



THE OLD PATHS

July / September : 2026

№ 51



For Private Circulation Only

The Old Paths

For Private Circulation Only

This is a quarterly magazine for the propagation of the Word of God and thus for the encouragement and edification of the people of God.

EDITOR: A. Davidson

ARTICLES FOR PUBLICATION

Articles for publication should be emailed as follows:

From non-Indian writers to Alan Davidson – **alanshonagh@gmail.com**

From Indian writers to Joseph Shah – **topnew2016@gmail.com**

Acceptance of the articles for publishing is entirely at the discretion of the editorial committee.

No article either in full or in part, can be used without the prior permission of the publisher and the writer. However, a brief quotation from the magazine is permitted for the purpose of reviews and/or teaching with proper credits.

COMMITTEE

Ajay Chhatria

Joseph Shah

Paul Sheppard

SUBSCRIPTION

This magazine is supported solely by the freewill offering of the Lord's people. No member of the editorial committee, author of articles or any other person connected with the magazine receives payment, remuneration or gratuity of any kind. However, any believer led of the Lord to support this effort may send their practical fellowship to Mr Joseph Shah.

PUBLISHER

Joseph Shah, G. Hall, J.P. Road, Barakar, P.O. Pin: 713324,
Paschim Bardhaman, West Bengal, India.

Mobile: **+91 9832231662**

Email: **josephhablu@yahoo.co.in**

All communications concerning this magazine should be sent via email to –

topnew2016@gmail.com

Website: **<https://www.topnew2016.org>**

Contents

Editorial – Follow Thou Me	J.A. Davidson	98
The Prophetic Page	J.A. Davidson	99
Daniel – Spiritual Warfare	J.A. Brown	103
Thoughts on Ephesians Ch. 4	T.J. Blackman	108
The Acts of the Apostles (Ch 17:1-9)	Ian McKee	112
Get to Know Your Bible – Old Testament Outline (8)	J.A. Davidson	118
Christ – The Firstborn (Part 2)	Paul Sheppard	130
The Worship, the Walk and the Work of Faith	Selected	133
Men of God Series – (23) The Apostle Peter	—	139
Remember Now...	—	—

And at the end of the days I
Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes
unto heaven, and mine understanding
returned unto me, and I blessed the most
High, and I praised and honoured Him that
liveth for ever, whose dominion is an
everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is
from generation to generation. (Daniel 4:34)



From the Editor's Desk

FOLLOW THOU ME

(John 21:22)

At the commencement of the Lord's earthy ministry, walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two men casting a net into the sea. He said to Peter and Andrew, "Follow Me ...And they straightway left their nets, and FOLLOWED HIM" (Matt. 4:19-20). Nearing the end of the Lord's ministry, leaving Jericho for the last time, as He went up to Jerusalem, He saw two men, sitting by the wayside. He heard their cry for they were blind, and He touched their eyes; "And immediately their eyes received sight, and they FOLLOWED HIM" (Matt. 20:30-34).

Matthew chapter 20 begins with the parable of the householder who sent labourers into his vineyard, some at the sixth hour, some at the ninth hour, and some at the eleventh hour (Matt. 20:1-16). Peter and Andrew got an early call to the work. The two blind men followed Him at the end, like eleventh hour labourers. You and I, have been hired at the very end of the harvest. It may be even later than eleven o'clock in the Day of Grace; the bulk of the harvest has already been gathered in. All the labourers alike, received "every man a penny". The reward is not for the amount or the duration but for faithfulness as we FOLLOW HIM.

The first recorded words that the Lord spoke to Peter was "FOLLOW ME". The last recorded words which He spoke to Peter in John's Gospel; signifying by what death He should die are, "He saith unto him, FOLLOW ME" (John 21:19). When Peter enquired about John, the Lord repeated, "What is that to thee? FOLLOW THOU ME" (John 21:21-22).

Following Jesus, ever day by day,
Nothing can harm me when He leads the way;
Darkness or sunshine, whate'er befall,
Jesus, the Shepherd, is my All in All.

Leonard Weaver 19th Cent.

The Prophetic Page

J.A. Davidson

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

“I will come again, and receive you into Myself” (John 14:3)

The Lord's ministry to His disciples in the Upper Room (John Ch's 13-17), was to prepare them for the period of His absence. In chapter 13, He teaches them about right relationship with one another down here on earth. In chapter 14, He is putting them in communion with God when He is glorified with the Father up there in heaven. At the thought of His leaving, the disciples are “troubled” and perplexed. Without Him who would guide, provide and protect? Who would make all the decisions about where to go? Peter said, “Lord, whither goest Thou?” (13:36). Thomas said, “How can we know the way?” (14:5). Philip said, “Lord, shew us the Father” (14:8). Judas (not Iscariot) said, “Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” (14:22). The Lord answered, “Let not your heart be troubled (distressed, perplexed, anxious): ye believe in God (Whom ye have never seen), believe also in Me (in My absence, when you cannot see Me)” (14:1). He revealed to them four encouragements to prepare them for His absence. The Promise of His Return (14:1-4); The PRIVILEGE of asking anything in Prayer (14:5-14); The PARACLETE, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter who

would abide with them forever (4:15-26); and the PEACE, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you" (14:27-31).

His teaching is PRIESTLY. We do not need to be in heaven to be introduced to the Father; His presence in heaven is essential for the maintenance of communion and is the source of comfort, consolation and care. This is PRACTICAL, to lead to holiness, obedience and prayer. This is PEACEFUL, because even in this period; "If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him" (14:23). This is the PRESENT age of His absence when the outstanding feature will be that, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things (the Epistles) and bring all things to your remembrance (the Gospels)" (14:26). "He will shew you things to come (future, Revelation)" (16:13). We will not be left to struggle on our own.

Above all, His absence is temporary, "believe also in Me", "rest in Me"; "I go"; "I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (14:3). This going away is not defeat but victory; it is not accidental but planned; it is not unexpected but intentional. It is suffering and glory in unbroken succession, by deliberate council and foreknowledge.

Heaven is spoken of as a CITY (Heb. 11:10); a COUNTRY (Heb. 11:16); the heavenly JERUSALEM (Heb. 12:22); PARADISE (2Cor. 12:4); "prepared for them that love Him" (1Cor.2:9). "In My Father's HOUSE are many mansions" (14:2). This indicated the relationship of a new dispensation. The earthly temple had many chambers. "Many abodes", does not have the thought of a variety of abodes or indicate any limitations of future happiness. The meaning is of "many RESTING PLACES", the traveller has found Rest.

HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

The Lord spoke of His Father's House when He cleansed the Temple. That earthly House, in which He once dwelt in visible glory, was a figure of another House; a figure "of the true tabernacle, which the

Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb. 8:2). Into that House, the Lord Jesus Christ went after His resurrection from the dead, back to the Father, His heavenly sphere of ministry; “true” real, abiding; “Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:22). This is the glorious Home for all the family of God, purchased by His blood and fitted for that home. “Many mansions” do not mean magnificent palaces, but dwelling places, translated “abode” (same word) (14:23). To be in the Father’s House is not the result of our worthiness as believers, but the fruit of His own blessed work on the Cross. Every true born again believer belongs there. “Let not your heart (singular, individual, personal not “hearts” plural) be troubled”. Dear saint, do not be “troubled” about being left for Great Tribulation, locusts, plagues, famine, the beast, the false prophet or the dragon. He assured the disciples in the Upper Room, and He assures us that we need not fear, but be perfectly at rest about it. “If it were not so, I would have told you” (14:2).

As long as He was with them on earth, Paradise, the third heaven, was not fully prepared. His precious Body given and Blood shed on the cross, was a propitiation for our sins, opened the portals of the Father’s House. He is gone on before as the Forerunner, there He is the Priest and Advocate of His people. By His death, resurrection, ascension, and His presence there, He guarantees our arrival.

HIS COMING AGAIN

The disciples knew about His coming as revealed in the Old Testament as a glorious visible event. The prophets predicted His coming to judge the nation, to deliver a remnant of His people, to establish Israel in their own land, and to establish His Kingdom. This will be preceded by wars, persecution of Israel, upheavals even of nature as verified by the Gospels. His Olivet discourse confirmed what the Old Testament had taught and this would be nothing new to the ears of the eleven disciples who believed in His future coming in the clouds of heaven to deliver His earthly people and to set up His Kingdom on earth.

In the Upper Room, the Lord gave a new and unique revelation which

no prophet had ever promised. This promise to His disciples was not about gathering His people into an earthly Jerusalem, but His taking them to His Father's House to be where He is Himself. "I will ... receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (14:3). This is a new revelation about things which He is going to bring to pass, the next prophetic event. His going away, was not a spiritual departure, He was going to be physically absent from them. He offered His Body on the Cross and in the same Body, He came out of the tomb, and in that Body, they were soon to be witnesses, He left earth to go back to the Father. His coming again cannot mean a spiritual coming again as at the Day of Pentecost. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is distinct from the Holy Spirit who came on the day of Pentecost.

This coming, is a specific once for all event for all believers. It is not a continual bringing of Christians when they die, to be with Himself in the disembodied state, to be "present with the Lord". The believer's death is not the Lord coming to the dying person but at death, he goes to be with the Lord. The Lord told His disciples, "I will come again". This can only mean His own personal, literal coming again, "to receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (14:3). This is not the deliverance of the Jewish remnant, it is not a coming to establish His Kingdom on earth, not a coming to judge the nations, but a coming which is only for His own. He is about to leave the Upper Room, to go out to the Garden, to go on to the Cross to shed His blood for them. He alone, has the right to make this unique promise to His blood bought disciples for the first recorded time in the order of the inspired canon of Scripture.

This promise to the eleven disciples was revealed to the apostle Paul. To him was given the truth about the Church, as the Body and the Bride of Christ and the direct revelation of the coming of the Lord for His saints (1Thess. 4:15-18). "The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up (raptured) together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord".

All the other New Testament writers spoke of His coming again as always imminent, about to happen. There will be “signs” relating to His coming to earth in manifestation. We await the “shout”. The Lord Jesus bore the first glorified body into Heaven. He is the Forerunner of millions to follow in bodies like unto His own Body of Glory. His coming for us is imperative, to deliver us from the coming wrath. “For God hath not appointed us to wrath (tribulation wrath on earth), but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. Who died for us, that, whither we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him” (1Thess. 5:9-10).

The Blessed Hope (Titus 2:13); the Redemption of the purchased possession (Eph. 1:14); The Rapture of living believers (1Thess. 4:17); and above all, The Reunion, “unto Myself” (John 14:3) is Imminent, Imperative, it will be Instantaneous, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1Cor. 15:52). How very near it must be. Dear believer; it will be HEAVEN, it will be HOME, it will be HIMSELF, and it will be SOON. MARANATHA.

Daniel – Spiritual Warfare

J.A. Brown

Chapter 10

(All quotations are from Daniel Chapter 10, unless otherwise stated)

Introduction

The last three chapters of Daniel’s prophecy are really one connective narrative regarding Daniel’s final vision in the 3rd year of King Cyrus’ reign, about 535/536BC. At this time Daniel was an old man in his mid/late 80’s. He was going to be prepared and strengthened concerning great unseen *spiritual* battles taking place in the background (Ch. 10), as well as great *physical* trials and persecution for the people of God in future days (Ch’s 11-12). Much

of what was revealed to Daniel that day regarding the future affliction of God's people on Earth has been *historically* fulfilled (Dan. 11:1-35), yet some still awaits future fulfilment in the Tribulation period (Dan. 11:36-12:13). Chapter 10 opens with Daniel in mourning (vs. 2-3), but by the end of the vision he is told he would experience rest and resurrection (Dan. 12:2,13).

Context

In chapter 9, Daniel had been before God in prayer for himself and for the sins of the nation, realizing that the nation's *political* and *geographical* restoration was closely associated with their *spiritual* restoration! Here in chapter 10, he is still pleading before God. A partial return to the land had began, but this was met by stiff opposition – yet Daniel was still seeking the matter before God (v12). He did not know at first that great unseen forces were at work when he was praying! We notice that Daniel's prayer life did not falter or alter, no matter what the cost or the prevailing circumstances. Babylon had never influenced Daniel! What really affected him was what had been revealed to him from his reading and understanding of Scripture concerning God's purposes and will for the nation and how this was being worked out in his present situation.

Daniel's Condition (vs. 2-3)

It appears that Daniel was under great mental and physical pressure at this time. He was sad and for three weeks his normal way of life was altered. These were three "weeks of days" (21 days) as opposed to the "weeks of years" in chapter 9. Not only was Daniel three weeks in mourning, but (as we shall see later) there were great unseen angelic conflicts for the same amount of time – three weeks (v13). Why was Daniel in this condition? We are not told. However, it was now the 3rd year of Cyrus' reign and the first wave of exiles had already returned to the land under Zerubbabel to rebuild the city and the Temple (Ezra Ch's 1-2), but this had been met with resistance and hatred (Ezra 4:4-6) and things didn't seem to be going well for the returned exiles (Dan. 9:25). The news of this must have saddened Daniel.

The Certain Man (vs. 4-6)

Who was it that Daniel saw as he was on the banks of the river Hiddekel? (v4; Gen. 2:14). The description given of this person goes beyond any description of a human being or of an angel! There appears to be many similarities (at least six) to the description given by John on the Isle of Patmos of the exalted Christ (Rev. 1:12-16); if so, then this may well have been a pre-incarnate appearing of the Son of God! As a result Daniel had no strength, he was on his face helpless, he fainted and was without breath! Think of the reaction of others in Scripture when confronted with the Divine presence – Moses at the Burning Bush (Exod. 3:2); Saul’s experience on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:3-7); and Isaiah’s reaction when he had a “*vision of the throne*” (Isa. 6:1). They all recognized their unworthiness and were in reverential fear!

Angelic Strengthening (vs. 10,16,18)

Daniel was, therefore, physically weak and feeling insufficient – he needed to be supported, reassured and strengthened. On three occasions (vs. 10,16,18) Daniel was touched. We suggest it was an angel, possibly Gabriel, that spoke to and touched Daniel. A comparison between Gabriel’s actions and words with Daniel in chapter 9 and the personage that came to Daniel here in chapter 10 shows many similarities. For example, regarding “*touched*” compare 9:21 and 10:10; regarding “*understanding*” compare 9:22 and 10:14; and regarding “*greatly beloved*” compare 9:23 and 10:11,19. Daniel’s intercessory prayer for his people was heard immediately it was made (v12). Gabriel seems to have been sent in answer to Daniel’s prayer for understanding (v12) – one of the many reminders in this prophecy that prayer really matters!

A Man Greatly Beloved (vs. 11,19)

Daniel was assured on two occasions in this chapter that he was not just loved, but greatly beloved of God! What an encouragement! He had received this encouragement *before* from Gabriel (Dan. 9:23). How often do we encourage our fellow saints? We might see the

danger of encouraging others and expressing our Christian love to them as possibly creating pride and an over-inflated ego in them – it is possible! However, it did no harm to Daniel or else he wouldn't have received that information from Heaven. Indeed, as believers, we are assured by the Spirit of God that we are loved by the Lord. Daniel was also told twice not to fear (vs. 12,19). Daniel's concern had been for his people's present distress but he was to be shown "*what shall befall thy people in the latter days*" (v14); this would equate to the period covered by the 70 weeks prophecy of chapter 9. Despite all this, Daniel is comforted and strengthened to know that God was still in ultimate control!

Delay to Prayer (vs. 12-14; 20-21)

Daniel might have wondered why there was no response from Heaven when he chastened himself (v12) and was in prayer for those three weeks (vs. 2-3), yet Gabriel reminded him that his prayer was heard right from the beginning (v12). That surely must be an encouragement to us regarding *our* prayer life!! Think also of Zacharias and Elizabeth in Luke 1:13, when Gabriel assured this godly couple that their (continual) prayer was heard regarding Elizabeth being barren. The reason for the delay to Daniel's request for understanding (v12) was that there had been a great "spiritual battle" taking place behind the scenes. Mankind is caught in a 3-dimensional world and we have no access to the "happenings" beyond our sphere, unless Divinely revealed as was the case with Daniel. It shows us that we are not alone in our struggles.

Satanic Opposition (vs. 13-14; 20-21)

Gabriel revealed to Daniel that a great unseen conflict and warfare was taking place behind the scenes. And so it is today! This conflict is not known or reported by the media and not seen by humans, yet has an effect on what we do see! (Job 1:7; 2:1; Zech. 3:1; Jude 9; Rev. 12:7). As believers we are all outsiders as to what is happening in this other "sphere of conflict". This is another dimension to our struggles on Earth. Here in chapter 10, the curtain is drawn-aside for us!

We are, therefore, introduced to the continuing conflict between the hosts of Heaven and Satanic powers that seek to disrupt and destroy. God's messenger was delayed for three weeks, being withstood by the prince of the kingdom of Persia – this personage was certainly *not* Cyrus or indeed any other human being!! We certainly cannot contemplate an angel being resisted by a mere man, especially when we read of just one angel smiting 185,000 Syrians in one night!! (2Kings 19:35); one mere man wouldn't have been too much of a problem! No, this "prince" was of Satanic origin!

Michael the Archangel (vs. 13,21)

Michael ("*one of the chief princes*", v13; "*your prince*", v21 and "*the archangel*", Jude 9) came on the scene in support of Gabriel. Michael seems to have a particular concern for Israel, being mentioned five times in Scripture and all in circumstances relating to the nation (Dan. 10:13,21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev.12:7). In Revelation 12:7 there is war in Heaven and Michael and his angels are fighting against Satan and his angels. Michael's forces prevail! We might not understand God's dealings with these unseen powers, but they do show us that God is in ultimate control everywhere – control over the things we see and also over those unseen happenings! Yet remember, dear child of God, that our Lord Jesus Christ has defeated these evil forces, and is exalted far above principalities and powers; they can *never* separate us from His love (Rom. 8:38-39).

Lessons to be Learnt Today

What can Daniel's experiences in this chapter teach us today?

- Battles behind the scenes continue today. We might not know what actually is taking place, but there is One who knows all things. His will and plans can never be thwarted.
- We are not alone when evil powers assault us (Eph. 6:10-18).
- A day without prayer is a wasted day. Daniel was ever before God in prayer. In our modern society we can be pre-occupied with material things; constant occupation with the internet and mobile

phones and other devices and the obsession for instant communication to each other can rob us of quiet time with God in prayer.

- Daniel is an example of one interceding for others. While suffering mentally and physically, he held on interceding for his people.
- On Earth, at the human level, the nation (Israel) appeared weak and scattered, yet in the heavens Israel had the mightiest representation of all! *We*, too, might appear weak and limited before men, but *we* too have the same intercessory activity on our behalf!

Conclusion

In this final vision of Daniel in chapter 10-12, Daniel had revealed to him what would befall the nation in the future on Earth up to and including “*the latter days*” of the Tribulation period. He also had revealed the great spiritual battles that were taking place in the heavens regarding his people. But he was given understanding and encouragement to realize that whether in the heavens or on the Earth, God’s purposes will be perfectly worked-out and God is in ultimate control of *all* things!

Thoughts on Ephesians Ch. 4

T.J. Blackman

Ephesians 4:17-32 – The Goal of Individual Growth

Obviously, collective growth and unity depend upon the individual members which make up the whole body. Each member of the body is a person who has been transformed by the grace of God. Therefore, each one is responsible to manifest the transformation which took place when they trusted Christ as Lord and Saviour. One important word used for this transformation is “conversion”. This word implies a radical change from the inside out.

Before becoming a Christian: The Need for Conversion (Verses 17-19)

(v17) As sinners, their walk was wrong in its manner and its direction. This is because all their ways were controlled by the “vanity of their mind”. No doubt the minds of many are full of a multitude of things, but none of these things can please our Creator nor bring blessing to His creatures. The carnal mind was empty of that which would produce a desirable result.

Notice the contrast with the way Paul speaks at the beginning of this verse: “This I say ... in the Lord”. The Lord was the source of his wisdom and spiritual power. An unconverted person does not have this, as verse 18 makes clear.

(vs. 18-19) Here we see that the sinfulness of our walk and the vanity of our minds were caused by the absence of light, life and love:

No light: “Having the understanding darkened ... because of the blindness of their heart”.

No life: “Being alienated from the life of God”.

No love: “Being past feeling” their affections are inclined toward mere lust and selfish greed.

When we feel our dark and desperate state, we can cry unto the Lord and be sure that He will hear and answer us: “In my distress I cried unto the LORD, and He heard me” (Psalm 120:1).

When becoming a Christian: The Process of Conversion (Verses 20-24)

(vs. 20-21) The Renewal through the perfect Man. In conversion we come to the Lord Himself. We come to learn (v20). The word “learned” implies to learn as a disciple, i.e. learning in order to follow and imitate. In verse 20, He is the lesson – Christ, the anointed One, anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit, to be “head over all things” (Ephesians 1:10,22). In verse 21, He is the teacher – we come to learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29). And He is the truth – “as the truth is in Jesus”. That blessed Man of

Bethlehem, Nazareth, Calvary, and now at the Father's right hand, is for ever the sum and repository of all truth.

(v22) *The Renunciation of the old man.* "Put off". This describes the ongoing effects of true repentance. The "old man" is all that we were in Adam. Not just the sinful works, but the inward nature which produced them, "which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts". It is like "putting off" an old and filthy garment.

(v23) *The Renewal of the mind.* "Be renewed". We cannot renew ourselves, we were born again of the Holy Spirit, but the new birth set in progress a process of spiritual growth (Titus 3:5; Romans 12:2), which the Holy Spirit realises as we give prayerful attention to the word of God. This renewal is nothing less than a spiritual transformation as characteristics of our Saviour are formed in us.

(v24) *The Replacement of old things with the new.* "Put on", i.e. put on the garments of salvation and righteousness (Isaiah 61:10; Psalm 132:9,16). In Christ we are a new creation. Two attributes of our Creator are righteousness and true holiness which characterize everything He says and does. These attributes are communicable. They should also characterize His new creation. Thus, we must "put them on" so that the world may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

After becoming a Christian: The Manifestation of Conversion (Verses 25-32)

As with collective unity at the beginning of the chapter, so with individual duty in the closing part, all is related to the three divine Persons.

Obedying Christ (Verses 25-28)

(v25) Put off lying, put on truth. "Speak every man truth with his neighbour" is a quotation from Zechariah 8:16. In the context, Israel are saved from their enemies and united under Messiah their King. Here this is applied with even greater emphasis to the body of Christ, because "we are members one of another" and He is our Head.

(v26) Put off resentment, put on reliance (“vengeance is Mine”). “Be angry”. Anger is not always sinful. Many times, God is provoked to anger by sin. This is, of course, the manifestation of His righteousness and justice. We can also have “righteous indignation”, but with us it could easily become sinful through loss of self-control. Therefore, we need to remember that “vengeance is of the Lord” and not to let the day come to a close without leaving the matter in His righteous hands.

(v27) Put off the devil’s influence, put on Christ fullness. The enemy will attempt to occupy any space not yet given to the Lord Jesus. Thus, the way to not “give place to the devil” is simply to give your whole heart and life to the Lord.

(v28) Put off stealing, put on generosity. Not only should the Christian respect other’s property and ownership, but should be willing to labour even more than necessary in order to have more “to give to him that needeth”. To him the desire to be generous should overrule any other motivation.

Pleasing the Spirit (Verses 29-31)

(v29) Not corrupting, but building. The Scriptures emphasise the power of the spoken word. A word can corrupt and destroy, or a word can sanctify and edify. Once again, the exhortation is not merely negative, not just to avoid “corrupt communications”, but to speak “that which is good” in order to build up and minister grace to those who hear, whether in public or in private.

(v30) Not self-governing, but Spirit-governed. The permanent presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer is his seal, the guarantee of the completion of God’s redemptive for him. We must recognise the constant presence of this divine Person. We need to recognise as well that the Holy Spirit is easily offended and grieved by that which comes from the old nature.

(v31) Not caustic, but kind. Therefore, we need to “put off” as filthy

garments every kind of speech which is not Christ-like and all the “malice” which causes it.

Imitating the Father (Verse 32)

(v32) Not implacable, but ready to forgive. The love revealed at Calvary began in the heart of the Father, and “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” (2Corinthians 5:19). We have experienced such kindness, tenderness and forgiveness from the Father, and that at the expense of not sparing “His own Son” (Romans 8:32), then instead of being hard and unforgiving, let us be “followers of God, as dear children” (Ephesians 5:1).

The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 17:1-9

Ian McKee

Preaching at Thessalonica (v.1-3)

Having left Philippi they “passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia”, evidently taking the road called the ‘Via Egnatia’ in a south west direction from Philippi. The great military roads of the Roman Empire became highways for the spread of the Gospel. We should note that it is no longer “we” but “they” as Luke the writer, evidently, remained for a period at Philippi. We next read of Luke in Acts 20:5-6.

As there are no details given of any events in those towns it would seem that the preachers’ primary objective is summed up in the words “they came to Thessalonica”. This city, which was approximately 100 miles distant from Philippi, was the capital of the province of Macedonia. It was a harbour city at the head of the Thermaic Gulf and a flourishing commercial city with a population of

some 200,000. Conquered by the Romans in 168BC it became a naval station. It was made a free city in 42BC, not that many years before this visit by Paul.

Unlike Philippi, Thessalonica had “a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them”. He therefore followed his usual custom even though he had turned “to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). It was Paul’s policy to preach in main centres of population and where people congregate using existing contacts. It is still the case that in Divine providence certain people as a result of their birth, upbringing, education, etc., are better equipped to reach certain groups of society with the message of the Gospel. Paul by birth, education, religion, culture, etc., had a greater understanding of the mind-set of Jewish people. However, that does not absolve us from responsibility to share the Gospel with all mankind.

There Paul for “three Sabbath days **reasoned** with them out of the Scriptures”, that is he **pondered** the text before applying it. We should notice the range of words and meanings employed in relation to Paul’s preaching in Thessalonica. He reasoned, explained, proved, proclaimed and persuaded. The Old Testament Scriptures were both his text book and ‘court of appeal’. Neither preacher nor hearer used Scripture in any superficial way, with the three Sabbath days being fully engaged with the Gospel message and its absolute conformity with Old Testament revelation. The practical lesson for us today is that Scripture must be the basis of our evangelism and therefore a good working knowledge of it is essential.

Three Sabbath days are specifically highlighted, a period of fifteen days at least, although Paul and his associates must have stayed at Thessalonica for several months as most of the converts were Gentiles and from pagan idolater backgrounds. We are not told of the length of time between Paul’s leaving the synagogue and leaving the city.

The central theme of Paul’s consecutive and doctrinal exposition is contained in the words, “**opening** and **alleging**, that Christ must

needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I **preach** unto you, is Christ". This is the crux of Paul's presentation to a Jewish audience. From Old Testament texts he is bringing forward the evidence, ***opening it up completely***, giving appropriate explanation by ***placing texts beside each other*** in context and before his hearers with conviction and with proof. Paul's example here should be contemplated. His Biblical and detailed exposition surely demonstrated that Scripture is capable of intelligent and logical application. It should be noted that while a range of words are used to show how he sought to convince those listening to him he never sought to deviate from the written Word of God, nor should we. Also, this is done via his ***preaching***: he is not engaging in any philosophical argument or debate. The preaching of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit will accomplish very much more than the endless intellectual debates often referred to as 'apologetics'.

The burden of his presentations is that the Old Testament asserted that Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. In this he is entirely consistent with the wondrous exposition by the risen Lord Jesus Christ to the couple on the road to Emmaus "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Paul's focus on the death of Messiah was not only because it was predicted but because it was absolutely essential to salvation. There is no avoidance of the supernatural implications as the message centres on a resurrected Christ!

Another vital component of his preaching relates to the Person of Jesus of Nazareth and His saving career from beginning to end. The Jesus of recent history is the Christ foretold in Scripture; He must be the Messiah given that He is the only One in whom those Scriptures have been fulfilled. Paul here is also speaking out from his own background and experience. Gospel preaching must be Christ-centred and bring the hearers to the significance of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The positive results (v.4)

The Gospel always has results, ranging from the positive through indifference to the negative. First of all, we have a summary of the positive responses to the preaching: “And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few”. This was because the Gospel was preached not simply with words but with power, “For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake” (1Thess. 1:5). So some Jews believed and joined with Paul and Silas, e.g. Jason (v5), Aristarchus and Secundus (Acts 20:4). These Jews were persuaded, convicted and convinced and so threw in their lot with Paul and his associates. Faith should always be expected to show itself in fellowship.

In addition, God-fearing Greeks, or possibly God-fearers and Greeks; that is people from a Gentile background who had associated themselves to synagogue worship, believed in large numbers. So also did many prominent or upper-class women who had been adherents to the synagogue.

The negative response (v.5-9)

However, doctrine divides men and envy was aroused in the unbelieving Jews at the offer of salvation. Not being able to counter the exposition of Paul and realising that they had lost the argument (and with that many of their adherents), they turned to violence. Hence they “took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort”, essentially those loafing about the market place who were under-employed with nothing else to do and who can be easily manipulated. So a mob was gathered to start a riot. They “set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people”. Jason was possibly a Jew; and possibly was related to Paul (Rom. 16:21). Evidently he was a courageous man who openly identified himself with Paul and his companions, showing them hospitality. The mob’s intention was

possibly to bring Paul and his companions out of Jason's house to the citizens' assembly or council or, more probably, to the crowd with the intention of violence or even murder.

To their disappointment "they found them not" so, instead of laying hold upon Paul and Silas, they "drew Jason and certain brethren [new believers] unto the rulers of the city", that is to the magistrates in Thessalonica. The cry of this mob is that "these that have turned the world upside down are come hither also", inferring that they had caused trouble all over the known inhabited earth, meaning throughout the Roman Empire. This was a gross overstatement intended to imply that they were causing radical social upheaval, stirring up sedition or treason. Nevertheless, it does demonstrate that when the Gospel reaches into new areas, or advances into different groups in society, an adverse reaction can be expected. This may range from criticism and slander through to persecution and violence. However, where Satan is openly opposing it is certain that the Gospel has been advancing!

That said, Jason, who had given the preachers hospitality and lodgings, is now in a difficult and dangerous position. The allegation to the Thessalonian magistrates now becomes more focused and personal; "Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus". This is a charge that what is being taught is in defiance of Cæsar's decrees and therefore is against the Emperor who was worshipped in Rome as a god. The seriousness of this allegation should not be underestimated: it is that Christianity is subversive to the civil powers, here to Cæsar and the Roman empire!

Consideration of the content of the two epistles subsequently written by the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians demonstrates a clear prophetic emphasis, which maybe would also have been present in his preaching and therefore would lend colour to these accusations. While they misrepresent the teaching about the Kingdom of God and

do not clarify that the Lord Jesus Christ is a King of a different order altogether, there was just enough truth in this serious charge to make it credible to the civil rulers.

We do remember that similar charges were made by the Jewish leaders to Pilate concerning the Saviour: “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King” (Luke 23:2). The Lord’s dignified response to Pilate’s interrogation states the position, “My kingdom is not of this world: if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is My kingdom not from hence ... Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice” (John 18:36-37).

The allegations had the desired effect with the crowd and the city officials thrown into turmoil; “And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things”. The Jew’s strategy therefore seems, on initial consideration, to have been successful. Satan seems to have triumphed. What must have looked like a reversal or a defeat by Jewish opponents, however, resulted in a benefit to believers of all subsequent ages given Paul’s two epistles to the Thessalonian assembly!

The outcome of the hearing was that they released Jason and the others under conditions of what we might term today as being a Court Order or ‘on bail’: in essence that Paul and Silas would leave Thessalonica and not return, potentially with severe penalties if whatever conditions applied were broken. The effect upon Paul and his companions is described, “we ... endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us” (1Thess. 2:17-18).

(To be continued D.V.)

Get to Know Your Bible

J.A. Davidson

OLD TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 8.

THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

The lesson of the whole Old Testament is the need for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as fulfilled in the New Testament. The book of Joshua is considered to be the first Book in the section of the OT called the Historical Books extending for a full millennium of Hebrew history, from about 1400BC to about 400BC. This long period is divided into:

1. **THEOCRACY** (1407-1043BC). This period is ruled directly by God, from Joshua to Saul, covered by the Books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth approximately 1407-1043BC. The Book of Joshua continues from the death of Moses when God raised up Joshua who wholly followed the LORD to lead Israel in the possession of the land of Canaan and the division of the land among the twelve tribes of Israel according to God's promise. Judges covers a period of civil disobedience to God's orders and disorder overcome by cycles of rule by individual judges. Pockets of heathen idolaters were left scattered through the land which allowed periods of Gentile oppression. "In these days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25). Ruth covers a period parallel to Judges, showing that even in this time of general disobedience to God's Word, there was a godly remnant who followed the path of faith and obedience to experience redemption and blessing until the time of the bringing in of David the King.

2. **MONARCHY** (1043-586BC). This era is covered in the original Hebrew Bible by three books (divided into six for convenience in all modern versions). Samuel; named after Samuel the last, and godly judge who anointed Israel's first king, Saul who was followed by the

rule of David, the King of God's own choice. Kings; Solomon, David's son began as a wise man and a just king but married many strange women. His son Rehoboam introduced idolatry and divided the nation. The Northern Kingdom had only evil kings and was carried into captivity, 722BC. The Southern Kingdom, Judah and Benjamin which for a time had both good and evil rulers, was carried into Babylonian captivity, 586BC. Chronicles. The last Book of Jewish history begins with Adam and ends with the fall of the Southern Kingdom. It follows the line of the priesthood and the sons of Levi, omits detailed reference to the Northern Kingdom and stresses the Grace and righteousness of God with the rule of the House of David from the building of the Temple by Solomon until it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the beginning of the times of the Gentiles.

3. **RECOVERY** (586-420BC). After the seventy years of Babylonian captivity as foretold by the prophets, Israel's recorded OT history ends with the return of a remnant in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah with the Jews who chose to remain in Mesopotamia as recorded in Esther. Cyrus, King of the Medo-Persian Empire, issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to form a province in their homeland in 536BC. About 50,000 Jews formed a small remnant to rebuild the temple under Zerubbabel. Ezra the priest also took about 2,000 Jews with him. Nehemiah was permitted by Artaxerxes (445BC) to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and with Ezra, a measure of spiritual recovery was allowed under Gentile domination. God's name is not mentioned in Esther but His hand is seen in every page of this little book working behind the events that take place in the Empire of Persia to protect His ancient people. This period runs concurrent with events in Ezra and deals with those Jews who remained in the vast Empire of Persia and Media from India to Ethiopia.

No King has ever sat on the Throne of David since "The Times of Gentiles" began, until today. This situation will not change until after the Rapture of the Church, when God will again deal with His chosen earthly people to bring them to repentance and acceptance of Christ, their Messiah who will come to establish His literal earthly Kingdom.

JOSHUA

The Book of Joshua is one of the most encouraging books in the Old Testament. It is throughout a testimony to the Sovereignty of the might and grace of God in His faithfulness to His covenant people.

This Book is the first of 12 Historical Books of the English Bible after the 5 Books written by Moses. It records the crossing of the River Jordan to enter the land of Canaan to the possession and division of the land, ending with Joshua's farewell speeches.

CONDITIONS IN THE LAND. At this time, the domination of the Egyptians on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean was being challenged by the rising power of the Hittites. As a result, Canaan became divided into several small idolatrous states, often at war among themselves and ready for the just judgement of God and overthrow by His Sovereign power through His chosen people. The condition of these seven nations in Canaan was clearly stated in Deuteronomy. "For the wickedness of these nations the LORD doth drive them out before thee" (Deut. 9:4). Baal, the lord of earth, whose voice was thunder, was the main "deity" of the Canaanites. They believed that this god controlled the rains and the seasons. Associated with this theme, were temple rituals, an immoral priesthood, goddesses of fertility and the horrors of Ashtaroth. "Every abomination to the LORD, which He hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters have they burnt in the fire to their gods" (Deut. 12:31).

The CITIES OF CANNAN, though mostly small in population, were inhabited by giants, strongly fortified, surrounded by solid stone walls, "great and walled up to heaven" (Deut. 1:28). The Book of Joshua is not just about battles and conquests. Joshua led possibly three million people in the conquering of cities with massive walls, defended by giants and mighty armies. Fortified strongholds were overthrown not by the nation of untrained wanderers, wearied by 40 years in the wilderness, but by Joshua under the hand of God who said, "Go over", "Go in" and "Go after". "Go over this Jordan" (Josh. 1:2); the lesson of death and resurrection. "Go in to possess the

land” (1:11). Every victory, was not by military strategy or superior armies but by the supernatural power of the Lord of Hosts. The exception was the attack upon Ai, made by human effort which ended in defeat (7:3). “When ye see the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and Go after it” (3:3). The Ark before the people of God, speaks of God’s presence and the pre-eminence of Christ in His rightful place.

THE COMMISSION OF JOSHUA (Chapter 1)

“After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ minister, saying, ‘Moses My servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel” (1:1-2). Moses, who represented the law, could only take Israel to the border of the Promised Land. It took Joshua, also called “Jehoshua” and “Hoshea” (Num. 13:16; Deut. 32:44) meaning “Jehovah is salvation” (the Greek equivalent of “Joshua” is “Jesus”, used twice in the KJV; Acts 7:45; Heb. 4:8), to bring the people into their rest. “Moses” is mentioned eleven times in the eighteen verses of chapter 1. Joshua is the first servant of God recorded as having a “Book” (1.8) to follow, “to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses” (23:6). Joshua obeyed the *WORD OF GOD*. His is first introduced in Exodus 17, as having with him the *POWER OF GOD*; “Joshua discomfited Amalek (the flesh) and his people with the edge of the sword” (Exod. 17:13). “Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man departed not out of the tabernacle” (Exod. 33:7,11). Joshua valued the *HOUSE OF GOD*. “Joshua ... wholly followed the LORD” (Num. 32:12).

THE CONCEALING OF THE SPIES (Chapter 2)

“And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two men to spy secretly, saying: ‘Go view the land, even Jericho’. And they went, and came into a harlot’s house, named Rahab, and lodged there” (2:1). At Kadesh-barnea, Moses by the commandment of the Lord, sent twelve men to reconnoitre the land of Canaan. Ten saw giants, two saw grapes. Ten brought back an evil report of the land and said we

are not able to go up against the people. "Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh" said; "Rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones" (Num. 14:6,9-10). Of the adult generation in the wilderness, only Joshua and Caleb entered the land. They were in the minority as they walked by faith and not by sight.

It is still not an easy or popular path. Moses sent twelve spies; Joshua had been in the land forty years before and this time, he sent two spies on a more profitable mission. Concealed by Rahab among the stalks of flax upon the roof two things were revealed: Fear and Faith. "She said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror has fallen upon us and that all the inhabitants of the land faint (melt) because of you" (2:9). God had conquered the hearts of the foe without Israel drawing a sword.

The second lesson was that faith, not merit or nationality, is the basis of God's blessing. She said, "Give me a true token: And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have and deliver our lives from death" (2:12-13). Rahab was an immoral sinner who told lies and turned traitor against her city. "We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites" (2:10). Faith cometh by hearing. In self-denying faith, she turned against her sins, her city, and her old life, casting herself upon the promise and power of God. Rahab's scarlet thread in the window was a type of the blood of Christ, which brings about deliverance from judgement and safety from death (2:12-21; 6:22-25). It was a message in the window about those who had come, who had gone away but were coming back again. The name of Rahab appears in the genealogy of Christ, "Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab" (Matt. 1:5). She is also mentioned in the great cloud of testimony bearers in Hebrews, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb. 11:31).

THE CROSSING OF THE JORDAN (Chapters 3-4)

“And Joshua rose early in the morning; and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel, and lodged there before they passed over” (3:1). The crossing of the River Jordan is the third of three momentous events for the children which are typical of the work of Christ for us.

THE PASSOVER – Shelter by the Blood of the Lamb, meant the end of bondage in Egypt which speaks of the WORLD. “Jesus also, that He may sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:12-13). *THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA* – Salvation from the Foe. The end of Pharaoh, the end of the tyranny of the DEVIL. This tells of the waters of death that passed over Another, “That through death He might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14-15). *THE CROSSING OF THE JORDAN* and Possession of the Land, meant the end of the wilderness, the end of the waywardness and wanderings of SELF. Through the Red Sea, Moses brought them OUT; through the Jordan Joshua brought them IN, speaking of death, burial and resurrection. “How that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1Cor. 15:3-4)

These three momentous events in the history of the nation, provide illustrations of the teaching of the Epistle of the Romans. The Passover points on to “The Redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24). At the Red Sea, we learn the great truth that “Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). The passing through Jordan brings us to the truth of baptism; “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

THE CAMP AT GILGAL (Chapter 5)

“And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped at Gilgal”, “And the LORD said unto Joshua,

'This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you'. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day" (4:19; 5:9). The triumphant host, following priestly men bearing the Ark, first rested at Gilgal to worship (5:10). When they went out to war, they went out and came back to Gilgal. They made Gilgal the centre of their activities and as they possessed the land, they did so orderly, recognising Gilgal as Holy ground (5:15). In later chapters when they divided the inheritance, they "came unto Joshua in Gilgal" (14:6). In the OT, the people of God recognised a central place; in the NT, as the Lord requested, we assemble to Himself, the Person. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). We labour from the assembly and to the assembly to seek to build it up.

At Gilgal, they RAISED THE MEMORIAL of the twelve stones from the midst of the Jordan. Each Lord's Day, we raise the remembrance of Calvary, the death and resurrection of the Saviour who passed through death's dark angry billows up to the Throne of God. They RENEWED THE RITE of circumcision; "Make three sharp knives" (5:2). Before taking the sword to the enemy, we need personally to take the knife to the flesh. They REMOVED THE REPROACH. Gilgal means "rolling"; "I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you" (5:9). They were finished with the bondage, bitterness and blackness of Egypt: which for us means separation from the world. They RECOVERED THE TRUTH. They "kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month" (5:10) at Gilgal. The Passover had been neglected. At times of recovery under Joshua, Josiah, Ezra and Nehemiah, they observed the Passover. "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1Cor. 5:7). We should always keep near to the Cross.

They RECEIVED THE CORN. "They did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn" (5:11). This was the new season crop ready to reap. The believer will only be strong and steadfast to the extent that they feed upon Christ and the Word of God. They RECOGNISED LORDSHIP. It is fitting that the vessel chosen by God for the leadership of His people,

should have a vision set before him of, The “Captain of the Host of the LORD”. “And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, ‘What saith my Lord unto His servant?’ And the Captain of the LORD’S Host said unto Joshua, ‘Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy’. And Joshua did so” (5:14-15). The “Captain of the Host of the LORD” is the title of Almighty power, sovereign authority over the nations of the earth and control of creation. Joshua had the Divine mandate to drive out the Canaanites, and purge the land from idolatry and abomination.

COMPASSING JERICO (Chapter 6)

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Heb. 11:30). All the victories recorded in the book of Joshua were miracles. God said, “See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour” (6:2). The battle was over before it began but man must learn his helplessness. They were to compass the city once every day for six days. “And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams’ horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets” (6:4). “So the ark of the LORD (10 times in 13 verses) compassed the city” (6:11). The Ark was central speaking of Christ enthroned being in Sovereign control. Human responsibility is spoken of by the 7 priests, 7 trumpets, 7 days and the 7 times they had to walk around and go away as if afraid. The only noise was of the sound of the trumpets and marching feet. The trumpets, like the Word of God, drew attention to the Ark. “Rams’ horns” were unimpressive and crude. These were men of war being made to look foolish as if defeated for 6 days.

The Gospel is to sound out as a trumpet from the assembly today, and to not give an uncertain sound. “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness ... God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1Cor. 1:18,27). God cannot be hindered but God cannot be hurried. This marching round and round continued for 6 days. Jericho, like Nineveh, was given opportunity to repent. From the first day until the sixth day, it

looked as though the effort was in vain, it seemed foolishness, just tedious repetition and not much action, no visible result, just a daily grind of silence, the same routine with no excitement. The lessons are that pilgrim feet must walk in quiet testimony before the noise of triumph will be raised.

There was no mention of tribal position as they marched but there was unity as they accompanied the Ark. Each day they went back to the camp at Gilgal, they were working from a centre, compare Christ the Centre and attraction of the assembly. They compassed the city until the 7th time on the 7th day when the people were never so tired, the test was not diminishing, obedience was displayed, faith was tried, they needed God to work in mighty power. The priests blew with the trumpets: "Joshua said unto the people, 'Shout; for the LORD hath given you this city'" (6:16). This was the enemy's leading city, considered impregnable. Its destruction would encourage Israel and further dismay the remaining Canaanites. What God wrought for His obedient people at Jericho, struck terror to the inhabitants of the land. "The city shall be accursed" except Rahab and her household. This is a little prophetic picture of the future judgement upon this wicked world after the deliverance of the remnant of God's people who await, the "Shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" (1Thess. 4:16).

COMMITTING THE TRESSPASS (Chapters 7-8)

"But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi ... of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing" (7:1). After the destruction of Jericho (Ch. 6) comes defeat at Ai (Ch. 7). "So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. And the men of Ai smote about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate" (7:4-5). Compare the first sin in the Bible; "As by one man sin entered into the world" (Gen. 3:6; Rom 5:12). Adam and Eve took the forbidden thing, they attempted to hide from God; deceit, dishonesty and death followed. Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the devil and Satan has continued his successful strategy ever since. The first recorded sin in the church committed by Ananias and Sapphira

his wife (Acts 5:1-10), involved covetousness and disobedience by taking money, materialism, that they did not need. The sin of Achan was in defiance of the plain command of chapter 6:18.

The believer's big danger (as in chapter 7) lies after a time of victory (as in chapter 6). David's biggest sin came when he was relaxing after victory; luxury and sloth led to a wandering eye and he took another man's wife (2Sam. 11:2-4). Adam hid among trees; Achan partook of the lust of the eye and the pride of life and hid them in his tent. He brought judgement upon himself and his family who were complicit in this concealment by keeping silent. Sin committed in Jericho, hidden in the camp at Gilgal was not found out until thirty-six men died and three thousand warriors fled at Ai. The introduction of the goody Babylonish garment of the ecumenical movement among the assemblies of the Lord's people in these last days is spreading to mystery Babylon (Rev. 17:5).

THE CAMPAIGNS AGAINST THE CANAANITES (Chapters 9-11)

The central campaign (Ch's 6-8) drove a wedge through Canaan to open up the way to extend South and North. This league of nations united in enmity against the people of God were of all kinds and every form of sinfulness. To acknowledge the right and authority of God and to submit to His will is something that the unregenerate of all ages, resent and oppose. Some indications of their enmity are shown in the meaning of their names. "The Hittite" means "Son of terror" in their ferocity. "The Amorite" are "the talkers" whose mouth must be stopped. "The Canaanite" means "the rulers" (clergy) and the Hivites are "the villagers" (laity). The "Jebusites" means "the treaders down" (9:1-2). The Gibeonites (9:3-27) represent those graceless professors seeking to join the people professing peaceful designs by copying Israel. God hates unholy mixtures. "Joshua made them hewers of wood and drawers of water" (9:27). They were reduced to slavery and drudgery. Gibeon had an extensive water system of long tunnels hewn out of rock and deep cisterns of water (Jer. 41:11-12).

"And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp at

Gilgal” (Josh. 10:15). The secret of Israel’s victory in these chapters is that they were a united people, “all” obediently following God’s chosen leader who followed the book of Moses. “The sun stood still and the moon stayed, until the peoples had avenged themselves upon their enemies” (10:13). This was the God of heaven and earth shining with favour upon His people as He gave them possession of the Promised Land. “So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses (11:8,12,15 [twice], 20,23); and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war” (11:23).

THE CLAIMING OF THE POSSESSIONS (Chapters 12-24)

The first section of the Book, the Possession of the Land ends with the “rest” from hostilities (11:23). The second section, chapters 12-24, deals with the Divisions of the Land, the allotment of the tribes and their cities. God originated the conflict, the LORD of Hosts was the Captain, Moses gave the commandment, Joshua was the commander and Israel was the instrument to purge the land from sin and abomination to bring rest and peace. “Now Joshua was old and stricken in years; and the LORD said unto him, ‘Thou art old and stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed’” (13:1). The “Borders” are clearly defined that they might be thankful for such an extended inheritance, that they might not grow friendly with those nations that still desired to keep them out of the enjoyment of rightful possessions, and that they would remain prepared for enemy attack and not grow slothful. As long as the enemy has not been driven out, the enjoyment of rest for the people of God is not complete. If the enemy cannot conquer outright, he can corrupt internally from among the people.

Allotment by special concession was made to two and a half tribes (13:3-33), who coveted and were allowed to remain in the rich pasture land beyond Jordan eastward. These left themselves exposed to constant enemy attack and were the first to be carried away by the Babylonians. World borderers who are in the assembly by convenience rather than by Scriptural conviction soon end up in

the world and worldly systems which deny the one gathering in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Detailed listing of names and locations (14-22) show that allotment was by Divine provision not according to human arrangement. There was special allotment for rewards to Caleb; arrangement for marriage so keeping the inheritance within each tribe; cities for the Levites and cities of Refuge were strategically placed. "And it came to pass a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age" (23:1). "A long time" would indicate a break of quite a long period before Joshua's final meeting with the people. Chapters 23 and 24 were likely recorded by an inspired narrator, having got his information from two sources, recorded both. In chapter 23, Joshua traces all the "promises" and the "good things", spoken and fulfilled by "Jehovah Elohim" (12 times). In chapter 24, the Covenant is renewed and reaffirmed. God encourages a weaning from over dependency on human leaders. Paul recounts all the counsel of God and says to the elders at Ephesian, "I commend you to God, and to the Word of His Grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). "And Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the LORD, that He had done for Israel" (24:31). A remarkable testimony like this, was not even attributed to Moses, but to confirm the courageous and spiritual leadership of Joshua.

The spiritual lesson for us in type is the subject of the Epistle of the Ephesians (Eph. 1:3). The "heavenly places in Christ" are not heaven but our Canaan into which we enter by the power of the Spirit of God. There are enemies to be defeated, there is armour which we must put on, there is territory to be possessed. We must fight the fight of faith against spiritual wickedness in heavenly places in order to possess the inheritance. There were enemies to be faced and battles to be fought in the land. It is a picture of our present spiritual inheritance, constantly set before us in the NT epistles. The entrance

of redemption and justification leads us into the great blessings of sanctification and blessedness. Satan will do all in his power as a strong adversary to rob us of the spiritual enjoyment of our inheritance. The enemies are described as, principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world.

We are well able to possess the spiritual inheritance when we take the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and the shield of faith as developed in Ephesians 6:10-18. The Lord's desire for Canaan was to drive out the idolatrous abominations of the wicked inhabitants and to fulfil His promises to give His people, "Rest" (11:23; 14:15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1) in the land. "For if Jesus (Joshua) had given them rest, there would He not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His" (Heb. 4:8-10). Joshua brought the people into the land but not into a permanent settled condition, a rested state. The teaching of Hebrews is Christ Supreme. The rest in Canaan being dependent upon obedience was temporary. The rest for the people of God in the day of Grace, is Christ, a Sabbath rest of peace, tranquillity repose upon Christ and His finished work.

Christ – The Firstborn

Paul Sheppard

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

Having reviewed something of the meaning of and the general usage of the term FIRSTBORN in the previous issue, we will now consider its application with respect to the Son of God.

Christ the FIRSTBORN as a Man

Coming to the first page of the New Testament we find something very notable respecting the first considered usage of firstborn! Matthew chapter 1 lists the “generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham”. In the following lists of names, none are referred to as the firstborn although some had that status. The only mention of firstborn (although in places implied) in the New Testament linked to the “opening of the womb” through birth is in reference to the FIRSTBORN of a WOMAN! Of course, every child-bearing woman has a firstborn, but here was something unique and different to any child previously born into the world: “And Joseph ... took unto him his wife (Mary): And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS” (vs. 24-25; Luke 2:7), literally meaning, “Jehovah the Saviour”. No male was involved as indicated from earliest days (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14), with Mary remaining a virgin until after His birth (vs. 22-23).

His miraculous conception through the sublime operation of the Holy Spirit was through divine power, marking Him out as “the Son of the Highest”, “the Son of God” (Luke 1:32,35), “the Lord from Heaven” (1Cor. 15:47), “God ... manifest in the flesh” (1Tim. 3:16). Yet He was truly a Man, “The Man that is my Fellow (Equal)” (Zech. 13:7), His two natures as God and Man being indivisible. His entrance into lowly manhood was vital to deal with the sin problem of which He was without. Such Holy Spirit power characterised His whole life by His miracles, death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father from where He had descended, in compassion and great grace. While conception by supernatural intervention had previously occurred with women such as Sarah (Gen. 21:1-2; Rom. 4:19-21; Heb. 11:11), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), Hannah (1Sam. 1:2,19-20), Elizabeth (Luke 1:7,24) and a few others, all required the fathers seed, God enabling them to conceive after years of barrenness and heartache.

Satan had for centuries by cruel genocide tried to prevent the birth of the Messiah (Exod. 1:16; Esther 3:8-15 etc.). Failing in this quest he tried to bring an untimely death through Herod, but God’s eternal

purpose was being progressed with the bringing in of a New Covenant bound up with the birth of JESUS, the Saviour of the world. With His birth, the emphasis on genealogies, the firstborn and the preservation of a family's line and inheritance, while so important to an Israelite and used by Matthew to prove Jesus' legal Messiahship, was to change. This was affirmed by the early Jewish believers of the Church who relinquished earthly property and goods in light of their heavenly calling, citizenship and hope (Acts 4:34-37; Heb. 10:32-34).

Joseph's firstborn son and Mary's second child, if we correctly identify him as James (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3), had no rights of succession to David's throne (Jeremiah 22:30) and lived in unbelief (John 7:5) during the earthly sojourn of Christ before His sufferings. However after his conversion following Christ's resurrection (1Cor. 15:7), this James through grace and in firstborn strength, rose to prominence in the church, becoming a pillar and was probably the writer of the inspired epistle (Acts 15:13; Gal. 1:19; 2:9; Jam. 1:1).

We are told that the child Jesus, "grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon Him", "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:40,52). We are told little of His childhood days but the fact that His mother said to Him at the wedding of Galilee, "They have no wine", and then to the servants, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it" (John 2:3,5), suggests that those "hidden" thirty years, when He laboured in a carpenters workshop and sought His place at the synagogue every Sabbath day (Luke 4:16), had a marked affect upon her. Did He resume the head of the household at Joseph's seeming early death manifesting the strength expected as a firstborn son to guide the family through difficult days with His wisdom, insight and character, that caused her to expect Him to address the need at the wedding, even if not sure how? We wonder! How often she must have pondered Him and His ways in her heart (Luke 2:19,51).

Finally, alongside the false teachers who 'make' Christ a lesser spirit, there is an expanding population on earth who say that 'the creation of Adam, the first man, was a greater miracle than the birth of Jesus,

as Adam had no father or mother while Jesus, a lesser prophet, came into being having a mother'. They also claim that 'God could not have a son'. As we engage and seek to enlighten these precious souls in Gospel witness of what "the truth is in Jesus", aware that such misconceptions are imbibed from childhood, we need to impress upon them that "Son of God" refers to an eternal and unoriginated Sonship and oneness with the Father; His Son came into the world through Mary's womb as JESUS, to die voluntarily, even for their sins.

In the next issue as the Lord enables, we will consider Christ as the FIRSTBORN in rank and preeminence, in Creation and of the Dead.

The Worship, the Walk and the Work of Faith

Selected

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has been stressing the vital necessity of faith.

The great attraction of Judaism was that it was a religion of visible things, a visible sanctuary, a visible priesthood, visible sacrifices, visible ordinances, in complete contrast to the gospel where all is heavenly and spiritual. The infinite superiority of gospel things could not be understood or appreciated by man except by faith.

So the writer pauses, and in chapter 11 emphasises the reason why faith is necessary, how it works, and how these things have been demonstrated in the lives of men and women of the past ages. He shows, in fact, how faith has been the essential principle of man's relationship with God right from the beginning.

Verse 1 is not a definition of faith but an explanation of why it is so essential.

We well remember the very first school we entered in infancy. The

venerable old building had built into its fabric the school motto, “Knowledge is power”. Now this is not a definition, for knowledge and power are quite different things, but it is a statement of the vital practical importance of knowledge. It enables us to do things we otherwise could not do, or it enables us to do things far more effectively and efficiently. The truth could have been more precisely expressed as “Knowledge empowers” or “Knowledge gives power”.

So the thought here in Hebrews is, “faith substantiates or gives substance to what is hoped for”. Believing God’s promises of future blessings makes them a solid and effective supporting and transforming influence in the life; and makes what God says about things we cannot see real and experimental, causing them in fact to become a visibly powerful witness to their reality in human experience, as the chapter abundantly demonstrates.

How significant that the writer turns at once to the creation! The word translated “worlds” is often more correctly translated “ages”, but here our translation is obviously right for ages cannot be “seen”.

The energy that was transmuted into nuclear energy in the form of matter was “the spoken word of God”. The invisible word of the invisible God produced visible results, and that very same word is the basis of faith, whether in the “elders”, that is saints of ancient times, or in us, as encouraged by their example.

Because we believe what God has said about it, we “understand (or apprehend) *that*”. We do not understand *how* but we understand *that*, i.e. the fact of it. If this is being denied today it is because men have no faith. See Genesis chapter 1; Psalm 33:6,9; 2Peter 3:5. What a tremendous thought to commence the chapter that the word that we are expected to believe is the very same as that which spoke the universe into being out of nothing!

Our privilege today is to prove the almighty power of God’s word in our lives by believing it and so by living in the faith of it.

When the writer begins to apply the lessons of chapter 11 to his readers in commencing chapter 12, he does so with these words,

“Therefore also we, having so great a cloud of witnesses encompassing us, *etc*” (lit.).

The word “witnesses” here signifies not “onlookers” but “testimony bearers”, the reference being to the many persons spoken of in the previous chapter; and the terms “so great a cloud” and “encompassing” are full of meaning.

Firstly we note the great number of persons of all sorts, old and young, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, men and women of all different backgrounds and circumstances, but all acting in faith.

Secondly “encompassing” indicates that faith was exercised in all different directions. Whoever we are and whatever our circumstances we can find someone basically like ourselves and someone in basically similar circumstances who was tested and triumphed by faith to challenge and encourage us.

We read of some who were miraculously delivered from death, some even who were raised from the dead but also of some who were obliged to suffer cruel deaths, in faith refusing deliverance; of some who became rich, others who became completely impoverished; some who became great, others who rejected greatness; some who acted in the interests of their nation, others who acted against the interest of their nation.

The chapter contains so many diametric opposites like these that “encompassed about” is obviously a very appropriate expression.

In just the first three characters instanced we see faith exercised in three distinct directions. In ABEL we see faith operative in his **WORSHIP**, in ENOCH faith operative in his **WALK** and in NOAH faith operative in his **WORK**.

Considering them separately and more fully we have first ABEL and his **WORSHIP**. We learn here a vital fact which is not expressly stated but only implied in Genesis, that Abel in offering his sacrifice was acting in faith. This means that he had had divine revelation concerning what he should do and was acting in obedience to what

God told him. He did not just offer what was most convenient and readily to hand, although he was a shepherd and keeping sheep was his occupation.

He was not governed by convenience but by obedience.

Of all forms of human life and service, worship is the highest and most important because it is exclusively Godward, and maintaining right relationships with God is the first priority for man.

Whether it had been explained to Abel or not, that man is a sinner and that the penalty of sin set by a God of infinite holiness and inflexible justice is death, so that only substitutionary death can atone for a sinner and put him right with God, we do not know. He may have learned the reason why an apron of fig leaves was completely inadequate and a coat of skins, involving the death of victims, alone was sufficient to cover the nakedness of his parents once they had sinned.

The main thing was that he had been told by God that this is what he must do, and in faith he did it, and as a consequence in some way God manifested His approval in the acceptance of his gifts.

Both in Genesis and Hebrews we note the mixture of singular and plural. In Genesis it is “firstlings” and “offering” (Gen. 4:4); in Hebrews it is “sacrifice” and “gifts”. John in his epistle (1John 3:12) speaks of “works”, so we gather that this was Abel’s practice to worship God by the offering of a lamb and its fat. God acknowledged that in so doing Abel was doing “well”, that his works were “righteous” and the Lord while here in the flesh spoke of “righteous Abel” (Matt. 23:35), a wonderful divine testimony!

Cain’s offering is mentioned first in Genesis. We are not told if Cain had had the same instructions from God as Abel, but it seems most likely he had. Certainly God spoke to him and gave him the opportunity to change his ways, promising acceptance and supremacy if he would; but he angrily and stubbornly refused to exercise faith and obey.

He represents those who are prepared to acknowledge God but only in their own self-chosen way, in ignorance or even defiance of God's revealed will. Some were still teaching that self-willed way thousands of years later (Jude 11) and still multitudes tread the same path even today. Paul speaks of "will-worship" (Col. 2:23), worshipping according to our own will and not by faith in the revelation of God's will.

And so Abel's story is a voice for us today that if we would approach God, worship God, and be accepted by God we must act in faith, according to God's own revealed will; We must come to Him in the merits of Christ's sacrifice, in virtue of His shed blood, and that alone, and in the way God has appointed in His word.

In ENOCH we see the **WALK** of faith. Although Hebrews does not use the word "walk", it occurs twice in Genesis chapter 5. We read there, "And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah" (v21), but after that, instead of reading, as in the case of all the other individuals mentioned in the chapter, "And Enoch lived...", we read, "And Enoch walked with God". The man's life was dramatically changed at the birth of his first son.

At that time, he must have had a personal divine revelation, for Methuselah means "When he is dead it shall be sent (*i.e.* the flood)". So whether it was parental responsibility or the revelation received from God at the time, from then onward we read that Enoch "walked with God".

This expression indicates constant, real, practical communion with God in daily life, which involves constant revelation from God on the one hand and constant obedience on the part of Enoch on the other. The precise term is very rarely used of others (Gen. 6:9; Mal. 2:6) but is, in fact, the duty of all men (Mic. 6:8).

So precious to God was this communion that He granted Enoch the wonderful privilege of being exempted from death by being translated. That "he was not" means that he ceased to live on earth

and could not be found, as in the similar case of Elijah (2Kings 2:1,11,17. See Heb. 11:5).

The term “walked with God” is rendered “pleased God” in the Septuagint, and so is found here in Hebrews (which, of course, is written in Greek).

This leads on to verse 6. Walking with God is the cause, pleasing God is the effect, and these are inseparable, and result from faith. To come to God in seeking to know Him requires faith for it requires believing that He, though unseen, really exists and that those who diligently seek Him will be rewarded. He is not indifferent to men’s attempts to approach Him and will see that they will not do so in vain.

In NOAH we see the **WORK** of faith. He believed God’s warning and acted on it, despite the seeming absurdity of his task, building an enormous boat miles away from the sea. No doubt he had to suffer much ridicule, but faith will always have the last laugh.

Notice the significant addition here. In verse 1 we read of “things not seen”, but in verse 7 of “things not seen *as yet*”. Noah was warned of things that had never been seen before, but which were soon to be seen, to the total destruction of an unbelieving, mocking world. He believed God’s warning and influenced his family so that they were saved while the rest of the whole world were lost. The flood did not commence till Noah and his family were safely in the ark and God had shut the door.

Noah was a “preacher of righteousness” (2Pet. 2:5) for a considerable period of time while building the ark (1Pet. 3:20), but all around him disobeyed his instructions and his warnings, so they stand condemned, without excuse, by Noah’s godly fear and by his example of obedience to God’s word.

Because of his faith Noah inherited, received by free grace, the righteousness that is consistent with faith. He received it, preached it, and publicly demonstrated it (Gen. 6:8-9).

MEN OF GOD SERIES

(23) THE APOSTLE PETER

**“The Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren”
(Luke 22:31-32)**

Peter was, “A witness of the sufferings of Christ” (1Pet. 5:1). In his second epistle, Peter also says that he was one of the “eyewitnesses of His Majesty” (2Pet. 1:16). This is the man who tells us that he heard the voice of God the Father on the Holy Mount, when the confirmation came, from the excellent glory; “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. These profound literal experiences as he followed the Lord Jesus in His Holy sojourn on earth, enables us to get near to a man who knew God. Peter wrote “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the POWER and COMING (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2Pet. 1:16-18).

The Lord was walking by the Sea of Galilee, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim, in Galilee of the Gentiles when He “saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And He said unto them ‘Follow (come ye after) Me, and I will make you fishers of men’. And they straightway left their nets, and followed Him” (Matt. 4:18-20).

Peter’s writings teach simple lessons. He is the only apostle who writes about the Lamb. He also writes about keeping sheep, catching fish, the roaring lion, the dog and the sow wallowing in the mire (2Pet. 2:22). He tells about seeing unclean animals and creeping things on a great sheet let down to the earth (Acts 10:9-16). Peter learned a weighty lesson from a cock crowing (Luke 22:34).

Peter was slow to learn. He went back to fishing three times; he fell asleep three times; the Lord called Peter, James and John to be alone with Him three times; Peter denied the Lord three times; the Lord asked him, "Lovest thou Me" three times; and he saw a vision and heard a voice three times (Acts 10:9-16). The Lord is patient with us, like Peter we are slow scholars. The Lord said to Peter, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted (turned around), strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Peter did this, he wrote his first epistle to persecuted believers, to "stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1Pet. 5:10).

Peter by nature, was impulsive, he tended toward extremes, he was full of zeal for the Lord but was prone to make mistakes. Peter said, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death" (Luke 22:35). In the same chapter, when they brought the Lord into the high priest's house we read, "Peter followed afar off" (v54), and soon denied that he was saved or knew the Lord at all. Peter sinned grievously and wept bitterly. The Lord led him to repentance both privately (Mark 16:7) and publically (John 21:15-19). We must all admit that we fail the Lord and do not testify for Him when the easier path is to just keep quiet. Like Peter, we serve in fits and starts, sometimes on the mountain top of faithfulness and often in the valley of failure.

On another occasion, the Lord asked the disciples a question; "But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'. And Jesus answered and said unto him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter (a stone, moveable), and upon this rock (a distinct word; stable, solid mass of rock) I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:15-18). On this occasion Peter, by this special revelation from the Father, made one of the most choice confessions in the NT. "The Christ", declares the Lord to be the Messiah. "The Son of the living God" expresses the Deity of Christ and His eternal existence and identification with God. "This rock" is Peter's confession. On this

solid rock, Christ the Builder can erect the superstructure of His “glorious church” (Eph. 5:27). “The gates of hell” are the power and authority of death in contrast to “the living God” of Peter’s confession. Peter himself cannot be this foundation because he failed in the following verses, and the Lord sternly rebuked him saying; “Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me” (Matt. 16:22-23).

IN THE HOME. “He ... entered into Simon’s house” (Luke 4:38). In the unadorned home of a simple fisherman, there lived Peter, his wife, perhaps his brother and his mother-in-law. Luke the doctor diagnosed the latter as taken with a great fever, which would result from an inward disturbance, bringing a high temperature, a delirious state of helplessness, weakness and uselessness. She was a picture of Israel, the sick daughter of Zion. When Jesus was come, He saw, He touched her hand, He rebuked the fever, she arose and immediately, without any convalescence, she “ministered unto them”. In the home, where service begins, Peter first witnessed the compassion and power of the Saviour.

IN THE SHIP. “He entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And He sat down, and taught the people (multitudes) out of the ship” (Luke 5:3). It is to be observed, that teaching comes before toil. “He said unto Simon, ‘Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught’”. Peter confessed that they had toiled all night and caught nothing. Peter was an experienced fisherman; these men habitually fished in those waters; they were familiar with the lake of Gennesaret; they were tired after toiling all night, which was the best time to fish. When the sun arose, the fish went down deep, and by launching out again, they appeared foolish before the other fishermen. The Lord said, “nets” (plural) (v4). Peter partially and reluctantly let down one “net” (singular) (v5). Peter said “Master” (v5). Peter called Him “Lord” (v8). Peter is learning. “Their net brake”, both ships full of a great multitude of fishes “began to sink”. As he saw the ships heaped high with their slippery silver cargo, Peter “fell down at Jesus, knees” (v8). Peter bowed even lower, as a “sinful

man” before the Lord who had dominion over the fish of the sea. “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men” (v10).

Like Peter, we need to think less of our own skills and more about the Lord. Never reckon on His help and blessing unless we are prepared to sail under His orders. Fishing needs watchfulness, tact, skill, patience, ability to keep out of sight and above all, to keep at it. If you are toiling with “partners”, you need to learn how to work in harmony with others in the ship. “They forsook all, and followed Him” (v11). The Lord entered Peter’s house and healed the sick. The Lord entered Peter’s business and blessed it abundantly. When the Lord called Peter to leave his fishing business, it was never doing better. The Lord does not use failures. If it costs nothing to serve the Lord, then it is worth nothing. The servant of the Lord must have something to give up. No man should expect financial advantage by leaving material employment to “follow Him”.

IN THE STORM. “The ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary” (Matt. 14:24). On this occasion, after He had fed the five thousand, the Lord went up into a mount apart, to pray alone. He had constrained the disciples to get into the ship to go before Him. They were obedient to do His will, they were in the voyage at His bidding, the disciples were in the middle of the storm tossed lake, they “toiled in rowing” but were getting nowhere. They had been talking about the control of the Kingdom and who would be the greatest. They were now discovering that they could not control a rowing boat. It was the fourth watch, after 8 to 10 hours rowing, the saw “a spirit (phantom, apparition) walking on the sea”, “and they cried out (screeched) for fear” (Matt. 14:26).

Often in the voyage of life, even we toil at the Lord’s bidding. He may lead us into the stormy waters of adversity, where we may feel that we are not making progress, the boat is in the waters, then the water is in the boat and we feel that the boat is going down, and the Lord is not with us. They were not really alone; He was in intercession upon the mountain. He knew about their struggles. He cares for us, He is

our Intercessor, our Advocate above. “But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, ‘Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid” (Matt. 14:27). He often uses the stormy waters of trial as the pavement of His approach. He did not immediately calm the waters. He first sought to calm the distressed disciples. When Peter heard those lovely words, “It is I”, he wanted to be closer to his beloved Lord Jesus. Peter answered “Lord, if (since) it be *Thou*, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, ‘Come’”. Do we ever bless the Lord for the storm that brings us closer to Him? When Peter, “saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid”. Often like Peter, we get our eyes on the waves, not on the hand outstretched to catch us. He has not promised to give us a calm crossing but we can be sure of a safe landing.

On three occasions Peter, James and John were alone with the Lord as select witnesses. In the DEATH CHAMBER; with the parents of the little girl of 12, they saw His Grace as Saviour, when He took her by the hand and restored her to life (Mark 5:35-43). On the MOUNTAIN with Moses and Elijah they heard the Voice out of the cloud and saw His Glory as Sovereign when His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light (Matt. 17:1-8). In the GARDEN they beheld His Grief and Sorrow. He went a little further, being in an agony (Matt. 26:30-45). There were five present with Him in the death chamber and on the mountain. In the garden, He went on alone. Peter fell asleep.

IN THE ROOM. With the upper room ministry (John Ch’s 13-17), the Lord prepares the disciples for the period of His absence. He guards the Holy requirements of the Heavenly sanctuary, yet He needs people to serve Him on earth so he begins by washing the soiled, way-worn feet of the disciples. “Peter saith unto Him, Thou shalt never (in no wise mayest Thou ever) wash my feet” (John 13:8). Peter loved his Lord; he thought this service of a slave was derogatory for his Lord. Peter lagged behind and thought this act of feet washing was unnecessary. “Simon Peter saith unto Him ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head’”. Peter now goes

before in his thinking, he implies it was insufficient. Both mistakes were very serious. Peter was warm hearted but dull minded. The bathing of salvation is never repeated; it is once for all, complete and permanent. The cleansing of defilement for the enjoyment of fellowship and service is continuous and practical. No defilement ever so slight is unimportant to the Lord. The lesson is that presently we should constantly cleanse our ways according to the Word of God.

ON THE SHORE. Peter denied His Lord by the worlds fire. After resurrection the Lord lit another fire by the Sea of Tiberias. Peter needs to get warmed again. This is a fire of coals which is warmer, lasts longer and was accompanied by the aroma of cooking fish and fresh bread for disappointed, tired hungry fishermen. In the great chapter of resurrection, we learn that the risen Christ was “seen of Cephas, then of the twelve” (1Cor. 15:5). The Lord taught how to treat an offender; “tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (Matt. 18:15). After this private meeting, Peter must be publicly recovered to the Lord, restored before his brethren and recommissioned to his service.

IN THE ACTS. On the Day of Pentecost; “Peter, standing up with the eleven” (Acts 2:14), united, shoulder to shoulder, embolden through the Risen Christ, and empowered by the descended Spirit, Peter was fearless. It was not now a female slave he faced, but the men of Judah, the national leaders, the crucifers of Peter’s Lord. He fearlessly charged them with having their hands stained with innocent blood, “Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up” (Acts 2:23-24). “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). The issue of this powerful message is that “there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

Peter had failures and faithfulness. He had bad days and he had good days. John was the disciple whom Jesus loved. Peter was the disciple who loved his Lord. “Lord, thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee” (John 21:17).

“Remember Now”

How easy it is to forget or be negligent even in essential matters! Even using electronic memory aids with instant and progressive reminders we can still miss important events or fail to prepare in time and have to face the consequences.

The writers of the Bible often exhorted their readers to **“REMEMBER”**, and we would do well to consider a few of these and apply to ourselves as appropriate.

Remembrance for the Sinner

“REMEMBER now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, ‘I have no pleasure in them...’” (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

“REMEMBER Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32).

All need to be saved and no better time than in youth before the affairs of life, albeit legitimate ones, overwhelm and choke and failing health dulls the senses. Increased age can also bring sourness, stubbornness or scepticism of spirit from life’s experiences and souls become ‘set in their ways’ and indifferent to their standing before God. Yet youthfulness also has its dangers especially in the world today with its tendencies towards carelessness with the evils of the ‘inclusive’ mindset and other lures to entice and snare. Many regret the folly of their youth.

To ***“REMEMBER NOW thy Creator”*** is more than just calling to mind His existence. It is laying hold of the fact of our accountability for the life being lived and our need to be reconciled to Him before that life expires on earth and hence, to take action! It is a great sin to ignore Him, and an even greater sin to refuse the provision He has made in the offering up of His Son to deal with our sins at His great expense and pain. One criminal on an adjacent cross to Jesus cried, ***“Lord, REMEMBER me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom”***. This was his way of acknowledging his sins and guilt and of inward repentance toward God and of faith in his heart toward the blessed Son of God dying alongside him and he received the assurance that his cry of faith was heard, ***“TO DAY shalt thou be with Me in paradise”*** (Luke 23:40-43). And the Lord was waiting and willing to receive him when he died later that day.

And so it is for all, the young and the elderly, who grasp the opportunity of the ***“NOW”*** of ***“TO DAY”***, for tomorrow has proved too late for so many! This need not be expressed vocally but in the quietness of our hearts. If there is a genuine confession and forsaking of our sinful ways and complete trust in Christ’s death alone to deal with our sins, He is willing to receive us whatever we may be guilty of, for He said, ***“All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out”*** (John 6:37). At Philippi, salvation came to Lydia, a business woman, as a gentle breeze; a jailor needed a mighty shaking (Acts 16:14,26).

Remembrance for the Saint

“This do in REMEMBRANCE of Me” (1Corinthians 11:24).

“And they REMEMBERED His words” (Luke 24:8).

“REMEMBER that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble...” (2Timothy 2:8).

Salvation brings blessings but also responsibilities in testimony. Baptised believers do well to gather on the first day of the week with the saints to, ***“shew the Lord’s death till He come”***. This should be with an appreciative heart towards Him in recognition of our acceptance before God through His offering for us. It should also be their practice to gather regularly with the saints for prayer and Bible teaching.

Believers do well to continually remember His words in faithfulness and obedience in their daily walk, ***“If ye love Me, keep My commandments”*** (John 14:15). The truths concerning Him should ever be before us as we bear a public testimony for Him in the demonstration of the power of God and His Holy Spirit and will keep us focused and persevering despite the sufferings and opposition that may arise.

Remembrance for the Suffering

When I call to REMEMBRANCE the unfeigned faith that is in thee, ... and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2Timothy 1:5).

“But call to REMEMBRANCE the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions” (Hebrews 10:32).

Timothy had proved conclusively to Paul the reality of his faith. The Hebrew writer had reservations over some. They had made good progress, endured much loss and were suffering but now showing signs of going back, even apostasy. So, he exhorts and warns any who might be wavering to, ***“hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering”***, to press on toward the heavenly and lasting reward.

The Remembrance of God

“For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I REMEMBER no more” (Hebrews 8:12).

“For her sins (Babylon) have reached unto heaven, and God hath REMEMBERED her iniquities” (Revelation 18:5).

Here are two contrasts! Those who are saved have no fear of God ever bringing their sins against them for He has determinately chosen to ***“REMEMBER no more”***. Sins consequences may have to be faced on earth, but judicially, they are forgiven.

Contrariwise, the sins of Babylon constituting all religious systems are continual **REMEMBERED** by God; He will judge her long oppression of His saints. God will also judge every unbeliever; He has record of every work committed against Him. Hell is a reality. Flee to Christ for Salvation while you can. **REMEMBER NOW thy Creator!**