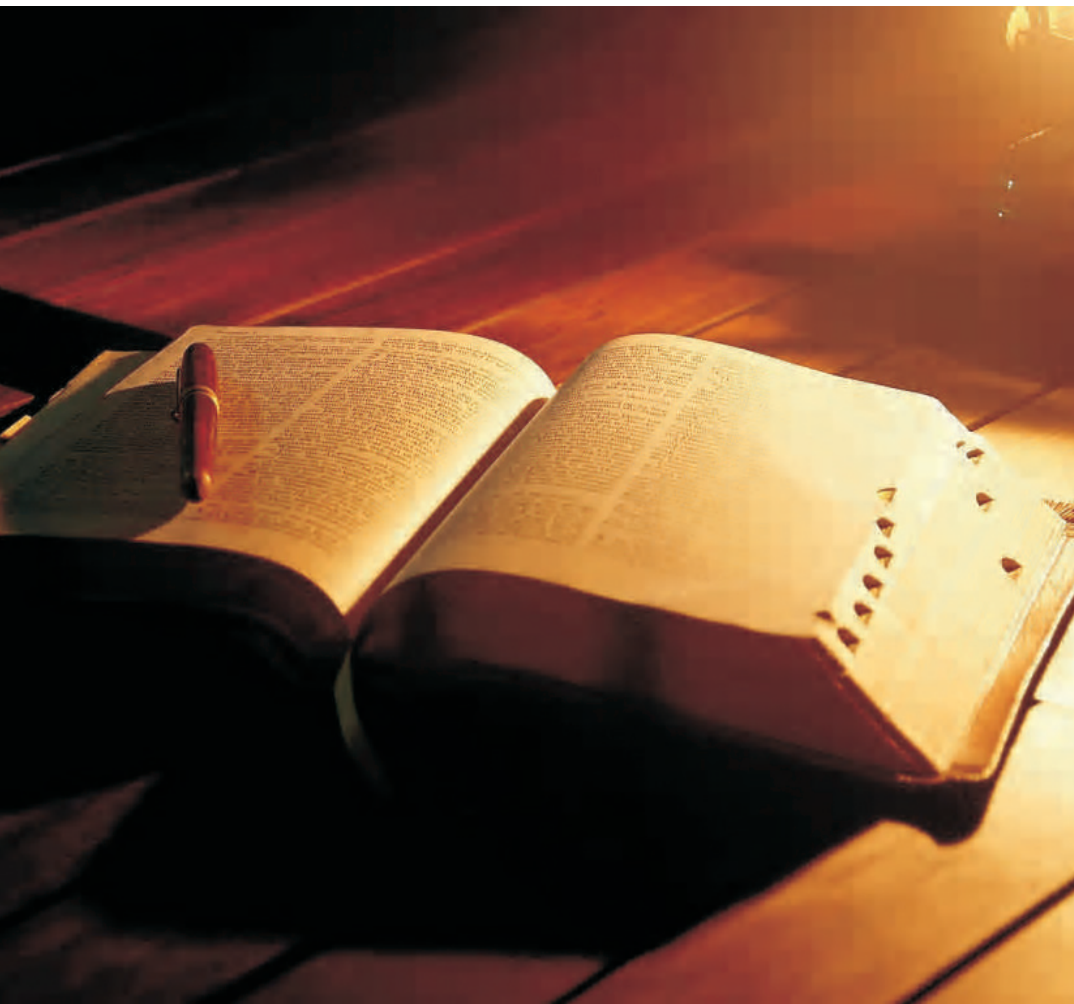


THE OLD PATHS

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The Old Paths

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From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. (2Timothy 3:15-17)



From the Editor's Desk

“The joy of the LORD is your strength”

(Nehemiah 8:10)

These words of encouragement were spoken to a feeble remnant delivered from Babylonish captivity, who had an exercise to build for God. Despised and few in number, they commenced quietly, with no campaign for bricklayers. They had no anointed king or ordained prophet to lead them. With no special announcement or programme, the high priest rose up with his brethren (Neh. 3:1). They began with prayer. The “apothecaries” (3:8), left mixing ointments to mix mortar. The “goldsmiths” (3:8), laid down their instruments of skill to work with a trowel. The men were helpers and the women assisted. In a humble, lowly spirit, they began at the sheep gate (3:1), and unitedly, each “next” to his neighbour, they proceeded to “the valley gate” and set up “the old gate” with its beams, lock and bars (3:6). The man who built “over against his house” (3:10), did what he could; and another “repaired the other piece” (3:11); another laboured “in his part” (3:17). It was carefully noted that “Baruch ... earnestly repaired the other piece” (3:20).

“The priests, the men of the plain” (3:22) were united shoulder to shoulder, “for the people had a mind to work” (4:6). They encountered those who were opposed, one of whom was “wroth” (4:1), some were “very wroth” (4:7), and conspired to hinder the builders to weaken their hands. They prayed again (4:9), set a watch, cleared the rubbish, and prayed again; “Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands” (6:9). “So the wall was finished” (6:15), and their enemies saw and “perceived that this work was wrought of our God” (6:16).

“Let every (each) man take heed how he buildeth” (1Cor. 3:10). Dear readers, have you become sad, discouraged, disappointed, perhaps disobedient or complacent; “Wearied and faint in your minds?” (Heb. 12:3).

The secret of the peoples “Joy” was that they had read and were obeying the “Book” at the water gate (Neh. 8:1), “From the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law” (8:3). The walls of separation were completed, they were a joyful people because they were reading and obeying the book. “The joy of the LORD is your strength” (8:10). Dear reader, are you reading and obeying the Book? This will bring “Joy” and much needed “strength” from the Lord.

The Rapture

J.A. Brown

Introduction

The next event to take place in God’s great prophetic programme is the “Rapture” of the Church, which includes every genuine born-again believer from the Day of Pentecost to the present day. The “second hand” on God’s prophetic clock has been stopped at one second to midnight; the very next movement of the clock will signal the next event in God’s eternal plans – the Rapture!

“Rapture” – Its Meaning

In the context of the Lord’s second coming, the word “rapture” is used in a specialised sense. It can be traced back to the Latin word “*raptus*” (a carrying off; snatching away). A related word was used in the 4th Century Latin Vulgate translation to render the Greek word “*harpazo*” in 1Thessalonians 4:17. This Greek word is used in different ways in the N.T.: In Matthew 11:12 it refers to “seizing possession”, while in John 10:28 it refers to “removing”. The third

way the word is used is being “caught up” to heaven, referring to the experience of Paul (2Cor. 12:2,4) and the Lord Himself (Rev. 12:5). It’s this third use of the word that is employed in describing the taking up of the Church from Earth (1Thess. 4:17) as the next prophetic event in the first phase of Christ’s Second Coming. The second phase will occur at least 7 years later: His coming to Earth (as opposed to His coming to the air in the Rapture) in great power and glory.

The different aspects of the Rapture. In looking at this great momentous event, we would like to think of it in a number of ways. Firstly we shall look at the *Scriptural basis* for the Rapture, then *How* it will take place, then its *Purpose* and finally its *Effects* (then and now).

The Scriptural Basis for the Rapture

To put the Rapture in its Biblical context, it is apparent that this event is part of what Scripture refers to as the Second Coming of Christ. There are over 300 Bible references which can only be understood correctly if we appreciate that this return or Second Coming has two distinct phases. The Rapture will be a sudden, un-announced event that will take all believers (the Church) – past and present – to the air to be “changed” (1Cor. 15:51) and ultimately to the Father’s house. There we will then all appear “before the Judgement Seat (Bema) of Christ” (2Cor. 5:10) and some time after that be present at the “Marriage of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:7), while those left behind on Earth will experience the horrors of the Tribulation for at least 7 years! At the end of the Tribulation period, the second phase of Christ’s Second Coming will take place – the coming in great power and glory to Earth.

So, this first phase of Christ’s coming (the Rapture) will be the fulfilment of that which was *promised* by the Lord to the disciples in John 14:3. It was then *confirmed* in the Epistles, such as 1Thessalonians 1:9-10; 4:13-18 and 1Corinthians 15:51-54. It’s also interesting to note the closing words of Scripture in Revelation 22:20, “...Surely I come quickly”.

How the Rapture will take place

The Rapture will be *personal*, *literal* and almost *instantaneous*. Broadly speaking, it will involve the resurrection of dead saints and the “taking-up” of living saints. A careful study of 1Thessalonians 4:14-18 and 1Corinthians 15:51-54 reveals many different and distinct aspects of the Rapture. The order in which these events are going to take place is recorded in these two passages of Scripture, and yet everything seems to take place almost *instantaneously* (“*in the twinkling of an eye*,” 1Cor. 15:52). The English word “twinkling” appears only here in Scripture, translating a Greek word used to refer to rapid movement. So, without any prior warning, suddenly the *Lord Himself* will come from Heaven (1Thess. 4:15). He promised that He would personally come again for His own, and that is what will happen at the Rapture. No substitute would suffice, however exalted or mighty. He is coming to claim His own rightful bride!

There will be three distinct sounds at the Rapture – a *shout*, the *voice of the archangel* and the *trump of God*.

Shout

The word “shout” is a military term, suggesting command, authority and urgency! The voice of Christ was heard at the tomb of Lazarus (a *loud* voice; John 11:43 – “Lazarus come forth”); this was a voice heard by one who was *dead*. At Calvary, Jesus uttered a *loud* cry when He “yielded up the Ghost” (Matt. 27:50), a voice heard by the *living*. Yet at the Rapture, the voice will be the clarion call to both the *dead* and the *living* (saints).

The Voice of (the) Archangel

Only two angels are named in Scripture – Gabriel, who appeared to Zacharias before the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:19), and Michael, called “the archangel” in Jude 9. Michael fights against Satanic powers (Daniel 10:13,21) to allow Daniel’s prayers to ascend to Heaven! In Jude 9 he disputes with Satan regarding the body of Moses. He is also seen in a coming day during the Great Tribulation seeking to defend the nation/people of God (Rev. 12:7), when many

“saints” will be martyred. So, Michael’s appearances in Scripture are associated with dealings with ‘the prince and power of the air’ (Satan, Eph. 2:2). Satan’s domain is the air or atmosphere or first heaven at present (enemy territory). Michael has experience of dealing with Satan and also has shown interest in the bodies of the saints. So, we suggest it is Michael that accompanies Christ at the Rapture.

Angels have been associated with Christ in the N.T. writings. There were angelic visitations before His birth *to inform* (Matt. 1:20-21), at the end of His wilderness temptation *to minister* (Mark 1:13) and prior to Calvary at Gethsemane *to strengthen* (Luke 22:43). Yet at Calvary the angels were conspicuous by their absence – there were none to inform, none to minister, none to strengthen, none to support and none to comfort! Angelic presence was seen after Calvary at the tomb (Matt. 28:1-7; Mark 16:1-7; Luke 24:4-7 and John 20:11-13), then at the ascension back to Heaven (Acts 1:9-11). Future angelic presence will be seen at the Rapture, and then at least 7 years after that the greatest manifestation of angelic power ever known will be seen at His Second Coming (phase 2) in great power and glory (Matt. 25:31; 2Thess. 1:7).

The Trump of God

1Thessalonians 4:16 refers to this trump as “of God”, while 1Cor. 15:52 refers to it as “the last trump”. Paul, the writer of these verses, may have been referring to when the silver trumpets were sounded as the children of Israel were in the wilderness, as a signal to pack up and move on towards the promised land (Numb. 10:1-10). He certainly wasn’t referring to the trumpets we read of in the book of Revelation – that book hadn’t been written anyway at this time, it was still future! All the trumpet sounds in Revelation are associated with judgements on an unsaved world – they don’t assemble anyone and are certainly not symbols of deliverance.

The *last trump* at the Rapture (1Cor. 15:52) is the last sounding forth in a particular set of circumstances (the Day of Grace), just as the last trumpet in Revelation 11:15 is the last phase in a different time

period, in different circumstances and involving different individuals. Imagine you are at a railway station late at night and it is announced – “the last train to ‘New Delhi’ leaves platform 4 in 5 minutes time”. Would this be the very last train to ‘New Delhi’? Well, yes and no! It would be the last train for that particular day, but there would be more trains again on the next day. So with the trumpet sounds; the last trump at the Rapture is for that particular time period of God’s dealings (dispensation of grace). The trumps in Revelation, *after* the last trump, are for a different set of circumstances of God’s dealings in the Tribulation period.

The Purpose of the Rapture

A study of 1Thessalonians 4:16-17 will make the purpose of the Rapture clear – it will be the means of bringing about God’s eternal plan and the Saviour’s promises to His own. It will involve the raising of the millions of believers who have passed through death since the Day of Pentecost and the changing of saints still alive when the Lord returns. The Church will then be complete and together for the very first time!

The Dead in Christ

Every believer who has died prior to the Lord’s return will be raised, all at once! This is the resurrection of life; the resurrection of damnation of the unbeliever will take place at least 1,007 years later at the end of the 1,000 year reign (Rev. 20:12-13). At the Rapture, the dead saints from every part of the Earth and every type of dead – every nationality, language, culture and age – will be raised. Those that have died at sea, those burnt at the stake, those with dismembered bodies; all will be suddenly transformed into new, living, incorruptible, resurrected bodies and joined together with their spirits at the coming of Christ. For an omnipotent, creatorial God who created this Universe from a previously non-existing “state”, this will be absolutely no problem!

The Living Saints Changed (“we which are alive and remain”)

Sadly, most people that have died since Earth’s creation will

eventually experience what Scripture refers to as the Second Death – the Great White Throne judgement and the eternal Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:15). They will then have experienced two deaths, one *physical* and one *spiritual*. Those that have put their faith in Christ since the Day of Pentecost and have died will only experience that one death. They are the “dead in Christ” referred to previously. But think of the two individuals in the O.T. that never experienced death – Enoch was taken up (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah went up (2Kings 2:11). Similarly, there are the living believers when the Lord comes to the air, who, like them, will never experience death. It could be us, fellow believer! What a thought that we very soon could be “caught-up” and changed!

To Meet Him, to See Him and to be With Him

Our eyes will be fixed on Him, our first glimpse of the One who on Earth we’ve come to trust and obey. We shall meet Him in the former domain of Satan, and we’ll be ushered away with Him to be in eternal fellowship with Him. What a blessed and sanctifying thought!

The Effects of the Rapture

The Effects Now

Our appreciation of the Rapture, as of any other part of Scripture, should *not* be merely an assemblage of facts and head knowledge. It should influence our present living *now!* (1John 2:28; 1John 3:3; Phil. 3:20; Titus 2:11-14). As believers, we are longing to see and to be with Christ and to be changed. The thought of the Rapture should stimulate us to be more like Him now. The Rapture gives assurance to believers who are worried about coming Tribulation conditions, that they’ll be “snatched away” beforehand. Obviously we long to be with our Saviour, but the Rapture also offers comfort to those who long to be re-united with departed loved ones (1Thess. 4:18), and also, the anticipation of being free at last from the pressures and presence of sin on Earth, and that which is within ourselves. Again, each time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper/Breaking of Bread, we do it “Till He come” (1Cor. 11:26).

The Effects Then

We have looked so far at the Rapture concerning those that will be taken. What about the very high percentage of humanity that will *not* be taken and will remain “living” on Earth or remain in the graves? The *long term* effects will be catastrophic, as they must experience the Tribulation period (the living unsaved), and ultimately the eternal Lake of Fire (all those who “received not the love of the truth” will “be damned”, 2Thess. 2:10-12). The *short-term* effects – let’s say a few minutes after the Rapture has taken place – will be devastating! There will be mass disappearances all over the globe. Family members will have disappeared and, in some cases, whole households will be gone. Drivers of planes, trains, lorries, buses and cars in transit will instantaneously disappear from Earth – imagine the effects! Perhaps even worse, the *restraining effect* of believers indwelt by the Holy Spirit will be suddenly removed from Earth. We often bemoan the fact that Christians have little local or national influence today, but in that day there will be *zero* influence, and satanic influence will be unrestrained! What a blessing to think that we will at that time be with the Lord!

Psalm 103 – God’s Remedy for Loneliness

T.J. Blackman

Alone (verses 1-5)

David is evidently alone as he writes this Psalm. There were many periods in his life when, either tending his father’s sheep or persecuted by Saul or his son Absalom, he was sometimes isolated from others. But it may have just been written when alone in his “closet”. But how did David respond to loneliness? He talked to his own soul! But what did he say to his soul? “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name” (v. 1).

Also, he exercised his memory: "...and forget not all His benefits" (v. 2). He recalls his personal experience of God's salvation. The Lord had delivered him (1) from the *guilt* of sin – "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities". (2) From the *damage* caused by sin: "Who healeth all thy diseases". (3) From the *consequences* of sin: "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction". (4) From the *degradation* of sin: "Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies". And (5) from the *weakness* caused by sin: "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's" (verses 3-5).

Alone, But Not Solitary (verses 6-12)

Not only does David speak to his own soul, but he tells his soul to "Bless the LORD". It reminds us of how the Lord told His disciples to "enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret" (Matthew 6:6). The praying Christian is never really lonely. Even in a sick-bed or a prison cell, he can speak to God his Father. Even when there are no words – just groans and tears – He sees our tears and the Holy Spirit groans with us (Isaiah 38:5; Romans 8:26).

Notice how David passes from addressing his own soul to speaking on behalf "*all* that are oppressed" (v. 6). God does not only reveal His ways to Moses, but also "His acts unto the children of Israel" (v. 7). See also how he speaks of "*us*" and "*our*" in verse 10. This is how the Lord taught His disciples to pray "in the closet": not "*my*" but "*our* Father ... give *us* ... forgive *us* ... lead *us* ... deliver *us*" (Matthew 6:9-13). It is not wrong, of course to pray personally to "my God" as Nehemiah and others often did. But we should always pray as part of a community, even when physically isolated from others. Job's prosperity was restored and doubled when he stopped praying just for himself and interceded for his friends (Job 42:10).

Alone, But Not Separate (verses 13-18)

When he says: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear Him" (v. 13), David is conscious of being part of a family – the family of 'them that fear the Lord'. Although isolated they are all, as it were, like a family gathered around their Father at

the throne of grace. Today, believers certainly have links which cannot be broken by isolation. They are all members of “one body” (Colossians 3:15) of which Christ is the Head.

The fear of the Lord is just as essential to us in assembly fellowship as it was to Old Testament saints like David. Notice the threefold privilege of “them that fear Him” in this Psalm. Verse 11: “For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him” – *Immeasurable mercy*. Verse 13: “The LORD pitieth them that fear Him” – *Fatherly care*. Verse 17: “The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children's children” – *Eternal love*.

Verse 18 reminds us that memory should not only lead us to bless the Lord (v. 2: “forget not”), but also to obey Him as “those that remember His commandments to do them”.

Alone, But Not Insignificant (verses 19-22)

The humble believer in his little room now realises that he is a child of the King of kings who “hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all” (v. 19). Days of rejection will soon be over and a “King shall reign in righteousness” (Isaiah 32:1).

Then the humble believer addresses angels. He does not pray to them, but he commands them: “Bless the LORD, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word ... all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure” (verses 20-21). What dignity is bestowed upon “them that fear the LORD”! (1Corinthians 6:3).

But that is not all. He is one who calls the whole of creation to worship his Lord. No corner of the universe should be devoid of praise! “Bless the LORD, all His works in all places of His dominion” (v. 22).

And that, of course, includes himself, so richly blessed, so greatly privileged: “Bless the LORD, O my soul” (v. 22), yes, let “all that is within me, bless His holy name” (v. 1).

The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 11:1-18

Ian McKee

Jerusalem hears the news from Cæsarea (v.1)

The apostles and other believers in Judæa soon hear about how Cornelius and his friends “received the word of God”. The news, evidently, had spread far and wide. However, as the apostles, in the persons of Peter and John (Acts 8:14), had to verify and endorse the conversion of the Samaritans (Acts 8:5-25), so also a similar consideration was needed after the salvation of Gentiles and the gift of the Holy Spirit, Acts chapter 10.

Peter is challenged at Jerusalem (v.2,3)

This challenge to Peter at Jerusalem was not because he was summoned to give account, but the surprising news had travelled faster from Cæsarea than Peter had. The events as reported from Cæsarea had disturbed the Christian community at Jerusalem, who were of Jewish birth, with all their Jewish prejudices about Gentiles. Instinctively these (who had not the benefit of the “great sheet” revelation, Acts 10:9-16) were divided in opinion from Peter and therefore “contended”, or disputed, with him.

These ‘Jewish’ Christians may have retained a zeal for the Old Testament Law and all the associated practices and observances. This is the first time since Pentecost that public doubts and opposition have been raised with Peter. He is, in essence, being accused of the surrender of long established practices by compromising the distinctiveness of Judaism in associating and having fellowship with Gentiles.

As the Jerusalem assembly was comprised only of Jewish believers, the wording “they that were of the circumcision contended with him” indicates that a party spirit was manifesting itself. Unless this

attitude was addressed robustly there was a very real possibility of a division into sects or factions, which could have led to separate Jewish and Gentile assemblies. It should be noted that as the apostles are specifically mentioned in verse 1, but not in verse 2, this indicates that they are not involved in or associated with the Jewish protest.

The specific objections do not appear to be about Peter preaching the gospel to Gentiles, but about his social contact with Gentiles in their home and in relation to shared meals and dietary laws. Entering a Gentile house was bad enough, as Peter acknowledged to Cornelius (Acts 10:28), but actually eating with them would have been unthinkable!

Although the point at issue is Jewish in context, nevertheless it is possible for any personal preferences or prejudices to impact adversely upon the work of God, even to division between those sharing common privileges.

Peter rehearses all that took place (v.4-17)

The serious implications made it necessary for Peter to explain everything as it happened in full and in context. As a result, Acts 11:4-17 recounts all that is recorded in Acts chapter 10. The care in addressing this issue and the number of verses providing the record indicates that to the writer, Luke, inspired as he was by the Holy Spirit, Cornelius' conversion was an epoch making event. Essentially we have these events retold for the third time. [Interestingly there is also a three-fold telling of Paul's conversion, Acts chapters 9,22 and 26.]

The rehearsal of the events starts with Peter's own experience. This is intensely personal: Peter receives a **divine vision** (vs. 4-10); which includes a **divine voice** (vs. 7,9).

Peter's account of **the vision** is amplified here. He states that in relation to the "great sheet" he says that he "had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw", which indicates that he had looked into

the sheet intently. This was no general view, but a forensic consideration, details were noted in a comprehensive way. “Wild beasts” is also a new detail here, that is wild beasts as distinguished from domesticated animals.

The **divine voice** to Peter is twofold: it embraces the interpretation of the vision by the Holy Spirit (vs. 7,9); and gives the command of the Holy Spirit (v.12). In this context, Peter does not gloss over his failures. He lets his hearers know that his ‘base position’ was very similar to theirs. However, in saying “Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth” he assured his hearers that while they were contending with him (Peter), he had contended on the very same issues with the Lord!

Peter stresses that the heavenly message to him was unmistakeable: “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common”. The fact that the “great sheet” was lowered three times and that the associated voice was heard three times meant that the basic message was reiterated six times by means of vision and voice. The fact that in conclusion “all were drawn up again into heaven” indicates that the message conveyed was not open to further discussion or renegotiation.

If we have had a vision and a voice, we have, at the very moment the vision ended, the visitors from Cæsarea (v.11). **Divine communications** are then confirmed by **divine command** (vs. 12,13).

This command is similarly unmistakable; “The Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting”. That is, go without hesitation, making no distinction. It must now have been very reassuring for Peter to be able to say, “moreover these six brethren accompanied me”. So, including Peter, seven men can bear united testimony to all that took place in Cornelius’ dwelling. Apparently in Egyptian law seven witnesses were necessary to prove a case; and in Roman law seven seals were necessary to authenticate a legal document. Be that as it may, abundant corroboration could here be provided to those who

were contentious. The word “these” indicates that the six men are presently with Peter in Jerusalem; and that they had all entered into Cornelius’ house as well as Peter.

Peter now focuses on the ***divine preparation*** in the vision to Cornelius (vs. 13,14). The cursory reference to this implies that these Jews had heard this story in some form already. So these details are given less coverage than the vision and voice to Peter. However, “who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” proves that at the time of: (a) Cornelius’ vision; and (b) Peter’s coming to him, Cornelius was as yet unsaved, whatever his ‘spiritual’ interest and its being expressed in practice. Similarly, all his family, and all those who were under the authority of the master of this house, i.e. domestic attendants or slaves, were also unsaved.

An interesting detail is then given; “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning”. This is really while he was still speaking, suggesting that Acts 10:34-43 may therefore be but the introduction of a much longer message Peter intended to preach. Often we have a perception that a gospel message is preached, the Holy Spirit convicts, the unsaved person considers, repents, believes, is saved. While that may be the experience of many, here such were the sovereign movements of the Holy Spirit as the gospel was being preached that Peter never finished his message!

But there can be no argument that salvation had resulted: “the Holy Ghost fell on them”. God puts the matter beyond all doubt; these results could not be gainsaid. Believing Gentiles had now obtained what believing Jews had experienced on the day of Pentecost. Such was the impact that Peter remembered words of the Lord Jesus Christ, as He Himself had assured His disciples in the upper room (John 14:26). These were words the Lord had stated to them after His resurrection (Acts 1:5), “John [the Baptist] truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost”. Peter then

understood the words of the Lord in a way he hadn't before. Therefore, this was the 'extension' of the blessings of Pentecost to Gentiles.

Peter concludes his explanation with what could only be the correct deduction: "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift [the Holy Spirit] as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" Water baptism is inferred here, as this rhetorical question matches "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts 10:47). [Unfortunately Peter later, for a period, fell under the condemnation of his current ministry, Galatians 2:11,12.]

The people conclude (v.18)

The phrase "When they heard these things, they held their peace", indicates that the Jewish 'contenders' remained silent; had no further objections; and all criticism ceased. It is more than being silenced, they were "still". Then praise and worship began as they "glorified God", which also involved a confession that Peter was correct in all that he had done.

They acknowledged "then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life"; that God had given the Gentiles the change of heart and mind, which results in spiritual and eternal life. This was an outstanding, epoch-making, statement by Jewish believers in the Jerusalem assembly who were of a 'conservative' or 'traditional' mind-set.

However, this Judaistic outlook continued to be a problem going forward; and the fact that they make no specific mention of the gift of the Holy Spirit may indicate that there is still presently a restricted view of the blessing bestowed upon the Gentiles. But, for now, the risk of division in the outworking of God's purpose via the gospel is averted.

(To be continued D.V.)

Sisters

Selected

In our occasional visits to assemblies two evident needs thrust themselves forward continuously. These are the lack of under-shepherds who will EXPLAIN the Scriptures relating to the Local Assembly (not merely warn and condemn), and that of sisters who are ready (in their Scriptural sphere) to serve the saints as “Mothers in Israel”.

This expression occurs only twice in the Bible, first with reference to Deborah (Judg. 5:7), then with reference to the Wise Woman of Abel (2Sam. 20:19). But in the New Testament Paul (by inspiration) tells us that Rufus’ mother was also a mother to himself (Rom. 16:13). Many times our teachers have pointed out the need for such mothers in the assemblies – women who have the Lord’s interests at heart, after the counsel of His Word, in seeking, particularly, the welfare of younger Christians (Titus 2:3-5).

In Romans 16:1-2 we learn that Phebe was “a succourer (a helper and protectress) of many”. Likely Priscilla qualified for the title as well. Mary (v6) and the three sisters of verse 12 are recorded for their “much (wearisome) labour” also. But since the two Old Testament women have been marked out by the Holy Spirit in clear outline, let us notice, briefly, a few pertinent features of their walk and fitness.

Deborah (Judg. 4:4-5), was first and foremost, *a woman to whom the Lord could make known His mind*.

Next, since the people “came up to her for judgment” (v5) it would seem likely:

- That she didn’t go around interfering into other people’s affairs, but *waited for people to come to her* with their troubles (Prov. 18:16; 20:3b; 25:9-10).

- That she knew how to keep her place, ministering privately whatever of His mind the Lord revealed to her.
- She could go with Barak to the battle *courageously*, in complete dependence on God.
- She did not go to direct Barak, but to pass on to him the encouragements the Lord gave to her (v14).

In chapter 5 we find that she is a praising woman (vs. 1-2). In the last glimpse we have of this noble mother in Israel she is seen praying, seeking only God's glory (5:31). No wonder the closing sentence could say, "And the land had rest forty years".

The Wise Woman of Abel (2Sam. 20:15-22), we may notice briefly, was not officious (v17); was both peaceable and faithful in Israel (v19); while from certain of the expressions used one would gather that:

- She was no gossip, no spreader of scandal (Prov. 26:22).
- In speaking to Joab she did so wisely, making her appeal by means of a question (v19b) in her own private sphere.
- She spoke to her people wisely, also (v22), setting forth facts rather than scolding or making wild statements, one would think; neither would she try to get results by scheming.
- She did not preach publically. She could not have built a reputation for wisdom by using any such means, we may be sure. No true Mother in Israel must ever be suspected of craftiness. What a mercy it was that there was a Mother in Israel in that ancient city at that time.

But let us return to **Deborah**, and the basic point of her fitness as a Mother in Israel. *She was a woman to whom the Lord could make known His Mind*. After all, beloved, when we need counsel is it not *the counsel of the Lord* which we require? Surely human experience cannot furnish such advice! "There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand" (Prov.

19:21). Moreover, the solemn lesson of Job 42:7-8 must ever be a warning to us if we would give advice on the basis of our own experience.

John 10:27 indicates that we should seek to learn to listen for His voice from His Word, rather than to rely on intuitions, as many do.

First, *we've simply got to learn to humble ourselves*, truly and DEEPLY, before the Lord if we are to be in any condition to *hear His voice clearly*, speaking by the Holy Spirit through His Word (Note Psa. 138:6; 2Kings 22:18-19; Isa. 6:5-8). If we are not willing to prepare our hearts to seek the Lord after this fashion there will be little use in our bothering about it. Time needs to be found, also, to get alone with God, if at all possible. Our minds need to be calmed and freed from the many demands of our creature existence if our spirits, led by His Spirit, are to get into His presence. David went and sat before the Lord (2Sam. 7:18) humbling himself, receiving God's great kindnesses and promises, before his request was made (v29), and we shall need to learn to do this same. Just to bow down, pray, jump up and go about our business is of but little value in my case.

It is a bit like yelling a greeting to a neighbour as one goes hurrying past. It often takes half an hour, or more, of self-examination, confession, reviewing our own past disobedience, recalling His mercy and loving kindness and going on to tell Him of the perfections of His Son, before communion is established and we are consciously in His presence. And only when that moment comes is it time to lay before Him our burden, in detail, and to ask that His counsel be given to us through His Word.

Occasionally, His answers may be given quickly as we read through our Bible. More often they are gleaned a verse at a time over a period of days – or weeks. When nothing more is being received we need to seek His face afresh for understanding of the message, earnestly endeavouring to set aside our own ideas or desires. There is no reason at all why any spiritually minded elder sister might not prepare her heart to seek the Lord on behalf of any in the assembly

who might profit from the care of a Mother in Israel. Through the means just described she can learn whether or not to speak a word to another sister; can receive counsel as to how to approach her; can learn what is to be read, or spoken, or can be given His answers to their problems in private without stepping out of her place of subjection in the assembly.

May it please the Lord to raise up many badly needed Deborah's as Mothers in the assemblies of His people ... if He be not come.

Hidden Workers

“My fellowlabourers, whose names are in the Book of Life” (Philippians 4:3)

“As unknown, and yet well known” (2Corinthians 6:9)

They lived, they served the Master, this we know, and naught besides;

No record of their names is left to show how soon they died;

They did their work and then they passed away, an unknown band,

And took their place among the greater host, in their homeland.

No glory clusters round their names on earth, but in God's heaven,

Is kept a book of names of greatest worth, and there is given,

A record of their labour and their flight, though here unknown,

And there the workers' names shine forth in light, before the throne.

Then take who will the boon of fading fame, but give to me,

A place among God's workmen, though my name forgotten be;

And if in that bright roll at last is found for me a place,

A song of loudest praise to God shall sound, for all His grace.

Get to Know Your Bible

J.A. Davidson

NEW TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 13.

HEBREWS

After studying the opening books of the New Testament, the Gospels and the book of Acts, we have considered thirteen epistles and letters written by the apostle Paul. In the order of the English Bible, we now come to eight epistles that do not indicate the name of Paul as the author. Two are written by Peter, two by “the elder” (John) and one each by James and Jude. The remaining two epistles, Hebrews and 1st John are anonymous, concluding with the Book of Revelation, written by John.

These eight epistles, which are not addressed to any specific local church, only occupy about ten percent of the New Testament, yet they constitute vital doctrine and revelation offering rich spiritual reward to the spiritual student of the Scriptures.

In this grouping, the epistle to the Hebrews occupies a unique position. Christ is the key to all the Scriptures and over the epistle to the Hebrews we can write, Christ Supreme.

“HEBREWS” means “TO CROSS OVER”

The expression was first used of Abraham the Hebrew, the heathen idolater, called out of Ur of Chaldees, who believed God and crossed over the Euphrates into a path of faith in fellowship with God (Gen. 14:13).

“Hebrews” is a great doctrinal treatise, written with unity of thought and progression of purpose, interrupted by frequent affectionate exhortations, admonitions and warnings. Like Abraham, the “heirs of salvation” (Heb. 1:14), are drawn out to Christ “Without the

camp” (13:13), not legally but lovingly, not as a mandate but as a magnet.

The lesson for us is as we are privileged through Christ, to enter into the presence of God with holy boldness, we are called out from the systems of Judaised Christendom unto our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has been rejected by religion.

THE OCCASION OF WRITING

In spite of the unquestioned value of Hebrews, little is known with certainty about its occasion, background and authority. It is from the opening chapter, an epistle of Supreme New Testament truth, yet it concludes as a letter with personal details, request for prayer and the indication of an intended visit accompanied by Timothy recently set at liberty (13:23).

It is written to a local company of Hebrew believers, (10:24-25), referring to their “former days” (10:32), and past generosity (6:10). These believers, because of faith in Christ were suffering great persecution. Some have been disinherited by their family. They had lost their livelihood and possessions. They have been afflicted, made a gazing stock, and suffered reproach being identified with the writer in his bonds. They were second generation believers (2:3), suffering great reproach from their fellow Jews but some were lacking understanding of the full Old Testament ordinances as now having been accomplished in Christ.

Some believers were babes needing further teaching (5:12-13). Some were discouraged and slothful needing to be stirred to better things (6:9-12). Others, under severe persecution, were in danger of turning back from the principles of the doctrine of Christ. These needed firm warning and rebuke (6:1-6). Sadly, there were also those among them who were apostate and needed to be exposed as unreal (10:38-39).

The doctrinal need for this great presentation of the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ through these chapters, and especially His presentation as our Great High Priest, was because some of these

believers thought that the splendour of the old economy of sacrifice and offering as revealed in the Old Testament Scripture was still of value and in danger of being lost. The lesson of Hebrews is that the old had a glory that was good but partial, temporary and fading.

They needed to be clearly taught that this former glory was all fulfilled and far surpassed in Christ. New Testament revelation is not at variance with the Mosaic law or the Levitical order, but it has superseded them because they were incomplete. This was a problem to a Jewish mind. The old order was a divine institution, given by the disposition of angels. It had been delivered in glory, promising the presence and blessing of God. The system of Judaism, its priests, offerings, holy vessels, holy days, laws and commandments exclusively belonged to Israel. To abandon all that had been handed down through many generations of priests, prophets, patriots and poets was a serious demand to make upon a pious Jew.

The burden of Hebrews was to show that all this was shadowy but now the substance had come; the emblematic had given way to the reality; the temporary which was “good” pointed forward to the “better”, which was abiding, final and forever. “Jesus”, (His single earthly Name used 8 times in the epistle) “Endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2). The choice must be made, the old order had served its purpose in that it pointed to the need of the Son, Who was the Priest unique and Supreme. The majestic unfolding of the enthroned Christ has given us a treasure of truth in this lovely epistle that is timeless and relevant whatever the circumstances in which it was originally written.

THE WRITER

Apostolic authority is not in question. Christ Supreme is not enhanced in anyway by the knowledge of the human penman. The Spirit of God deliberately does not tell us.

The writer had an established relationship and acquaintance with the readers so there is no concealment of authorship to the first believers who received this lovely epistle.

The final words of salute (13:22-25), indicate that the writer was likely Paul. We are told by Peter that Paul also wrote to some definite company of Hebrew believers (2Pet. 3:15-16). No other writing of Paul so adequately fulfils this description apart from Hebrews.

DATE OF WRITING

The details of the writing supposes a working temple, a system of priesthood and the continuation of temple ritual and offerings. This would indicate that it was written between AD63, when there were priests functioning in the temple (8:4; 10:11), and before AD68, as the destruction of the temple in AD70, was pending “Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (8:13).

METHOD OF WRITING

Hebrews contains more Old Testament quotations and illustrations than any other epistle. Without salutation or introduction the inspired writer launches into the subject of the superlative glories of our Lord Jesus Christ, showing that the Old Testament contained all the internal evidence of a mediatorial service and ceremonial system that must pass away. In a masterly way, the epistle develops the surpassing and abiding glories of the Person and work of Christ directing faith to look beyond the law.

The substance, superiority and supremacy of the Son of God above the shadows of Old Testament revelation rise to a climax, “Thou art My Son, to day have I begotten Thee” (5:5); “Thou art a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec” (5:6). The chapters continue to build up to the practical result of this priestly boldness within the veil (10:19-22), and reproach without the Camp (13:11-15) (note the word “without” three times).

The nation of Israel could claim the rich heritage of the “prophets”, the ministry of angels, Moses the law giver, the promises of God, the glory of the Aaronic priesthood, the holy sanctuary of God’s presence, the covenant, the holy vessels, the beautiful veil, the great Day of Atonement and the Levitical offerings. It would be difficult to

persuade the Jewish mind to leave all this ancient tradition and ritualistic grandeur to be identified with Christ in water baptism and to gather to remember Him with the simple bread and cup, emblems of His body given and His blood shed. The answer in Hebrews is that we have Christ. He is greater than the prophets, greater than the angels, greater than Moses, Joshua and Aaron. A Superior priesthood, a better sanctuary, a better covenant. Christ is the antitype of the vessels and the offerings of bulls and goats. In fact, Christ is the once and for all enthroned sin Purger, seated at the right hand of God. He “Sat Himself down” (middle voice) occurs four times and are the Keys to the sections of this Epistle:

1. “When He had by Himself purged our sins, set down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3-4). THE PURGER, His Person, Who He is and the excellency of His “Name”.
2. “We have such an high priest, who is sat on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (8:1). THE PRIEST, His Position, where He is, “A minister of the Sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (8:2).
3. “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (10:12-14). THE PROOF, the Perfect Expiation for “sins”. What He has done at the cross.
4. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2-3). THE PLEDGE, the Pattern, “Consider Him” as we follow in the path of “faith”. What He is now, “lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”.

The revelation of “God” (1:1), through the excellence of the Son, now seated again at the right hand of God, leads us to our gracious acceptance by God; “Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire” (12:28-29). We are in the course of receiving, “a kingdom which cannot be moved” (12:28). This is God’s final purposes in His Son,

based on all that is in the epistle, so perfect, so complete, needing no further additions and no repetition, “once” for all. With willing gratitude we are called to serve as thankful worshippers. We must do this with dignity, with befitting manners, language and veneration. God is righteous and of searching judgement. God has not lowered His standard of holiness since Sinai. We must not approach in modern lightsome casualism but serve with reverence and awe.

COMPARISON WITH OTHER WRITINGS

Galatians and Hebrews contain warning to those who profess faith and are in danger of turning back. In Galatians, the warning is against a return to Law and circumcision as a means of salvation. In Hebrews, there were those who were turning back to Law and ceremony to avoid reproach and suffering.

Romans and Hebrews contain fundamental Gospel truth, developed in the epistles which follow in each group of writings. Romans will prove that Grace and Law, like faith and works, are incompatible for salvation. Hebrews will prove that Christ, as the fulfilment of New Testament revelation is the culmination of all that is foretold in the Old Testament.

THE STRUCTURE OF WRITING

Hebrews is mainly doctrinal with five practical parentheses (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:20; 10:26-39; 12:25-29). The readers were under such persecution and stress that the author warns them of the danger of; “drifting away” from the things they had heard (2:1); to guard them from; “an evil heart of unbelief, in departing [falling away] from the living God” (3:12); to arouse them from dullness of hearing (5:11), and to encourage them to retain boldness and “patience” unto the end, (10:35-36), “Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (12:3). Some also needed to be warned about the danger of apostasy (6:4-8; 10:26-31; 12:14-29).

It also contains eleven practical exhortations designated by the words, “Let us”. The doctrine and privileges of the epistle are accompanied by responsibility and practice. For example. “Let us ... come” (4:16), coming in, within the veil is the privilege of chapter 1

to chapter 10. “Let us go” (13:13), go outside, outside the camp, is the responsibility of chapter 11 to chapter 13.

The great doctrines of Hebrews begin with God (1:1), and end with prayer to the “God of peace” for troubled saints (13:20). Similarly the account of creation (Genesis 1-3), begins with God. The pattern of the Tabernacle begins with the Ark of God’s dwelling place (Exod. 25:10). Without any salutation, unlike other epistles, the first word of Hebrews (1:1) is “God”. The writer immediately shows that the revelation of God “by His Son” (1:2), is greater than the revelation given by “the prophets”. By various manners and means of communication through divinely inspired spokesmen, their ministry was partial and incomplete.

Chapters 1 and 2 are like twin pillars as we enter this magnificent edifice of teaching. The opening chapters present the PERSON of our Lord Jesus Christ. His Deity (Ch. 1) and His Humanity (Ch. 2) are like the gold and acacia wood of the ark.

Ch. 1 – The pure gold of His Deity. The Majesty of the Son of God and His Power to save.

Ch. 2 – The incorruptible wood of His Manhood. The Mediator as the Son of Man.

Ch. 3:1 to 4:13 – HIS PREEMINENCE; He is greater than Moses and “the house” and Joshua and the “rest”.

Ch. 4:14 to 8:13 – HIS PRIESTHOOD is after the pattern of Aaron but after the order of Melchisedec.

Ch. 9:1 to 10:22 – HIS PROPITIATION; the background is the Day of Atonement. In chapter 9, “blood” is mentioned twelve times through which we have Approach (1-10), Access (11-23) and Acceptance (24-28). “Having therefore, brethren, boldness (confidence) to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus” (10:19). This section develops the three occasions on which Christ is said to “appear”. He has appeared to put away sin. He now appears in the presence of God for us. He shall “appear the second time, without sin unto salvation” (9:24-28). Chapter 10 shows that His first advent, did not exhaust His

coming. “For yet a (very) little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (10:37). There will be no delay; we wait expectantly and eagerly on the time appointed for His manifestation.

Ch. 10:23 to 11:40 – THE PATH OF FAITH. The practical section of the epistle commences with exhortation and warning. “Let us hold fast (continuous, steady with undeclining firmness, unswerving) the profession of [our] faith” (10:23). To encourage “faith” in the Hebrew saints, chapter 11 gives us a list of fourteen men and two women of “faith”. To encourage believers in persecution and trial, the narrative omits any mention of the failures of these worthies. The greatest detail is given of the lives of those who lived before Moses (11:4-22). They lived by faith before the Law and ordinances outlined in the precious chapters of Hebrews.

Group 1: (11:1-12). They were marked by PERCEPTION; looking deeper.

Group 2: (11:13-31). They were characterised by PATIENCE; looking forward.

Group 3: (11:32-40). They had POWER enabling them by faith to do exploits for God in their present persecution.

Ch. 12 to 13 – PRACTICAL POST RESURRECTION GLORIES OF CHRIST. The former chapters of doctrinal truth are brought to focus upon the Supreme Example; “Looking (with fixed gaze, away from anything else) unto Jesus” (12:2). Faith (Ch. 11), Hope (Ch. 12) and Love (Ch. 13) are to be worked out morally and practically in the life, home, assembly and testimony of the believer.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do His will... (Heb. 13:20-21)

Seven Special Saints

Howard A. Barnes

Introduction

On a good number of occasions the Apostle Paul mentioned a person's name and then provided a miniature verbal sketch of them, as for instance 'my fellow labourer', my kinsman, or 'my fellow prisoner', etc. However, on fewer occasions he changed his descriptions to write 'our' instead of 'my'. For instance, in the long list of 26 named individuals he mentions in Romans chapter 16, 'my' is used for about a dozen, while 'our' for only two. So, when he says 'our', Paul is assured enough to extend his description to embrace others also in his appreciation. There are in fact, in our Authorised (King James) Version, only **seven** individuals altogether who are so described, i.e., (in alphabetical order) Apphia, Archippus, Epaphras, Phebe, Philemon, Timothy and Urbane. We will investigate each of them in turn, seeking to provide some brief helpful comments.

Timothy our Brother (2Corinthians 1:1)

Paul described Timothy in a number of ways, such as fellow-workman, fellow labourer, workfellow, minister of God, even 'my beloved son', and the like. However, the fact that he is described as 'our brother' is most noteworthy. Initially, the Jews were very suspicious of Timothy, since, although his mother was a Jewess, his father was a Greek (Acts 16:3). We are told that although Timothy would have been grudgingly accepted as a Jew through his mother's Jewishness, the Jews at his local synagogue would have treated him as illegitimate, especially as he was not circumcised. This was never so with Paul, for Timothy was a brother, and indeed 'our brother' to many, so no identity crisis for him now!

Phebe our Sister (Romans 16:1-2)

Phebe was indeed 'our sister', but she was much more! Her name

comes originally from Greek mythology, and its moon goddess, and means 'bright and shining', and her example is just that. So, she was most probably a Gentile, but Paul had no problem in calling her 'our sister', happily commending her to the believers at Rome. This is most important, since racism has no place among believers, and we should receive believers 'in the Lord', whatever their background.

One way in which Paul was happy to say 'our' was that Phebe was for Paul what she also was for many believers – a 'succourer' (Rom. 16:2). In the original language, the word 'she' is emphatic, meaning that Paul wanted to emphasise that sisters like Phebe were few and far between. 'Succourer' was a specially chosen word for a special kind of helper, who would readily come to the aid of the needy. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words says, 'It is a word of dignity ... indicates the high esteem with which she was regarded, as one who had been a protectress of many ... the title of a citizen in Athens, who had the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of resident aliens who were without civic rights. Among the Jews it signified a wealthy patron of the community'. Phebe was always there, ready and willing to help, and she had already done this for many says Paul, and "of myself also". She was, like Deborah, a real "mother in Israel" (Judg. 5:7).

Urbane our Helper (Romans 16:9)

Urbane was a Gentile, who if he lived up to his given Latin name was 'city born'. He might even have been *urbane* in its modern sense, i.e., elegant, courteous, and refined in manner and speech. On the other hand, W. Sanday and A.C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, T & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1902, could be correct in saying his was 'A common Roman slave name'. However, what we definitely know is that Urbane had been a helper of Paul, but also of others, consequently earning the appellation of 'our helper' (fellow-workman, JND), and like many others mentioned only once in the scriptures, had earned themselves an honourable place in "The Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever" (1Pet. 1:23). Our secular or social standing is of no

consequence when it comes to our usefulness as a worker or co-worker with fellow-believers. However, being courteous is to be Christ-like and commended to all.

Epaphras our Dear Fellow Labourer (Colossians 1:6-7)

There must have been a number of ways in which Epaphras had earned the title of ‘our fellow labourer’, obviously first in the gospel. In speaking about the gospel coming to Colosse, Paul says, “since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth; As ye also learned of [from] Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ” (Col. 1:6-7). Also, his earnestness in prayer for the Colossians alongside Paul was most commendable, Cp. Col. 2:1-2 and 4:12-13, praying “that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col. 4:12).

Philemon our Dearly Beloved (Philemon 1)

Many believers had experienced that Philemon was ‘our dearly beloved’, but he was also our ‘fellow labourer’ in that he had laboured with others including Paul in the work of Christ. He now lived at Colossae and the assembly met in his house. Onesimus his slave had run away, probably taking things with him belonging to Philemon, but he had been saved in a most remarkable way through the Apostle Paul, who, at the time was imprisoned in Rome. Paul was now sending Onesimus back to Philemon, but with the hope that he would accept him as ‘a brother beloved’. This would really put Philemon to the test, and would challenge Paul’s description – would he be ‘our dearly beloved’ to this new believer?

Our Beloved Apphia (Philemon 2)

Apphia was most probably Philemon’s wife, and for Philemon to have been able to do well what he had done would have depended on his wife being wholly supportive of his efforts. Not only were they “*heirs together of the grace of life*” (1Pet. 3:7), but also committed to the Lord’s work in the same way as Priscilla and Aquila, were (Rom. 16:3). Philemon showed kindness to fellow believers (Philemon 4-7) and his

provision of his home for the assembly meetings (v2) would have been greatly enhanced by Apphia's cooperation.

Archippus our Dear Fellow Soldier (Philemon 2)

A good soldier of Jesus Christ is a believer who, in the service of the Lord, would 'endure hardness', i.e., put up with great difficulties (2Tim. 2:3). Epaphroditus had earned this title in a way that was obvious in that he had risked his life for 'the work of Christ' and had almost died (Phil. 2:25). However, Archippus, probably Philemon's son, on account of difficult service unknown to us, had been given an even better name of 'our dear fellow soldier'. His loving fellowship in difficult circumstances (unknown to us) had ensured him being valued and loved by Paul and others.

However, something – also unknown to us – had caused Paul to have to ask the assembly at Colossae to "say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it [literal: keep on filling it full]" (Col. 4:17). There seems to have been some problem with Archippus's commitment to using his gift fully in the Lord's service. His good name as fellow soldier needed to be preserved! Paul would later give a similar challenge to Timothy, to "do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2Tim. 4:5).

Conclusion

Seven dear saints in very different circumstances had proved themselves useful to Paul and others, and had thereby earned themselves good names and thus provide good examples for us to follow.



In addressing the Lord in prayer, there is often a great familiarity indulged in by those who are not at all remarkable for their spirituality.

The Death of Christ is the Foundation of God's Kingdom

Selected

We believe it would be a mistake to suppose that the book or scroll (Greek, *biblion*) of Revelation chapter 5 to which reference was made in a previous article (TOP No. 33 – The Death of Christ Facilitates God's Judgement) is merely a book of judgement.

It is much more likely that it corresponds to what we find in Jeremiah chapter 32.

In this chapter Jeremiah is instructed by the Lord to buy the field of Hanameel the son of Shallum, Jeremiah's uncle. This he is requested to do as a near kinsman, the one who possessed "the right of inheritance", and "the right of redemption". Jeremiah obediently purchased the field. Then we read "And I subscribed (or wrote) the evidence (literally, the writing or book, as verse 12, the R.V. reads "deed"), and sealed it, and took witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. So I took the evidence (book, or deed) of the purchase, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open: and I gave the evidence (book, or deed) of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Maaseiah, in the sight of Hanameel mine uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses that subscribed the book of purchase, before all the Jews that sat in the court of the prison" (vs. 10-12).

Quite clearly the sealed book here is the proof of purchase and so the deed of title to the land. It has been suggested that two copies of the document were made, one "sealed according to the law and custom", and one left "open", "so that, in case the open one were lost, or were accidentally or designedly injured or defaced, a perfect original might still exist in the sealed up copy".

The sealed book of Revelation chapter 5 seems to answer exactly to what we have in Jeremiah chapter 32. Here, however, is not the deed of a field, but the proof of purchase and the deeds of title to the whole earth. He who is “kin” to both God and man purchased it with His own precious blood.

When we think of the long period that had elapsed since God’s earth was purchased from the one who had taken possession, the devil; and when we consider the universal hostility to the rightful Owner, and to His claiming His rights to the earth, we can appreciate that the opening of the seals of the book is a traumatic occasion and one fraught with momentous ramifications and issues.

We can also appreciate the appropriateness of the seals being loosed and the book being opened by the One who appears as “a Lamb, as it had been slain”. For it is in His sacrificial death, and by the shedding of His precious blood, that the Lord Jesus Christ recovered the right of inheritance and ownership.

When man, the appointed regent upon earth (Psalm 8:6), listened to Satan rather than to God, he effectively placed the sceptre into the hands of Satan. So Christ Himself acknowledged Satan as “the prince of this world” (John 12:31 etc.) and never questioned his claim that “all the kingdoms of the world” had been delivered unto him (Luke 4:5-6).

By the opening of the seals “the Lamb” is unveiling the evidence of the legal rights of possession which are now His.

Other Scriptures speak of the universal scope of the purchase, among them Matthew 13:44 and 2Peter 2:1.

From earliest times the parable of the man who bought the field in order to secure the treasure hid within it, has been understood as representing the necessity of a sublime appreciation of the Kingdom of Heaven in the case of any that would enter into it, and a willingness to sacrifice all else to gain it. But does this interpretation fill out the details satisfactorily? Such an attitude is certainly requisite

in the pursuit of divine blessings, and has been even from Old Testament times (See e.g. Proverbs 2:1-5; 3:13-15), but does this, undoubtedly true as it is, reach the full depth of these “mysteries of the Kingdom”? The Sower of the first parable, and the “man which sowed” of the second, are representative of the Son of man (Matt. 13:37). So, we would suppose, is the “man” of the third parable. Is it not most likely that the leading figures in the parable of the treasure, and the parable of the pearl, are also representative of the Prime Mover in the Kingdom of heaven? Understood in this light the details of the parable become luminous rather than obscure. What possible vital explanation can be given of a sinner needing to purchase a field in order to obtain the treasure hidden in it?

In Old Testament Scripture the thought of treasure is linked with the nation of Israel (Exodus 19:5; Psalm 135:4; Malachi 3:17). In order that Israel might be saved, and brought on to New Covenant ground, and restored to divine favour in the coming Kingdom age, the Saviour must not only make “Himself of no reputation” (Phil. 2:7) in incarnation, but “give Himself” in atoning sacrifice (See e.g. Isaiah chapter 53).

We might suppose from the parable that the treasure hid in the field was not something easily removable but something inseparable from the field, such as a deposit of precious metal. At any rate the legal right to possess the treasure required the purchase of the field. And this the man is prepared to do, even at the cost of losing all else that he possesses.

It is not difficult to see how the restoration of Israel to its position as the head of the nations, and the disposal of the nations according to their peculiar relationships to Israel, require the rights of universal ownership and government. So the purchase of the field in order to possess the treasure has a simple, readily understood significance, and accords with Revelation chapter 5.

And so from this and the next parable (the pearl), both peculiar to

Matthew's Gospel, we learn the vitally important and heart-touching principle, that the Kingdom of Heaven, in whatever aspect, is based upon the sacrifice of Christ. The foundation of the Kingdom is the cross.

In the parable of the treasure the prime thought is of joy, in the parable of the pearl it is of profit, for it is a merchant who seeks pearls, not a diver nor a collector. So here we have the joy of Christ (Compare Hebrews 12:2) which enabled Him to make the great sacrifice and pay the extreme price in order that Israel (if so we understand the treasure in the parable) might be His own peculiar treasure in the Kingdom of heaven.

Is it not a consideration of great joy to the believer that in the Kingdom of heaven Christ finds, and will find, great joy and great gain, such as will recompense Him for His infinite sufferings and loss at Calvary, those upon which the whole Kingdom is founded?

Some may see an objection to this interpretation inasmuch as when the Lord asked His disciples "Have ye understood all these things?", and they answered "Yea, Lord", the Lord did not dispute their answer. For succeeding chapters reveal that they had not yet learned that the cross was necessary as the basis of the Kingdom. We can scarcely suppose, however, that the Lord was ready to accept that the disciples understood the spiritual significance of every detail of all the parables! The disciples' reply would rather convey that they had grasped the broad lessons of the parables, according to their present state of spiritual understanding.

We might also point out, as a matter of practical application, that the greater sense does not exclude the lesser sense. Discipleship is following the Master. It is coming to see things and to appreciate things as He sees and appreciates them. See the principle stated in another connection in Matthew 10:24-25. If the Kingdom of heaven is a treasure to the Master, it must become so to any who would become His disciples. If the Kingdom is as precious as a pearl to Him,

so must the matters of the Kingdom be to His disciples (Matt. 7:6). Divine riches must be sought (Matt. 6:33), and though they are of grace, in a certain sense they must be “bought” (Isaiah 55:1-2; Proverbs 23:23; Rev. 3:18), and sacrificed for (Luke 14:33; Phil. 3:7-11), and so acquired (Matt. 13:52; see now “his treasure”). The man who is truly “discipled unto the Kingdom of heaven” is one who follows in the footsteps of his Master as far as lies within him in relation to the Kingdom. Of course his sufferings will never be atoning sufferings; that work was all completed by Christ at Calvary; but in a lesser sense the disciple must drink the Master’s cup, and experience the Master’s baptism (Matt. 20:22-23). Suffering loss for the Kingdom’s sake is the experience in measure of all who enter (Acts 14:22; 2Thess. 1:5).

In 2Peter 2:1 we see that ungodly men and even apostates have been “bought” by the Lord. They are not redeemed, although the ransom price was paid on their behalf (1Tim. 2:6). Redemption is a twofold truth, deliverance by the paying of a price. The price, the precious blood of Christ, was paid at Calvary, but the purchased deliverance only becomes operative when that ransom is appropriated by faith, and true conversion to God is experienced.

How significant it is that when the favoured three received that glorious fore-view of the Kingdom upon “the holy mount”, when Moses and Elijah appeared with a radiant Christ, the subject of conversation was “His decease (exodus) which He should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31)! Moses the representative of the law, and Elijah, the representative of the prophets, in this way show how the law and the prophets had declared the necessity for the sufferings and death of Christ before He could enjoy the glory “after these” (Luke 24:25-27,44-47). Will not this be the central theme of conversation throughout the Kingdom age? Yet how slow the disciples were to grasp both the teaching of Scripture and the repeated predictions of the Saviour, that the cross is the only foundation for God’s Kingdom.

MEN OF GOD SERIES

(8) MOSES : MY SERVANT (Part 1)

**“So Moses the servant of LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word (lit. “mouth” – JND, Newberry, “kiss”) of the LORD. And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, overlooking Beth-peor: but no man knoweth his sepulchre unto this day”
(Deuteronomy 34:5-6)**

This was a unique token of approval for His faithful servant; the man whom God called, **“Moses My Servant”** (Joshua 1:2).

The life of Moses covers four books in our Bible. His name occurs about eight hundred times in Scripture. In the account of the life of Moses given in Hebrews chapter 11, the expression, “By faith” occurs four times. He was the meekest of men who put his faith in the Great God, that God might have all the glory:

- He was the son of a slave; he was the child of a princess.
- He was born in bondage; he lived in a palace.
- He was laid by the river; he appeared on the mountain.
- He dwelt in the desert; he built a sanctuary for God.
- He fled in fear; his face shone in glory.
- He kept sheep; he led a nation.
- He was hid 3 months; he walked 40 years.
- He had the wealth of a king; he suffered affliction.
- He refused the treasures of Egypt; he bore the reproach of Christ.
- He forsook Egypt, he saw the Invisible.

MOSES THE BABE

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment” (Heb. 11:23). In this first reference in Hebrews chapter 11 to the faith of his parents, we are introduced to that which marked Moses throughout his life:

We need to see that Moses was the hidden man:

- He was hidden by his parents for three months in the home.
- He was hidden in the ark of bulrushes by the brink of the river.
- He was hidden in the wilderness for forty years.
- He was hidden on Mount Sinai for forty days.
- He was hidden on the Mount a second time, alone with God.
- He was hidden in the cleft of the rock by the hand of God.
- He was hidden upon Mount Nebo where God buried him.

We are only allowed brief glimpses of the most noble of God’s servants when they appear in public service. The greater portion of their lives is not revealed to us as it was spent in private communion with God. The great example is the Lord Himself. The ratio of time spent in private to that spent in public is approximately 10 to 1. There is great profit in studying His public life, His private life and His prayer life. “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). When the Lord taught the disciples to pray, He referred to: “Thy Father which seeth in secret” three times (Matt. 6:4,6,18). Moses communed with God, face to face. God spoke to him, mouth to mouth. The constant refrain in his writings was; “as the LORD commanded Moses”.

“The king’s commandment”, to murder all the male children did not apply to Aaron, who was three years older than his brother Moses. This wicked decree was successfully outwitted by the shrewdness of

the women in attendance and does not seem to have been prolonged. Stephen's statement; "In which time Moses was born" (Acts 7:20), indicates that Moses was born at the very time that the bitter bondage in Egypt was at its peak. In the fulness of Divine purposes God caused the future deliverer of His people to be born in a humble peasant home. Like his blessed Lord, Moses was born under sentence of death at the king's command. Moses' parents saw that he was, "a goodly child" and seemed to recognise the mark of God's favour. As with Joseph and Mary, Amran and Jochebed may have received Divine communication, or simply by faith, they refused the royal edict.

"She hid him three months" (Exod. 2:2). Moses was, "nourished up in his father's house three months" (Acts 7:20). He was, "hid three months of his parents" (Heb. 11:23). They raised him together, united in their concern, a godly couple guided and preserved by God to raise a great family. Aaron their eldest boy became the high priest, Miriam their daughter led the praise of all the women in the song unto the Lord at the Red Sea and Moses was raised up to lead the people of God out of Egypt. Some reader of these pages may be a father who was never called to specific public service or a mother who has served God in her own sphere of godly silence and subjection. What an honour in present conditions to have the joy and privilege of rearing a family to honour God in society where marriage and family life are under such satanic attack.

In the formative years of Moses, God used five women, Jochebed, Miriam, Shiphrah, Puah and Pharaoh's daughter. God worked in the domestic sphere, the home life. The first to influence, the first to encourage, the beginning of great things for God may begin in a house of prayer and godly example, where it is the done thing for the whole family from earliest days, to go to the meetings and be taught the Scriptures which are able to make wise unto salvation, in Sunday School. Indeed, often the early training of a servant of God begins when he himself teaches a little Sunday School class and is encouraged to see God's hand in salvation.

MOSES AND THE BULRUSHES

An ark of bulrushes and the tears of a babe were vital links in God's plan to raise up a man to lead His people out of Egypt. When God's purpose was to call Moses to this great work, He placed Moses in the palace and allowed Pharaoh to feed him. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

"She could no longer hide him" (Exod. 2:3). Moses' mother parted with him three times. She nursed him in the home, embraced him in her arms as long as she could. There came the day of her last kiss and she tenderly laid him in the ark of papyrus rushes and bitumen, closed the lid and laid it in the flags by the river's brink. She did not trust him to the buoyancy of the Nile but by faith, with sensible precautions she placed him in the care of God, for, "they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Heb. 11:23). The place of death was the place where he lived, illustrating the principle of death and life in the believers experience expressed in baptism and being raised up from the dead, "so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4).

"Behold, the babe wept" (Exod. 2:6). To deliver His people, God used the cry of a babe to move the power of the nation. The lesson is that we must trust God, right up to the line. This was also the lesson that Moses repeated at the impassable waters of the Red Sea (Exod. 14:13). Peter slept, chained between two soldiers, as Herod planned his execution for the next day (Acts 12:6). Gallows had been constructed by Haman fifty cubits high to hang Mordecai in the morning (Esther 5:14). "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Psa. 34:19).

One of the residences of the Pharaoh's was at the estuary, near the sea where there was less danger of crocodiles. Moses' mother placed the little ark among the reeds, not midstream, so it would not float away. This area was commonly frequented by members of the royal court. Pharaoh's daughter would have been suspicious of a

Hebrew woman but the presence of a child, was an act of wisdom and overruled by Divine design so that he was returned to his mother who; “took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew” (Exod. 2:9-10). She had him when he was growing while under royal protection and she was receiving wages. We read, “when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren” (Exod. 2:11). Who taught Moses that those people serving in bitterness with vigour and hard bondage, working in mortar and brick, were his brethren? His mother taught him that this nation of slaves were God’s people. The lesson is, never criticize God’s people before your family. Moses’ mother had him growing up, in a God fearing home in those early formative years. This was no accident or happy coincidence but the overruling hand of God that Moses would be taught those vital convictions essential for the future deliverer of Israel. Dear mother, rear that boy for the Lord. Do not, for material gain, give him out to someone else to rear for you. In school days guide him from the Scriptures. In college years order and supervise his company before he leaves the shelter of the home. God gave the precious opportunity to Moses in those first personal irretrievable years to be under the godly influence of prayer and faith.

“She brought him unto Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son” (Exod. 2:10). It was another distressing occasion when Moses’ mother, with her last words, final advice and parting kiss, delivered him up to enter the palace.

MOSES AND HIS BRETHREN

“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter” (Heb. 11:24). Historians suggest that this lady was Thermutis who was married but childless. “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds” (Acts 7:22). Moses obtained the best education as a prince in the most advanced nation on earth at that time. He would have learned arithmetic, the Egyptians left detailed land markings of the annual inundations of the Nile; astronomy, the pyramids of Egypt

were built in exact orientation to the sun in years of 365 days; art, the excellence of which is still preserved; architecture of massive proportions; anatomy, medicine, dentistry preserved in the teeth of the mummies; amusements, “pleasures of sin” associated with Egyptian idolatry, athletics, sports and music of ancient Egyptian culture. The extreme dryness of the Egyptian atmosphere has preserved in almost perfect condition, the inscriptions of the early civilization. “Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb. 11:25). To obey the call of God is costly. A choice must be made before God. Moses never forgot that his parents were slaves, his brethren were groaning. Like Ruth, he would say; “Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). He belonged to an alien race who were treated with suspicion and hate in Egypt. His brethren were an oppressed people, under a cruel lash. They were living in savage enslavery, building cities for Pharaoh. “He went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens” (Exod. 2:11).

“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:26). Some believers speak about providential guidance in their service and read the will of God into the circumstances in which they find themselves. Moses was in circumstances in Pharaoh’s palace where he could have helped the people of God. Perhaps he could try to influence Egyptian politics or send money or food to ease their burden. He had the opportunity to ride in chariots of grandeur or float on the Nile in a golden barge listening to nice Egyptian music. ‘Accounting the reproach of Christ’ was a decisive act once for all. Moses wrote about Christ as the coming Messiah 1500 years before Christ came, “Until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be” (Gen. 49:10).

In the wilderness they, “were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock

that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1Cor. 10:2-4). This N.T. passage taken from the O.T. background, asserts that Moses was focused upon the Person of Christ as the recompense of the reward of faith yet future. Hebrews chapter 11 speaks of Moses parents not fearing the “king’s commandment” (v23); and Moses himself, “not fearing the wrath of the king” (v27). Moses led the people by faith, out of Egypt not fearing the waters of the Red Sea, nor the pursuing chariots of Pharaoh or the strength of the walls of Jericho (Heb. 11:29-30). The key to the choice that Moses made was that, “He endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible (the unseen One)” (Heb. 11:27). Faith steps out when it has nothing visible to tread on. Faith is prepared to give up what it cannot keep to gain what it cannot lose.

Moses’ choice (responsibility) was made before he got a definitive call (sovereignty) from God. A choice is not made by one who has nothing to give up. Service is worth nothing if it costs nothing. Paul said, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). A man should be at no material advantage by going out full time in the work of the Lord. This was the first decisive step of Moses on to the ladder of faith leading to Horeb, Sinai, Pisgah, the Mount of Transfiguration and Heaven. Moses knew God face to face.

MOSES AND THE BONDAGE

There were three reasons for the bondage in Egypt:

1. DIVINE: It was foretold in Genesis chapter 13. God’s promise to Abraham was, “I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth” (v16). From a family of 70, Jacob’s seed increased to about one and a half million in two hundred years. It grew from a tribe to being “the congregation of Israel” (Exod. 12:6).
2. DISCIPLINE: His brethren sold Joseph and he was carried down into Egypt. Their descendants became slaves in the same land.
3. DISPENSATIONAL: The governments of earth are under God’s

control. Israel delivered Christ into Gentile hands. Presently, we live in the “times of the Gentiles” and Israel will yet suffer the time of “Jacobs trouble”.

“Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” (Exod. 1:8). A new dynasty came to the throne of Egypt resentful of the amazing growth of the children of Israel dwelling in the choice land of Goshen. The more Pharaoh afflicted them with hard bondage and bitter sorrows, the more they multiplied and grew. This new king was resentful of the previous Pharaoh and certainly would have had historical knowledge of his prime minister, Joseph. Joseph was raised up of God to preserve the children of Israel. Now God was raising up Moses to deliver His people.

There are practical lessons to be learned from the bondage:

1. Hard times do not erase God’s promises. Peter writes about persecution and dark misty days but also speaks about, “the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2Pet. 1:19).
2. Harsh treatment does not escape God’s notice. “I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them” (Exod. 3:7-8). To persecuted saints of Smyrna, the Lord said: “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty ... Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer” (Rev. 2:9-10).
3. Heavy tests do not eclipse God’s concern. “The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1Pet. 1:7). Beloved; does pressure press you down or does it press you nearer to the Lord?

MOSES AND THE BURDENS

“And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he

looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand” (Exod. 2:11-12). Moses was “full forty years old” (Acts 7:23), when he slew the assailant of the Hebrew slave. “He defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed ... For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not” (Acts 7:24-25). Moses needed to learn, like Abraham, that premature efforts of the flesh, while well intended, end in failure. We need to learn to wait upon God. Spiritual ends are never achieved by carnal means. We can do right things but not at God’s time. Leadership of God’s people is not self-assured. No one will be a leader without being a servant first. Moses acted rashly and hastily. He wanted to be a deliverer and to jump start a rebellion.

Looking this way and that way indicates that he was not acting before God. An exercise is not a call from God. Passion is not principle, impulse is not purpose. We must not just act upon a pious appeal or missionary enthusiasm. If we learn these weighty lessons about God’s call, an exercised young brother will be preserved from the embarrassment of going out for God and being called back home by his wife and family. We need to learn like Moses that the wilderness comes before God’s call, the sanctuary before the street, the private before the public, worship before work. May God preserve us from preachers that just talk. The warmth of God’s presence and the weight of God’s truth will deliver us from mere wind and words. A young brother seeking commendation declared that he would be original or nothing. He said that he soon found out that he was both. A zealous man, declared that God had called him to world wide evangelism. He said, believe it or not, that he had not as yet taught a Sunday School class.

Moses attempted to bury the Egyptian in the sand. When God buried the Egyptians, He buried Pharaoh, with his chariots and horsemen, all the host in the bottom of the Red Sea, so there remained not so much as one of them. Moses needed to wait upon God to judge

Pharaoh. He was not looking this way and that way but he was looking in the right direction when, "He endured, as seeing Him Who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). He also had the added burden of seeing his brethren going back to the brick yards and enduring the task masters rods for another forty years. They said; "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" Like his blessed Lord, his own did not receive him. The people of Israel, served the gods of Egypt (Josh. 24:14). They were unfaithful and rebellious. God said; "In the day that I lifted up Mine hand unto them, to bring them forth of the land of Egypt ... they rebelled against Me, and would not hearken unto Me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt" (Ezek. 20:6,8). Israel sighed, cried and groaned under their burdens. They were not ready to leave until they were sick of Egypt and repented and cried unto God for deliverance.

Moses learned to be a servant while in the desert at the well. In the school of God, he defended the oppressed women. He stood up to help them when the shepherds drove them away from the troughs which they had filled with water for their fathers flock (Exod. 2:17). These selfish, violent thieves were robbing the women by taking the fruits of their labour. Moses would have thoughts of the oppressed in Egypt and the failure of his own rashness.

The risen Lord commanded His disciples, "that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4). The order of service, in the power of the Holy Spirit was to be, "witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The order will usually be, witness before relatives, school chums or work mates. Prove God in a little Sunday School class and the local assembly. Let your voice be heard giving public thanks to God for His Son, before attempting to preach to others about Him.

(To be continued D.V.)

Questions and Answers

Question: “Yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). What does this statement mean?

Answer: The Epistle to the Hebrews states in the first chapter “God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by [His] Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds” (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus Christ, is the eternal Son of God. “Prophets” were servants, He is in character and relationship, One with God as Son, not a mere messenger but the “Image of the Invisible God” (Col. 1:15).

God said unto Him, “Thou art My Son” (Heb. 5:5), also said, “Thou art a Priest” (Heb. 5:6). Prior to incarnation He created, decreed and commanded. Divinely appointed as the Priest, He was acquainted with what it meant to be obedient. This to Him was not disagreeable but delightful; “I come to do Thy will, O God” (Heb. 10:7,9). His perfection was manifest, “In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears” (Heb. 5:7). This refers to His sorrow in the garden of Gethsemane. There His obedience was expressed when He cried, “Not My will, but Thine be done” (Luke 22:42). His deity and dignity were not diminished in any way but to be priest His perfection was filled out in His experience of “the things which He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). This involved death. He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8). On the cross, He cried, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me” (Matt. 27:46).

For it became Him ... in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their Salvation perfect through sufferings. (Heb. 2:10)

“Ask Now the Beasts...”

When God created mankind, male and female, He blessed them and said unto them ***“Be fruitful, and multiply, ... and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth”*** (Genesis 1:28). Yet, despite mankind’s position of superiority over the beasts, a wise man many long years ago, found occasion to give this counsel:

“ASK NOW THE BEASTS, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul (life) of every living thing, and the breath (spirit) of all mankind” (Job 12:7-10).

The whole of creation, animate and inanimate, in earth, sky and sea, bears testimony to the reality of the existence of a Creator, and reveals the power and wisdom of the One who made all, including mankind. No one can find excuse to deny this fact, ***“For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse”*** (Romans 1:20). He is the One who gave all its being and its life, and who sustains in life every one of us. Shall it be said of me, ***“The God in whose hand thy breath is ... hast thou not glorified”***? (Daniel 5:23). Do we now have less sense than the beasts around us?

“The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know, My people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity ... children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward” (Isaiah 1:3-4).

What was true of Israel of old, is true of all mankind. What an unspeakable tragedy and disgrace that man with his supposed superior intelligence, through the blinding effects of sin and wilful departure from God, has become more foolish than the beasts and has to be pointed to them to learn the simplest of lessons. The ox and the ass know their master, the one who cares and provides for them, but men in the blindness of unbelief refuse to acknowledge God’s goodness to them. They show Him no gratitude, and turn from Him in rebellion, corrupting themselves, and bringing themselves under His awful wrath and judgement. ***“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way”*** (Isaiah 53:6). This is my natural state and condemnation before God, ***“For there is NO difference: For ALL have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:22-23).

“The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies” (Psalm 104:18).

Both the wild goats and the “rabbit-like” conies have no self-defence “systems” and make for an easy meal if caught. Yet both find their safety in the rocks; one by inhabiting the difficult terrain of the high hills where predators cannot easily go; the other within the solid rocks out of which they cannot be easily extracted.

Likewise as sinful creatures with no self-immunity or protection from the punishment for our sins, we need to make the Rock our shelter: ***“A Man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land”*** (Isaiah 32:2). The ***“Man, Christ Jesus”***, who was lifted up on Golgotha’s rock to provide a solid foundation for God’s Redemption plan, is the only Rock of shelter from the pending judgment of God; all other “rocks” are “sham-rocks”. However, this Man is also the One through Whom God, in a not to distant day (Daniel 2:34,45), will smash the proud kingdoms of this world to establish His Millennial Kingdom. He likened those who heard and obeyed His teaching as a house built upon a rock (Matthew 7:24-29).

“Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest” (Proverbs 6:6-8).

Now is the summertime of God’s grace, the day of salvation from the dark winter time of God’s coming judgement upon our sins. If we sit back and do nothing about our soul’s need we will perish in hell eternally. Salvation is by grace through faith and not of works, ***“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”*** (Ephesians 2:8-9). Yet God has made us responsible beings, and we must seek Him diligently, and appropriate the full provision He has made for our soul’s salvation in the sacrificial death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who finished the work of salvation at Calvary (John 3:14-17; 19:30).

“PREPARE to meet thy God.” “SEEK ye the Lord!” “STRIVE to enter in.” “REPENT and BELIEVE the gospel.” How dreadfully sad and solemn if we should ***“NEGLECT so great salvation”*** and have to lament, ***“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved”*** (Jeremiah 8:20).

The ant has no ***“guide, overseer or ruler”*** to tell it what to do; it does of its own accord what it needs to do. Yet man can be told, counselled and warned over and over again and still fail to prepare for eternity and to flee from the awfulness of the righteous wrath of God to come.

May God make us ***“wise unto salvation”*** before it is too late, by learning from the beasts: ***“Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; ... but My people know not the judgment of the LORD”*** (Jeremiah 8:7).