David wrote, “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Thy works; I muse on the work of Thy hands” (Psa. 143:5), and “I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches” (Psa. 63:6). The writer of Psalm 119 delighted to meditate on God’s ways, His statutes, precepts and laws (vs. 15,23,48,78,97).

Joshua was told to “meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein” (Josh. 1:8). The aim of Joshua’s meditation was that he should do all that God, through the Word, instructed him to do. God promised Joshua prosperity and success if he would do these things. Joshua was told repeatedly to be strong and courageous (Josh. 1:6-7,9,18). His strength and courage would result from meditation on, and obedience to, the Word of God. In the same way, the believer should meditate prayerfully on the entire Word of God and not only on selected or favourite passages. Then he will be prepared, strengthened and enabled by the Holy Spirit to do the revealed will of God.

Delight in the Law of the Lord

In Psalm 1 we are told the way of happiness and the way of unhappiness. Happiness results from knowing and obeying God. Only the Lord Jesus Christ is entirely and eternally righteous, holy and sinless. He was obedient to His Father’s will even unto death (Phil. 2:8).

He always obeyed, glorified and pleased His Father (John 8:29; Matt. 3:17; 17:5), and He was the truly blessed and happy Man of Psalm 1.

In the first verse of that psalm we learn that the blessed man, the happy man, leads a life which is separated from the world and unto God. The blessed man knows the truth of the words, “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). The blessed man delights to study and meditate on the Word of God (Psa. 1:2). If we are to have time to study and meditate on the Word of God we need to discipline and organize our lives. This means choosing between alternative ways of spending our time. We need to exercise a spiritually profitable stewardship of time.

Meditation on, and obedience to, the teaching found in the Word of God will lead to happiness and a peace that passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7). The believer who gets his counsel from the Scriptures will think, behave and speak as God would have him to do, for as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7),

and “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). The things we think about determine our words and actions, and form habits and character. The blessed man who meditates on, and obeys, the Word of God will prosper spiritually (Psa. 1:3), and bring forth the fruit of the Spirit which is “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Meditation of Him shall be Sweet

The blessed man of Psalm 1 delighted in meditating on the Word of God, and we read in Psalm 104:34 that “My meditation of Him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the LORD”. Meditation on God and on the Lord Jesus Christ, the “altogether lovely” One (S of S. 5:16), who has revealed God to us, will indeed be “sweet”. Dwelling, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, on the Lord’s Person and Work, and on His soon return when He will come to take us to be with Himself for ever (1Thess. 4:16-17), will cause a believer to experience feelings of awe, wonder, joy, gratitude and love for Him that cannot be adequately expressed either verbally or in writing. Meditation on the Lord Jesus Christ and on the things of God is a source of happiness, help, guidance and strengthening for the believer and pleases and glorifies God.

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Get to Know Your Bible

OLD TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 7.

DEUTERONOMY

“And it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spake unto the children of Israel, according unto all that the LORD had given him in commandment unto them” (Deuteronomy 1:3)

Deuteronomy is the Book for the new Generation. The former generation have died in the wilderness. Only Moses, Caleb and Joshua remain. The journey that had commenced with the Passover in Egypt was at last coming to an end after forty years in the wilderness. They now stand, “on this side Jordan in the wilderness” (1:1), on the borders of the Promised Land. God promised the land to Abraham and the patriarchs. God honours His promises in spite of the disobedience of His people. Sin and disobedience always bring death and sorrow and delays the joy and blessing that God desires for His people.

There is great profit in reading this book. Not only does it record past events giving fresh information but it reaffirms the same covenant given for the wilderness journey now told in detail, to cover conditions when dwelling in the land. The prospect of a new LEADER and a new LAND did not bring need for new LAWS. A new generation could argue that God’s principles in the past generation failed, being too legal; Moses repeatedly said, “Thou shalt not” – ‘We need to change’! Sadly, such thinking prevails among assemblies of the Lord’s people in the present period. There is a great movement to change from the old paths of Scripture to something for the young, from Bible Study to playing with a ball; from reading the Scriptures to a period of recreation, organized games, musical items and lively activities. They say that we need youth leaders, who will give us what we want rather than what God knows we need for our spiritual profit and contentment in the vast inheritance of blessings in Christ Jesus.

The book of Deuteronomy can be divided into two main sections: Chapters 1-11 are retrospective with respect to the wilderness journey. Chapters 12-34 are prospective relative to entrance to the land. The final instructions of Moses are given in chapters 12-30 and the final words of Moses before his death are recorded in chapters 31-34.

REVIEWING THE JOURNEY (Chapters 1-4)

The word “remember” occurs 18 times and the expression “forget not” is used 11 times. They were to remember the PAST. “Remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt” (4 times), “a servant” (5 times). Before we were saved, we were in the blackness, bitterness and bondage of sin. Salvation delivered us and we should never think of going back to the world. They were to remember the PASSOVER all the days of their life. The blood of the Lamb shed on the Cross has separated us and made us different from our former life. They were not to forget the PATH, being told to remember all the way the Lord God had led them to humble them, to prove them and to know them. They were to remember the trial of faith at the Red Sea; the test of dependence at the bitter water of Marah; the trial of obedience at Rephidim; “that I may prove thee whither thou wilt walk in My law or no”, and “to do thee good at thy latter end”. They were not to forget the lessons of the “PROVOCATION” of the Golden Calf, and the lack of PROGRESS when the Lord smote Miriam with leprosy and the whole camp was at a standstill for seven days. They were to teach the same PRECEPTS to “your children” to the third generation. The lesson is that God’s principles, pattern and promises do not change, nor does God lower His standards.

The Lord’s teaching and Scriptural principles of assembly testimony are even higher in the New Testament. The lesson for each subsequent generation is that we need to constantly review progress in our journey. The lessons taught to us by men of God, who saw God’s hand in seeing souls saved and assemblies planted and who taught Scriptural precepts to guide us must not be forgotten. The present desires for new methods lead to the copying of religious systems without God, as practiced in open fellowships and human organisations.

THE REAFFIRMING OF THE COVENANT (Chapters 5-11)

It is a mistake to neglect the book of Deuteronomy thinking that it is a mere repetition of what has been written in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. The number of quotations from Deuteronomy in the New Testament is only exceeded by quotations from the Psalms, Isaiah, Genesis and Exodus. Three times the Lord Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy using the words, “It is written”, when He was tempted by the Devil (Matt. 4:1-11), quoting Deuteronomy 6:13,16; 8:3. When asked which commandment was the greatest, the Lord Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 in reply. This is the “creed” (Heb. “*shema*”) of Israel. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (6:4-5). These words were to be taught to their children, bound for “a sign” on their hand, kept as “frontlets” between their eyes, written upon the doorposts of the house and on the gates. The verb “to choose” (Heb. “*bachar*”) occurs 30 times in Deuteronomy, stressing the election of Israel based on the call of Abraham. The “covenant”, is a major thought in the book stressing their relationship as redeemed out of Egypt by God. The commandments are to be kept in remembrance and never forgotten as a basis of continued obedience to God’s Word, fellowship with God’s will and preservation from idolatry as they entered the Land of God’s promises.

RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE LAND (Chapters 12-26)

“These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth” (12:1). The term of the covenant into which Israel had entered at Horeb, had not changed but it was now to be renewed as dwellers in the land, no longer as travellers toward the land but now settled in their own land given them by the Lord. There were matters such as diet, the sanctuary, idols, tithing, Jubilee, Cities of refuge and first fruits, to be dealt with. There were also Judges, Priests, Levites and Prophets to be recognised. Various details for sanity, honesty and purity relative to daily life are established as necessary for the blessing of the people and the enjoyment of the bounteous land.

“Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree” (12:2). With Divine justice the nations were expelled, they had corrupted, polluted and destroyed their lands by worshipping false gods. Every altar, pillar, grave, graven image and their names were to be removed. In John’s Epistle, having declared the Lord Jesus as, “The true God and eternal life”, John adds, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1John 5:20-21).

“But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all the tribes to put His Name there, even unto His habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings ... And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee” (12:5-7). As then, so today, there are various “places” of falsehoods, fancy names and fictitious practices where the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ is not honoured. In contrast and complete condemnation to those places there is a place of God’s CHOICE, “the House of God ... the Church of the living God” (1Tim. 3:15); the place where God is HONOURED, “the temple of God” (1Cor. 3:16-17). The place where God’s ORDER is recognised, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2Cor. 6:17); the place of the NAME today, is the local assembly of which the Lord Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered in [unto, JND] My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). We gather, not to the place, but unto the Name of the PERSON.

When they were still in the wilderness God said; “Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes ... But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when He giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause His Name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you...” (12:8-11). These verses distinguish between “here this day”, that was on the border of the land, “on this side Jordan”, with the place of God’s choice, then having gone down into, passed through and came up out of the river Jordan, typical of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The tribes which did not cross Jordan, but settled on the wilderness side, were always more exposed to enemy attack and were the first to be carried away into captivity.

REACHING THE BORDER (Chapters 27-34)

As Israel stood on the borders of Canaan, they were overcomers. The review of the previous chapters brought them to an understanding of why God dealt with them as He taught them obedience in the wilderness. As they started out from Egypt, the nations and inhabitants of the lands would regard them as homeless fugitives, a collection of tribes and though very numerous, was of no military threat. Now Pharaoh, king of Egypt and his chariots, had been swept away, Arad, king of the Amorites, Og, king of Bashan, Sihon, king of Heshbon, enemies who sought to hinder their progress had been overwhelmingly defeated (29:7; 31:4). Surrounding nations were afraid of them, their hearts fainted, no spirit of resistance remained in them knowing that “The LORD your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Josh. 2:10-11). Having known triumph over their enemies, they can have faith in God who had brought them through, to enter the land as victors. The NT. lesson is, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might”. “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:10,12).

Moses set before the tribes of Israel the choice of the “blessing” of obedience, or the “curse” of disobedience, chapters 27 to 34. “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him” (30:19-20). Sadly chapter 30 also predicts “thy captivity”, and regathering of Israel because of sin.

“And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this SONG, until they were ended” (31:30). “Moses the man of God” (33:1), viewed the land from the mountain of Nebo (the mountain range), from the top of Pisgah (the mountain top), but was forbidden by God to lead the people into Canaan. There was no sense of complaint or bitterness in the words of Moses. He had to endure thirty-eight years in the wilderness because of the failure of the people to enter. The disobedience of the people had caused Moses much anguish, and now the Lord had told Moses that he would not enter Canaan despite his great desire to do so. He submissively bowed to the will of God. It is likely when Moses saw all

the land “to its boundaries” (34:1-4), that he saw more of the inheritance than Joshua ever conquered. However, the man Moses “whom the LORD knew face to face” (34:10), did enter the land to stand upon the Holy Mount of Transfiguration. There he saw the Lord whose “face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light” (Matt. 17:2).

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Someone Had Prayed

**“Men ought always to pray, and not to faint (give up)”
(Luke 18:1)**

The day was long –
The burden I had borne seemed heavier than I could longer bear,
and – Then it lifted;
But I did not know – someone had knelt in prayer;
Had taken me to God that very hour, and asked the easing of the
load;
And He in infinite compassion,
Had stooped down and taken it from me!

We cannot tell –
How often as we pray for some bewildered one, hurt and distressed
– The answer comes;
But many times those hearts find sudden peace and rest;
Someone had prayed, and by faith, a reaching hand took hold of God
and brought Him down that day!
So many, many hearts have need of prayer,
Oh, let us pray!

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Christ – The Firstborn

**“The Firstborn of every creature ... the Firstborn from the dead; that in ALL things He
might have the preeminence.”
(Colossians 1:15,18)**

As we take a look at the subject of the FIRSTBORN, particularly in its association with the Person of Christ, it becomes necessary to embark upon a survey of the word throughout the pages of Scripture. This will help to establish and to confirm how it should be correctly understood when applied to the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ and to prevent us from being “led astray with the error of the wicked”, and those who “follow their pernicious ways”. For there are many since the early days of church testimony, even to this present day, who foolishly attempt to use the title to reduce the blessed Son of God to a creature of His Own creation!

The term FIRSTBORN (“First begotten”, Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5) can be used in two ways in both the Old and New Testaments:

1. In its ordinary meaning when used to identify the literal first-born (or eldest) son, occasionally the daughter, of a man, the father, the one to whom by default the birthright belonged.
2. In its fuller meaning when referring to the rank, preeminence, dignity and privileges that the family member, marked out as the firstborn, has over their siblings. It is important to realise that this individual may NOT always be the literal first-born son.

In this issue, we will take a closer general look at each of these meanings and also draw out some practical applications along the way, before we consider how they are used with respect to Christ, the eternal Son of God in the next issue, Lord willing.

1. The Literal Firstborn Son (or Daughter)

In the OT, the most dominate use of the word is with respect to the first-born or eldest son of the father, rarely of a woman and then not directly (i.e. “firstborn of the maidservant”, Exod. 11:5). Selecting a few from the line of Abraham we have: “The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun” (Gen. 35:23). Again, “Now these were the sons of David, which were born unto him in Hebron; the firstborn Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess; the *second* Daniel, of Abigail the Carmelitess” (1Chron. 3:1). And towards the demise of the southern kingdom of Judah, “And the sons of Josiah were, the firstborn Johanan, the *second* Jehoiakim, the *third* Zedekiah, the *fourth* Shallum” (1Chron. 3:15). Tragically, none of the firstborn sons mentioned above ever achieved the primary and dignified status as expected of the firstborn within the family.

Respecting a firstborn daughter, Jacob got a shock when waking from his first night of marriage to discover that he had gone in unto Leah and not Rachel, his expected reward from his seven years labour of love for her. Upon challenging Laban as to why he had so beguiled him, he was promptly told, “It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn” (Gen. 29:26). So Jacob got a taste of his own beguiling conduct with Isaac, by taking the blessing from Esau (Gen. 27:18-29) after previously obtaining his birthright through taking advantage of Esau’s profanity (Gen. 25:29-34).

And Lot does not fare better with his firstborn (eldest remaining) daughter who suggested the ploy to her sister of raising seed of their father. He had decided to sojourn near, and then in Sodom where his family were heavily influence by its corrupting influence, including these two surviving daughters. He lost other daughters, son-in-laws, maybe grand-children, his wife and all his possessions in the overthrow of the four cities, and then became father to two nations that became a perpetual trouble to Israel: “...And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: ... And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Ben-ammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon” (Gen. 19:30-38).

Extracting a lesson for ourselves from this sad account, we should be careful of our associations and be sure of the Lord’s guidance in all that we do, where we live and in whose company we keep as, while Lot retained a measure of righteousness to himself (2Pet. 2:7-9), his family were ill-influenced. Likewise Jehoshaphat’s association with wicked Ahab (1Kings 22) resulted in intermarriage, with a wicked Athaliah ruling on the throne of Judah, and she certainly had no rights of succession to do so, after seeking to destroy all those that did (2Kings 11). Sadly, so many saints have paid the high price for compromising with their children, for seeking their prosperity in this world, though education and other ventures, only to see them get sidetracked and stumbled in things spiritual.

The ten sons of Jacob found themselves afraid, then astonished, when they revisited Egypt to replenish their supplies of wheat and to confront that seemingly stern and demanding “Egyptian” ruler of the land set over the corn. He unexpectedly brought them to his own house, washed their feet and set food before them, “And they sat before him (Joseph), the firstborn according to his birthright, and the youngest according to his youth: and the men marvelled one at another” (Gen. 43:33). Joseph was testing and sifting them as wheat to see whether their attitude had changed towards their father and Benjamin, Jacob’s

“remaining” beloved son of Rachel. These self-confessed “true men” (Gen. 42:11) became as broken and contrite men. From this process, Judah evidenced himself as a leader, acting as an advocate for his brethren (Cp. 1John 2:1). Perhaps we too at times need to be sifted as wheat to remove the chaff, but would we be shocked at how few grains of wheat may remain in the sieve? Let us remember we have One who prays for us, that through such sifting, even if allowed by Satan’s intervention as with Job, we may come out for the better (Luke 22:31-32) even as Peter did!

It becomes a solemn matter when we consider the manner in which the Israelites were delivered from their many years of cruel bondage in the “Iron furnace” of Egypt under the tyrannical rule of a new dynasty of Pharaoh’s, “which knew not Joseph”, or acknowledged God’s blessing to Egypt through him. Moses was commanded: “And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is My son, even My firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn” (Exod. 4:22-23). Due to Pharaoh’s hardness of heart, this tenth and decisive judgement fell, the most punitive of them all upon the “gods of Egypt” and the people, where no blood was applied; “And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle.” (Exod. 12:29).

God in His omniscience knew their identity and location and none were spared and the grief was sore and great, not only due to the loss of a family member but also of the “chief of *their* strength” (Psa. 78:51; 105:36), the death of the one as the possessor of the birthright. Pharaoh’s firstborn would have been ‘deified’ at his accession. Pharaoh had refused to humble Himself before the God of the Israelites (Exod. 10:3). We are reminded by Peter to “be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due season” (1Pet. 4:5-6).

And just to close the OT survey of this aspect of the firstborn, we can recall the fall of Jericho as Israel began to take possession of the Promised Land, that “Joshua adjured them at that time, saying, Cursed be the man before the LORD, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it” (Josh. 6:26). And that is what happened, as we say, to the letter (1Kings 16:34). There is always a solemn price to pay when one neglects such warnings as this. However, in grace, Christ visited this city centuries later to bring sight to Bartimæus, a blind beggar (Mark 10:46-52), and salvation to Zachæus, a probable thief and chief of the taxmen (Luke 19:1-10).

2. The Firstborn as Preeminent or Privileged in Position

The rights and privileges of a firstborn within the families of Israel were embodied in the Mosaic law. This is clearly understood in the context of when a man had more than one wife. Such fathers are warned: “Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his” (Deut. 21:16-17).

We see this right adhered to a number of times in the OT, one being with respect to Jehoshaphat, “And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah: but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he was the firstborn”. But this wicked son did not rise to the dignified position expected of him as the firstborn or as the king of Judah, for “he strengthened himself, and slew all his brethren with the sword, and divers also of the princes of Israel”. Because he followed the house of Ahab, the Lord smote him in the bowels with an “incurable disease” from which he died “without being desired” (2Chron. 21).

One of the best commentaries respecting the rights and privileges of the firstborn comes from the mouth of Jacob when pronouncing the future blessings on his twelve sons, many years before the Mosaic law was given, when the rights of the firstborn were acknowledged: “Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and

the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel..." (Gen. 49:3-4).

Reuben was the first to issue from Jacob's loins; this came with great expectations, blessings and excellency of status in his dignified position and authority within the family, preeminence over his brethren, a double portion of goods, succession in the rights to rule and one to be looked to for guidance and example. However due to his misconduct some 40 years earlier with Jacob's concubine wife, Bilhah (Gen. 35:22), he and his tribe were deprived the blessings of the firstborn. The leadership was transferred to Judah, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. 49:10); the double portion and birthright went to Joseph, "Joseph is a fruitful bough, *even* a fruitful bough by a well; *whose* branches run over the wall ... the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob ... who shall help thee ... who shall bless thee..." (Gen. 49:22-25); (See also 1Chron. 5:1-2).

One salutary lesson for us is that our conduct today can often rebound to our loss many years later: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8) and lose out on a full reward (2John 8; Rev. 3:11).

It is noteworthy that it was Leah who bore Jacob his firstborn son, probably against his preference: "And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren" (Gen. 29:31). This of course was the beginning of much rivalry in the family (Gen. 29:31-30:24) which often occurred when multiple wives were taken contrary to God's original order although He at times overruled, as in this situation. But while Jacob honoured Reuben's position, as noted above, it was the tribe of Joseph, Rachel's firstborn, who ultimately acquired part of the right of firstborn blessing. It reminds us that we should be careful to fulfil our obligations to all our fellow believers without preference or respect of persons or trying to work things advantageously for ourselves as the Lord can cause things to work out very differently to our preferences!

While Reuben lost his blessing as the literal first-born, Jacob intentionally gave the rights to Ephraim the younger son over the elder Manasseh, when blessing the sons of Joseph "And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn" (Gen. 48:14). Centuries later the Lord would add His blessing to this, "For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn" (Jer. 31:9), referring to the future days of Millennial blessing. And in this context Isaiah declares that the "firstborn of the poor shall feed, and the needy shall lie down in safety" (Isa. 14:30), speaking of the impoverishment of Israel being reversed in that future day of bliss, remembering that Christ Himself became poor (2Cor. 8:9) to make this all possible. So here are a few of the occasions in the OT when firstborn privileges were not always conferred upon the first-born (eldest) in the family which is the point that really needs to be emphasised.

And finally to indicate the preciousness and importance that was placed upon the family firstborn, as noted at other places in the OT, Micah wrote, "Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" (Mic. 6:7). Something far more precious and of value to God than any sacrifice offered to cover an Israelite's sin was their initial submissiveness and obedience to His word, "And what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (v8). And God demands the same from us.

And as per the grief in Egypt following the tenth judgemental plague, as the forthcoming period of Great Tribulation reaches its climax, the deep wailing and remorse shown by the surviving remnant of the nation of Israel toward their rejected Messiah at His sudden appearing is likened to that expressed toward the loss of a firstborn: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech. 12:10). Here is Jehovah speaking of Himself! While this appearing is still future (Rev. 1:7),

the physical piercing took place at Calvary by the soldier with the spear (John 19:34-37). So here is a powerful testimony to the fact that “Jesus” of the New Testament is “Jehovah” of the Old!

Hopefully something of the importance, privileges and value of the FIRSTBORN as expressed in the Old Testament has been grasped and appreciated that will assist us to fully more understand its application to the Son of God in the New Testament writings which will be considered in the next issue.

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Questionable Companies

It is true that Christians in the early days of the church era had problems that we do not have to face in these latter days. For example, it was comparatively easy for false teachers to appear among the saints and lead them astray by claiming to be bringing fresh revelation from God, because they did not have the complete revelation of God’s mind in His written word, the Scriptures, as we have today. They had the apostles with their manifest power and authority, but the apostles could not be everywhere, and frequently as they moved on the teachers of error moved in.

But we today have problems that the early disciples did not have to face. The only professedly Christian companies known in New Testament times were the assemblies of God. They were not perfect, and were always susceptible to the inroads of false doctrine, poor morals and wrong practice but, being gathered by God according to the one simple divine pattern, they were basically sound and consequently recoverable.

Yet in the warnings given to the seven assemblies of Asia in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and in the threat of the removal of the golden lampstand (Rev. 2:5; 3:16) we have the beginnings of the idea of “Christian” companies which no longer have divine approval and which are no longer a distinctively divine testimony, however zealously they may engage in religious activity.

We might compare those altars and high places erected for the worship of Jehovah in Israel in addition to the one divinely appointed “place of the Name” (see e.g. 2Kings 12:3).

Those early omens of departure have matured today into the full-blown manifestation of Christendom in which man-made, humanly organised systems embrace the multitude of nominally Christian “churches”, and true assemblies of God are a small minority outside of it all.

Our present concern, however, is not with those companies which are obviously part of the religious world system, members of a sect or denomination fashioned according to man’s rules and creeds and governed by their councils and committees. Those who have gone forth to a rejected Lord Jesus Christ to share His reproach outside the camp, who know what it is to be gathered simply to His name alone, will view such as constituting religious Babylon, and will want nothing to do with them.

Our concern is with companies which are professedly assemblies of God, claiming to be gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and which may at one time have been loyal to the truth of God, but which now have seriously departed from the New Testament standard.

There is, of course, no such thing as a perfect assembly; as long as the flesh is within us, failure will mark us all. We are thinking of serious departure which alas, is increasing alarmingly. For example, some companies mix up habitually with the religious world and invite its clergy to preach on their platforms so that the question is seriously raised, is it still a “called-out-company (*ekklesia*) of God”? Some set aside the head-covering and silence of the sisters in the assembly gatherings, customs that necessarily mark “the assemblies of God” (1Cor. 11:16).

Others have received into fellowship remarried divorcees, whom God calls adulterers (Mark 10:11-12; Rom. 7:3); how then can they be thought of as “God’s sanctuary” (1Cor. 3:16)?

Yet others have introduced paid pastors, setting aside the truth of the assembly as “body of Christ” with its variety of gift and the operation of the Holy Spirit (1Cor. 12).

It is foolish and irresponsible to say that it is not for us to judge, only the Lord can remove golden lampstands and not other assemblies. We are responsible before God with regard to what we have fellowship with, and if we support and have fellowship with what is contrary to His word, we are as guilty as those who have introduced the departure. To support and help weak assemblies is one thing, to continue to have fellowship with wilful and knowing departure is quite another, although it is often difficult to know where to draw the line.

There are three dangers. **Firstly** by supporting those who are doing wrong, we are supporting what is grieving to God and so we are antagonising Him. **Secondly** by supporting those who are doing wrong we are encouraging them in doing wrong. If godly saints withhold their fellowship it makes a point and could, if the company is as yet recoverable, lead to a rethink. **Thirdly** there is the danger of the effect upon ourselves.

We find an allegory with the leprous house of Leviticus 14. This house represents evil manifest in a company. It was to be examined by the priest, and if he was not sure, the house was to be shut up for seven days. If during this period any entered the house he became unclean. The house had not yet been pronounced unclean, but neither had it been pronounced clean. In other words its state was questionable. The man may have entered for a rest or to eat food, but he was defiled (v47).

Many Christians go on holiday and take little care as to assembly fellowship. As long as they can obtain an address of a nominal assembly, that is sufficient for them. “We are not going into fellowship, it is only for a week or two”, is their argument. But to enter a questionable house just for a rest, results in being defiled.

Some would go to hear a good preacher. They think a quick visit to a company they would not normally have fellowship with is justified if it will result in spiritual food. But to go to a questionable company for food, results in being defiled. Notice there is no specific prohibition from entering, but what spiritual mind would be happy in needless defilement?

Preachers, take note! If you go to a questionable company to minister the word you may well be the means of hindering the saints, not helping them. It could lead to associations being formed and things being seen which will harm good saints and even good assemblies. Remember Ahaz (2Kings 16:10-16).

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MEN OF GOD SERIES

(22) JOHN THE APOSTLE

**“Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved”
(John 13:23)**

John...

- Leaned on His bosom; he worshipped at His feet.
- He looked in the Tomb, he gazed up to the Throne.
- He beheld a Dove descending; he saw seven Spirits of God burning.
- He was banished on earth; he is the only man who prophesied from heaven.
- He was alone on Patmos; he saw multitudes in glory.
- He was isolated on an Island; he wrote about the city.
- He turned from the Terrestrial; he was translated to the Celestial.

John the Baptist was the first messenger foretold; the son of a priest from the country. He had a short ministry of 6 to 18 months as he pointed forward. John the Apostle is the last mentioned preacher, the son of a fisherman, from the city. He had a long ministry of 60 years. He is the last writer as he points back. John Baptist said, "Behold, the Lamb". He saw Him as He "walked", commencing His earthly work. John the Apostle says "Worthy is the Lamb". He beheld Him as He "stood", His earthly work at the Cross being finished.

John the Apostle speaks about "the mother of Jesus" (His humanity), "the feet of Jesus" (His pathway) and the "Cross of Jesus" (His Death).

John writes about His Deity, yet it is John who alone gives those tender touches of His Humanity, "wearyed at the well", wept at the tomb, thirst on the Cross. John's Gospel is the only Gospel which mentions the literal "blood".

John the Apostle, describes himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved". He lay upon His breast, he heard those Holy beatings of love, he gave those unique unfoldings as he said, "In Him is no sin".

HIS CALL

Matthew and Mark give the historical order, when the Lord called him, he was "mending his net", by the Sea of Galilee. This represented his old life as a Jew; the law he had broken but now, he began a new life as a fisher of men. John's Gospel reveals the old giving way to the new; Law and Grace (1:17); worse wine and good wine (2:10); a master of Israel and the new birth (3:10); the Passover to the Supper; the old commandment to the new commandment (13:34); the barren fig tree to the true vine (15:1).

HIS CATCH

Luke writing in the moral order, says he "was washing his net" by the Lake of Gennesaret. This is the beginning of his service. Fishing without the Master, he only caught weeds and scum. "Immediately he left" (abandons all), "the ship" (material gain), "servants" (earthly comfort), "his father Zebedee" (temporal security). He is no fool who leaves his last pay packet to follow the Lord. "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" (Quote by Jim Elliott, one of the five American missionaries who gave their lives for Christ, seeking to reach the South American Indians with the Gospel.)

HIS CHARACTER

"John" means the Grace of Jehovah, "Boanerges" means the sons of thunder. John displayed a balance of tenderness and firmness; grace and truth, black and white. In his Gospel he wrote about God's love yet exposed the devil's hatred. In his Epistles, we have the exposition of truth and the exposure of liars. In Revelation, he wrote about the Lion and the Lamb. The lesson is that if we are all love we become like a jellyfish, if we are all truth, we may be like an iceberg.

HIS COMMUNION

In Mark chapter 10, John is one of the twelve; in Matthew chapter 17, he is one of the three disciples; in John's Gospel (1:37), he is possibly one of the two disciples; in John chapter 13, he is the one on His breast. John enjoyed an increasing closeness of communion with the Lord Jesus. In the Upper Room, he is LEANING, reclining casually on the couch (John 13:23). Later the word suggests that he was LYING, falling over upon. We learn that as saints, we are in His Hand (safety), as sheep we are taken on His shoulders (support): as scholars, we should be at His feet (schooling). John leaning upon Him learned the secrets of His breast (sharing His thoughts). It is John in the Upper Room who learns about division in the company and asks about the betrayal (John 13:25). When the Lord tells them that He was going to leave them, the other disciples asked questions in consternation, John leaned closer. John was listening, learning, leaning, lying. The nearest to His breast knows Him best. On the shore at the Sea of Tiberias, in the morning light, John was looking; he said, "It is the Lord" (John 21:7).

"The disciple whom Jesus loved". This statement used by John five times, brings "Jesus" into focus and leaves the "disciple" in intentional obscurity. John the apostle could have learned this attitude from John Baptist who said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30).

In the Room (13:26): John being nearest to the Lord, prompted by Peter, asked the question. The answer by the Lord, exposed the betrayer and suspicion was removed. It was for the good of the company and faith was strengthened.

At the Cross (19:26): John is the only disciple we know for sure, that remained at the Cross. He saw, “blood and water” (19:34). He is the only Gospel writer who mentions literal, “blood”. He wrote, “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1John 1:7). We need to repeat again and again, “Jesus, keep me near the Cross”.

At the Tomb (20:3): John, the younger, outran Peter the older. John looked with reverence. Peter entered with boldness. John says that he saw “linen clothes lying” and the napkin lying in “a place by itself”. He witnessed evidence of a literal orderly miraculous resurrection. In the Acts, the two apostles unitedly bore witness, “with great power”, amid fierce Jewish hatred, that the Lord Jesus was risen from the dead (Acts 4:33).

On the Shore: In the absence of the Lord, they had toiled all night and caught nothing. Now at His bidding, John saw a multitude of fishes, he said “It is the Lord” (21:7). John wrote the Gospel of abundance. In John chapter 2, they had no wine. The beginning of miracles yielded six water pots filled to the brim with, “the good wine”. In chapter 4, the woman had no water in her waterpot. The Saviour offered her, “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (4:14). In chapter 6, they had no bread. He fed a great multitude and they filled twelve baskets of the fragments that remained. In chapter 21, they had no fish. In this last miracle, they were not able to draw the net for the multitude of great fish. When two ships drew the net to land, the disciples found bread and fish cooked already. The Lord waits on the shore to welcome us when the toil of night is over.

On the Mountain: As the Lord ascended to heaven, He revealed to Peter by what death he should glorify God. Peter “seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved” said, “What shall this man do?”; “Jesus saith unto him, ‘If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me’” (21:20-23). “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly, Amen, Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20). John, who was embraced in His love, was encompassed in His promise.

HIS COMPANIONS

James was his natural brother, in the family, in the business, in the Lord. Their mother’s interests are revealed to us as she sought the promotion of her two sons in the kingdom. James was slain in Acts 12. For him, the pathway to glory involved suffering and martyrdom.

Peter was his spiritual partner in the Gospel, as they laboured faithfully shoulder to shoulder in the book of Acts. They proved together that the pathway of service was dangerous. Over a long lifetime of service, John in fellowship with His Lord also enjoyed fellowship with those of like mind in the home, the business, in the Gospel and in assembly life, as revealed in his Epistles.

HIS CARE

The Lord had confidence in John. At the Cross, seeing His mother, to John He said, “Behold thy mother”. In his Epistles, he shows care for the fathers, the young men and the little children. In 2John, to the elect lady, a sister and her family, he says, “Whom I love in the truth” (v1). In 3John, he writes to Gaius, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (v4). The Lord still has need for those who care for His sheep, the sorrowing, and the sick. Would He send you? Would they tell their troubles and trials to you, confident of your guidance and care?

HIS COMMISSION

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer” (Acts 3:1). The story of the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, marks the first outbreak of opposition to the preaching of the Gospel in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, risen from the dead. This public healing of a longstanding case of helplessness before a gathered multitude of Jewish worshippers, brought praise to God, joy to the needy and a public testimony by two penniless apostles to a penniless beggar, of the power

of a Risen Christ. Behind the magnificent gate of Corinthian brass, 50 feet high, 63 feet broad, the priests held beautiful ceremonies, and conducted powerless ritual that offered no help to the crippled beggar of long time helplessness. This condition characterised the nation itself.

HIS CHARGE

“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John” (Acts 8:14). After Stephen was slain at Jerusalem and the believers were scattered, with the confidence and commendation of the apostles, Peter and John, anointed by the Holy Ghost, were sent forth into the new work among the Gentiles. There are billions of perishing souls today in this world, who are kept in darkness by the god of this world, and no one has even come to tell them about Jesus Christ Who died for their sins and rose again. Are you willing if you are called to be a missionary?

HIS CAPTIVITY

“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the Isle that is called Patmos, for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 1:9). John wrote his Gospel as John the apostle, he wrote his Epistles as John the elder. John wrote the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, as a companion in tribulation. Advancement in age and maturity in the work of the Lord does not exempt from trouble, trial and tribulation. He wrote from exile on a barren isle, 13 square miles of rock, with no rivers and little vegetation. Perhaps he was made to work in the marble quarries. Yet, in patient endurance he laboured on considering the triumph of “Jesus Christ” in that spiritual kingdom, far greater than Cæsar’s.

HIS COMMUNICATIONS

“I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter” (Rev. 1:18-19).

JOHN WRITING – John wrote his Gospel that we might believe. He wrote his Epistles that we might be sure. He wrote the book of Revelation that we might be ready. In his Gospel, he wrote “Behold the Lamb”. In his Epistles, he wrote, “Behold, what love”. In Revelation, he was told to “Behold, the Lion”. He said that he looked, “And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain” (Rev. 5:5-6).

JOHN WEeping – “And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon” (Rev. 5:4). Search was made in heaven, in earth and under the earth, and no man, “was found worthy”, it would surely make you weep. The Lamb, came and took the book, only the Lamb was worthy to finish the great work of Redemption. The nail pierced hand of the Blessed Man of Calvary is worthy to open the Scroll, uphold the Stars, break the Seals, wield the Sword, put in the Sickle and hold the Sceptre.

JOHN WONDERING – John saw a woman sitting on the scarlet coloured beast. She was called, “Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth”. She was drunken with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, “And when I saw her, I wondered with great amazement” (Rev. 17:5-6). This Babylonish system of religion and all her harlots revelled in the murder of the saints. John was shocked, amazed at the debauchery, depravity and slaughter. This is the final destruction of apostate Christendom which will become fully manifest after the Rapture of the Church.

JOHN WORSHIPPING – “And I John saw these things, and heard them ... I fell down to worship” (Rev. 22:8). John saw the Lamb upon the Throne, the Bride and her Beauty and the City Foursquare. John concludes his Gospel as he sees the STRANGER on the SHORE in the morning light, he says, “It is the Lord”. John concludes the volume as he sees the SOVEREIGN upon the THRONE. We echo his words, “Amen, Even so, come, Lord Jesus”.

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Questions Frequently Asked

Question: Can we find help from the Scriptures about frequency of attendance and punctuality at the assembly meeting?

Answer: The question needs to be asked time and time again among all generations, in every ethnic background. Thomas MISSED the meeting. He may have had a very good reason for not being there, but he spent “eight days” in unbelief. The disciples in ecstasy of delight said, “We have seen the Lord” (John 20:25). Thomas refused to believe the testimony of ten men. He used strong language; “Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side (lit.), I shall in no wise believe”. “After eight days” (John 20:26) this was a new beginning, a fresh start. The Lord was very gracious to him but he must have had a miserable week of doubt. Many choice saints, for serious health reasons, cannot be at the meeting. We have met believers, who because of danger of imprisonment, have partaken of the emblems as they remembered the Lord whilst walking through the forest. Always remember that He went the whole way to Calvary for you, and if physically possible, you should be at the meeting as it is pleasing to Him.

Martha was LATE for the meeting. “Martha was cumbered (distracted, drawn different ways) about much serving” (Luke 10:38-42). Hospitality is to be commended. “Use hospitality ... even so minister the same to one another” (1Pet. 4:9-10). Her fault was not in her hospitality but in her priority. “Lord, does Thou not care”? The Lord said that she was “careful (anxious) and troubled”. In this state, she seemed to think that Mary should reverse her priorities that “she help me”. The Lord provided spiritual food for Mary, she was at the meeting with the Lord, she had chosen that “one thing” of which there was need; she remained at His feet; she learned about His death and burial. Like the Rose of Sharon, Mary could have said, “I sat down under His shadow with great delight, and His fruit was sweet to my taste” (S of S. 2:3).

Martha worked, Mary worshipped (John 12:1-7). The Lord appreciates our active service at the right time but “the good part” (not to be compared), must come first, worship before work, the absorption of His Word before diligence in His service. Teaching before activity is seen in Acts 13:1-4. Due diligence is necessary, mindful of common travel conditions, to be there early; giving time to greet the saints respectfully; to assemble reverently, to meditate silently for a little before the hour appointed. This is evidence that we know why we are there. It is not just to please the brethren. It should be out of love to Christ, attraction to the Lord Jesus, and appreciation of the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The background of 1Timothy chapter 3 is of the corporate public meetings of the assembly. This chapter outlines godly Scriptural collective gathering and order, “In the House of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Tim. 3:1-16). If you habitually turn up late at your place of secular employment, your employer will realise that you are not really interested in the prosperity of the business.

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner (custom) of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as we see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). Christ draws us “together”. For the Hebrew believers, amid reproach and ridicule, “some” may have been returning to the synagogue. One of the first symptoms of backsliding is casualism and missing the meetings.

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“The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10)

LIGHTHOUSES and **LIGHT-SHIPS** are located along sea coasts, rocks or near shallow water such as sandbanks to warn shipping against the dangers of shipwreck during low light or darkness. **LIFEBUOYS** (large floating rings) may be placed on boats or near waterways such as ports or docks, lakes or rivers, and can be thrown to those fallen into the water and in peril of drowning, for them to grasp and hold on to.

Both the **LIGHTHOUSE** and the **LIFEBUOY** indicate that danger is near and help is available. The parallel thought is that of man in relation to God. Firstly he is in eternal danger, although he may not realise it. Secondly, God not only warns him because He is interested in him and loves him, but He has also provided the necessary help in the Person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”¹

When God speaks of perishing, He is bringing before us the idea of everlasting punishment and separation from Him. His justice requires it:

“And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”²

The above truths are quite terrifying, but this is reality and we exhort you to face it. There is, however, good news:

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”³

“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”⁴

Like the lighthouse, God not only reveals the danger that man is in without Him, but also expresses the desire to save him from his precarious situation. Like the lifebuoy that someone has placed nearby, God has provided the only means of salvation:

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”⁵

God has dealt with sin in the Person of His Son. In order to provide this free salvation for all who will receive it, the Lord Jesus Christ gave His life upon the cross at Calvary:

“Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”⁶

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Living Saviour:

“And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”⁷

As God sees us in our need, He lays upon us the responsibility to take action and accept His salvation on His terms. Remember that God is Holy and cannot allow sin in His presence:

“Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”⁸

“Testifying ... repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁹

Repentance is a change of attitude. Our sin displeases God. He directs us to leave our sin and to have faith in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Because you are in eternal danger, we plead with you to take action. A desperate jailor once exclaimed such a desire, with the answer quickly coming to him:

“What must I do to be saved? ... Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”¹⁰

“Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust.”¹¹

Bible Ref's: ¹John 3:16; ²Revelation 20:11-15; ³2Peter 3:9; ⁴1Timothy 2:4-6; ⁵1Timothy 1:15; ⁶John 10:17-18; ⁷Revelation 1:17-18; ⁸John 8:12; ⁹Acts 20:21; ¹⁰Acts 16:30-31; ¹¹Psalms 40:4;

(Written by John Axford [1950-2026], who served the Lord in Amazonas, Brazil – 1974-2024)

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