

The Old Paths – January / March : 2026 – № 49

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For ever, O LORD, Thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth. They continue this day according to Thine ordinances: for all are thy servants. Unless Thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction. (Psalm 119:89-92)



From the Editor's Desk

EBENEZER

As, by the Grace of God, we commence another year of publications of the Magazine, we raise our "Ebenezer" to God for His past mercies and take courage to continue editing "The Old Paths".

The changing winds of adversity have been against us over previous years. We have passed through anxious months during the year now passed. Yet again, we have proved that God answers the prayers of the Lord's dear people, when we come to a standstill and wait upon Him. The way to become strong in Christ, is to become weak in yourself. We quote the words of the late Editor of "Words in Season" magazine, Dr. E.A. Martin:

"How great Thy wondrous ways, O God,
Thy mercies and Thy tenderness,
How Thou hast blessed the path we trod the year now past;
We would confess our faithlessness.
O help us to anticipate,
The quick return of our dear Lord,
To lean our weakness on Thy sure Word,
And in Thy strength, to overcome."

Our esteemed brother Ajay Kumar Chhatria continues to receive rehabilitation therapy and has regained his mobility. We are so pleased to have his continued contributions and spiritual guidance as a member of the publication committee. God has graciously raised up brother Joseph Shah of the Dishergarh Sanctoria assembly in Bengal to help with the publication, distribution and subscription list. This is no small burden. We look to all to assist our brother with an efficient updated list of the existing readers from their local assembly. Every effort to expand the interested and exercised readership should be addressed to brother Shah.

We desire to see God's people "Overcomers" in a day when so many are apostatizing from the "Old Paths". If we can be a help to any through the pages of the magazine, our labour will not be in vain.

The Lord Himself hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5-6).

We thank God's people for their generous support through the past twelve years, and ask for a continuance of the same, that the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be magnified by the messages contained in "The Old Paths" as the Rapture is so imminent.

MARANATHA

J. Alan Davidson
Editor

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A New Year Invasion

The record of this raid is given in 2Kings 13:20. Bands of Moabites invaded the land, at "the coming in of the year". They were far-off kinsfolk of the house of Israel. But their history was bad (see Gen. 19:37). They had been a snare to the people of God, had led them astray already (Num. 25), and caused them to serve their gods (Judges 10:6). They are typical of those carnal, deceitful, subtle foes of ours, who scheme and plan to lead us away from God, into ways that well they know will strip us of our glory, and rob us of our power as the redeemed and separated people of God, His witnesses to the world, and His light-bearers among our fellows.

The Moabites come for no good. Their mission is to "rob" and to "destroy", as the devil's business ever is (John 10:10), no matter who he may use to do his work. Let this be clear, and half their game will be spoiled. The Moabite raiders are out for evil, they are enemies of God and of His work, and no matter what they pretend or profess, we can give them no room to work. They know when to come. The New Year is just over, with its times of new resolution, fresh dedication, and joyful expectation. The Moabites know it, and they come to spoil and ruin it all. They can stop a revival, start a disruption, split up happy fellowships, rend godly friendships, cause love to damp out, and sow the seeds of discord, discontent, and distrust, where love and grace have long had their reign.

These Moabites, enemies of the Cross, must be met square in the face with the armour of resistance. No discussion is to be held with them. They are no better than their progenitors; they are children of Lot, their origin is evil, their end is to be smitten with the sword, and to perish for ever (Num. 24:17). They are to be made to feel its sharp edge of the Word of God even now (Heb. 4:13), not in destruction, but in resistance. And if they are, they will not visit again. If they are not resisted (1Pet. 5:8), but given a "place" (Eph. 4:27), they will not "flee", but come again.

Who are the Moabite invaders? They are carnal, worldly professors of Christ's Name, who may or may not

have Divine life in them, men who seek to seduce God's people into alliance with the ungodly (see Rev. 2:14), to cast stumbling-blocks in the path to stumble those who seek to walk in the way of God's commandments. Beware of all such. They are more to be feared than Philistines, and can do more harm than Canaanites. Be particularly watchful of their doings now.

They begin their raids at "the coming in of the year", and will spoil every vestige of work for God in the Gospel and among the saints, if they can. Let the Lord's watchmen be on the watch towers, and the Lord's warriors in their armour, in rank, to defend their heritage. And let there be no exposed flank, no gap in the ranks, through which they may gain an entrance to do their evil work. And let there be no comings and goings with these marauders, no unhallowed unions formed with them, when they come to seek or give "a helping hand", deceitfully.

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Daniel's Third Vision – The 70 Weeks

Chapter 9 – Part 1

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

Introduction

Daniel's two previous visions were given in the reign of Belshazzar (Ch's 7 and 8). This third vision occurred at the beginning of the Medo-Persian empire in the reign of Darius (v1). Daniel, now in his mid 80's, had been a captive by this time for almost 70 years and he anticipated by his reading and understanding of Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 29:10-14) that restoration of the nation was imminent! He implicitly believed in God's promises to Jeremiah, so it seems that Daniel expected an immediate, complete fulfilment of Israel's restoration at the end of the captivity. Yet he also realized that *complete* restoration depended on a number of "spiritual" factors that had to be met (national repentance, prayer, etc.); it was evident, at that time, that this was not the case! As a result, Daniel personally confessed and interceded before God for himself and for the nation! (vs. 3-19).

Context

While in prayer, Gabriel revealed to Daniel the "70 weeks" prophecy which outlined God's future prophetic programme. This prophecy gives us a remarkably detailed overview and outline of God's plan for Israel and the nations and provides us with a "time element" to unlock other Bible prophecies. It also clearly shows that there is a future for Israel! When interpreted, these "70 weeks" reveal God's purposes from Daniel's lifetime through to New Testament times and then on to "end" times!

So many events are prophesied in this vision over a very long period of time – many have subsequently been fulfilled while others are still future! This prophecy is really a sequence of events (sequential) that would take place at different times ("progressive prophecy"). Predicting a single future event is naturally challenging; to *correctly* predict a series of events over a lengthy period of time can only be Divine! This prophecy is surely a proof (if we needed it) of the trustworthiness of Bible prophecy and indeed of Scripture itself in its totality!

Method of Interpretation of Daniel's Vision

This vision has been the subject of numerous and varied interpretations over many years! The present writer believes that much of the prophecy has been fulfilled historically – from the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem (7 "weeks") to the coming and ultimate rejection of Christ by the nation (7 + 62

= 69 “weeks”) (vs. 25-26). When Christ was rejected by the nation all subsequent prophesies were suspended (not cancelled), so we are, presently, in the time when the prophetic clock has stopped. The final 70th “week” is still yet future and concerns “the prince that shall come” (v26) – the Antichrist – in the Tribulation period (see more details in the next article – **Part 2**). Scripture is clear that Christ will return to the *air* for the saints (Rapture) before this Tribulation period begins and then return to reign over the Earth for 1,000 years after it has finished!

Nebuchadnezzar and Israel

The numeral 7 is used frequently in Scripture. Consider the 7 days of Creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, the 7 feasts of Jehovah (Lev. 23), the 7th Sabbatical year (Lev. 25:1-7), the weekly Sabbath, the 70 years of captivity (Dan. Ch’s 1-12), the 7 miracles in John’s gospel and the 7 churches (Rev. Ch’s 2-3). In Scripture the numeral 7 speaks of rest, completeness, perfection and fullness. In Daniel’s prophecy it is used in relation to Nebuchadnezzar (Ch. 4) and to this “70 weeks” prophecy in chapter 9. Nebuchadnezzar was disciplined of God for a period of “7” times because of his pride and sinfulness; Daniel realized that the 70 years captivity of the nation was also the result of sin and departure! Yet in *both* cases there was ultimate restoration/rest in view – Nebuchadnezzar to his throne and Israel to their land! So we see *individual* and *national* restoration; yet both had to learn the principle of acknowledging and repenting of their sins and also appreciate the forgiveness of God!

Daniel’s Prayer (vs. 3-19)

Daniel knew that restoration would be preceded by prayer (Jer. 29:12-13). He implicitly believed in God’s promises, but what about the spiritual state of the nation? All that he could do was to set his face to God, by prayer, supplications, fasting and confession for his personal sins and also for his people’s sins! (vs. 3,5-6). We notice the order of priorities of Daniel’s prayer – he began with God and His character (v4), then moved into deep and serious confession (vs. 5-15) before pleading for God’s mercy and forgiveness in supplication (vs. 16-19). Confession lays the ground for supplication!

Daniel’s confession before God shows that he realized that the nation’s *political* and *geographical* restoration was underpinned by their *spiritual* restoration! That is why he was praying! Daniel declared before God the “spiritual” history of the nation in those times – and it was not good to hear! Note the number of times the word “sin” (or its associates) was mentioned in the prayer (18 times), together with “done wickedly”, “iniquity”, “rebelled”, “unfaithfulness”, “transgressed”. (See Isaiah 1:4-6 and Ezra 9:6-7).

The prayer and the Answer (vs. 20-23)

Towards the end of the prayer (vs. 16-19), Daniel interceded before God and made specific reference to “thy city”, “thy sanctuary” (Jerusalem) and also to “thy people” (Israel). How wonderful of the mercy and grace of God that God began to answer at the *beginning* of Daniel’s prayer (v23). God had even promised “*before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear*” (Isa. 65:24). The very words and subject matter that Daniel had used in his prayer were the same words and subject matter in the reply/vision of the “70 weeks” – “*thy holy city*”, “*thy people*”, “*Jerusalem*”, “*the city*” and “*the sanctuary*”. So it is obvious when trying to interpret the prophecy that what is involved is a physical, national, geographic restoration of Israel, but *also* with many spiritual goals to be achieved first! All this in its *totality* is still yet future!

The Time of the Prayer (v21)

A specific time is mentioned when Gabriel revealed this vision of the “70 weeks” in answer to Daniel’s prayer – “*about the time of the evening oblation*” (v21). The offering of a lamb every evening (Exod. 29:39) had been historically enacted until the Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. After that, with no Temple, no altar and the nation in captivity, it was not practised. Yet after almost 70 years in captivity it was still precious to and remembered by Daniel. He was still reckoning the time of day by that event! Gabriel then informed Daniel that he was to be given “*skill and understanding*” (v22). He had been given this as a

youth nearly 70 years previously (Dan. 1:17). There's a lesson for us here. Whatever our age or stage in life, we need Divine enlightenment and enabling to fully understand God's will and purpose. We are never too old to be taught of God!

The Six Conditions to be Met (v24)

Much has happened historically since the "70 weeks" vision was given to Daniel – Antiochus Epiphanes' persecution of the Jews, the defiling of the Temple, the crucifixion of Christ at Calvary and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. Yet none of these events (or any other event in history) have satisfied *all* of the spiritual conditions/ objectives that needed to be satisfied in their *entirety* before the *complete* fulfilment of this "70 weeks" prophecy and the restoration of national Israel. This prophecy and these six objectives concern the Jewish people alone – "*thy people*" / "*thy holy city*". This is nothing to do with the Church; we have no holy city on Earth – it is also nothing to do with the new heavenly city, new Jerusalem, for the city referred to here had its walls broken down and they were to be re-built! It can only refer to the physical city of Jerusalem and its Jewish inhabitants!

The first three objectives refer to the problems/sins of the nation (v24a):

- "To finish the transgression". Transgression emphasises human wilfulness and revolt as opposed to sin which emphasises general character. *The* transgression seems to refer to the nation's wilful sins for which Daniel had been praying. "To finish the transgression" means that Israel's rebellion will cease at Messiah's return to Earth.
- "And to make an end of sins". We may think of Calvary here, but this refers specifically to the nation (Rom. 11:26-27). Israel's salvation will be at Christ's second coming to Earth!
- "And to make reconciliation for iniquity". Although the basis for reconciliation was made at Calvary, its *effect* will only be a living reality when the nation looks on the One whom they pierced and mourn for Him (Zech. 12:10).

The last three objectives refer to the nation's character/ blessings (v24b):

- "To bring in everlasting righteousness". There is possibly a dual meaning here. Because sin and pardon (reconciliation) have been mentioned in the same verse, it would suggest a permanent justification for the nation as well as righteous character marking the coming age.
- "And to seal up the vision and [the] prophecy (lit. prophet)." This really goes beyond the fulfilment of a specific prophecy. It seems to refer to the completion of *all* prophecies with the return of Christ.
- "And to anoint the most Holy". This could refer to a *person* or a *place*. The expression could be rendered "to anoint a holy of holies", and this would seem to be a response to Daniel's prayer regarding the restoration of the sanctuary (v17).

We see a principle here in that the issues of sin (problems) need to be dealt with first before the blessings would be experienced!

Conclusion

Having traced the pathway of a godly man, Daniel, for almost 70 years in an "alien" land, Scripture confirms to us that Daniel remained firm, resolute and faithful despite his surroundings and varying circumstances. He lived close to God and had a deep and spiritual concern for the nation's future. As he interceded before God in prayer, Gabriel revealed to Daniel this "70 weeks" prophecy, which we shall look at in the next article (D.V), i.e. in **Part 2** of Daniel chapter 9.

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Thoughts on Ephesians Ch. 4

Ephesians 4:7-13

The Giver (Verses 7 to 10)

The first section of the chapter linked our personal attitudes with the spiritual unity of the church, which itself is a manifestation of the Trinity – the Spirit, the Lord and the Father (vs. 4-5). The word “But” at the beginning of verse 7 perhaps anticipates the feeling of the reader that such Christ-like attitudes and spiritual responsibilities are beyond our ability. But now the apostle is going to show that not only is the body of Christ full of God, but every member of it is important and has received unlimited grace to function for the good of all.

Thus verse 7 teaches that “each one” is a recipient of grace. If we ask, “How much grace?” Paul replies, “According to the measure of the gift of Christ”. Christ Himself is the “gift of gifts”, if we can measure His worth we can perceive limitations to His provision of grace. His preciousness is incalculable, His power is universal, His love “passeth knowledge” (3:19).

In verse 8, he quotes Psalm 68:18 as proof of this. Although written a thousand years before, Paul introduces the quotation with, “He saith”. The living word still speaks to us today, and these words are even more powerful because they have been wonderfully fulfilled in the ascension of Christ, and He is still the Man in the glory, at the right hand of the majesty on high, whose grace is all-sufficient for us.

In His ascension He “led captivity captive” for He had bound the forces which had kept us in bondage to sin, “And gave gifts unto men”. The word rendered “men” is the word for mankind in general without reference to gender. In the Hebrew of Psalm 68 it is the word “*adam*”, which can have the same meaning: “Male and female created he them ... and called their name Adam” (Genesis 5:2). The exalted Head of the church is the One who gives spiritual gifts. Abilities that do not come from Him can only harm the body of Christ.

Verses 9 and 10 give Paul’s, and the Holy Spirit’s, logical commentary on the quotation, with respect to the Giver. “He also descended first” speaks of His incarnation. The expression, “the gift of Christ”, in verse 7 would seem to confirm this interpretation. (Some have applied it to the idea that Christ descended into Hades, but this would have little to do with the context here in Ephesians). Said Isaiah, “Unto us a child is born ... a Son is given” (Isaiah 9:6), “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16), what an “unspeakable gift” He is! (2Corinthians 9:15). The “lower parts of the earth” would then imply the virgin’s womb – see Psalm 139:13-15: “Thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb ... when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth”. In John 13 it is stated that, before He performed the slave’s task of washing His disciples’ feet, He understood He “was come from God, and went to God” (John 13:3). In this way God’s Son describes His trajectory of grace.

The One who gave us the perfect example of lowliness and selfless service is “the same also that ascended up”. He who humbled Himself to a death of agony and shame is now “far above all”. Ezekiel had a glimpse of the sapphire throne of heaven and saw “the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it” (Ezekiel 1:26). The book of Acts assures us that He is “that same Jesus” (1:11; 2:36), who on earth had lived, and died and risen again.

Then, the next statement: “that he might fill all things” indicates God’s eternal purpose – to fill a renewed universe with Himself as revealed in Christ. This makes it clear that in becoming flesh the eternal Son did not renounce any of His divine attributes, not even His omniscience. As the apostle goes on to speak of gifts given, we will see that the Giver’s purpose is the same for the church – to fill it with Himself (v13).

The Gifts (Verses 11 and 12)

“And he gave some”, this is plural, indicating that it was never intended for the church to have a pope or any other single supreme leader, other than the Lord Jesus. This list is different from other lists of spiritual

gifts (Romans 12; 1Corinthians 12) in that it refers to persons rather than merely abilities. Five are mentioned. Two were to lay the foundation, and three build upon that foundation. All of these gifts are given to communicate Christ: apostles and prophets communicate Christ as the Foundation of His sanctuary; evangelists communicate Christ as the Friend of sinners; pastors and teachers communicate Christ as the Food for His sheep.

Apostles and Prophets

The fact that the apostles and prophets are foundational is mentioned in Ephesians 2:20: “ye ... are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”. It is not Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles, but both apostles and prophets were given in New Testament times. The foundation they laid was “Jesus Christ” (1Corinthians 3:11). “Apostles” means “sent ones”, implying authority; “prophets” means “proclaimers”, implying inspiration. All that was revealed to them is now contained in the New Testament. Therefore, although the gifts of apostles and prophets were essential in the beginning, they are now unnecessary because we have the inspired New Testament. In a sense the original apostles and prophets are still with us in the inspired New Testament Scriptures. Any who appear today using these titles must be false, because the foundation has already been laid.

Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers

The exalted Head of the church continues to provide the gifts He uses to build His church.

Evangelists proclaim Christ as the One who alone is approachable and accessible to all. The One who alone will receive them, take their burdens and guilt away and make them children of God and heirs of heaven.

Once the evangelist has found the lost sheep they become the Lord’s sheep and need to be cared for by His “under-shepherds”. In English, we may miss the connection between “pastor” and “shepherd”, but they mean the same thing in Greek, and in other languages too. Each assembly has one Pastor – the Lord is our Shepherd, but should have a plurality of inferior pastors, also known as elders (indicating maturity), overseers (or bishops, indicating vigilance), and guides (indicating wisdom).

The teacher is necessary to build up the saints upon their “most holy faith”. Again, there is really only one Teacher – the Lord Jesus Christ who said, “One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Matthew 23:8). The teachers given by the ascended Lord, are but channels to pass on His teaching to His people.

Many understand “pastors and teachers” to indicate the same men. A shepherd certainly needs to be able to feed the sheep, and likewise a teacher needs a shepherd heart to know what God’s people need to learn and how best to communicate it. Perhaps the two are placed together to indicate the cooperation that should exist between them.

What are these gifts for?

What end did the victorious Lord have in view in giving these gifts to His people? In a day when popular preachers talk about developing their “ministry” and establish organizations to that end, we need to be clear about this. Verse 12 uses the word “for” three times, but it needs to be understood that they do not all refer to the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The first – “For the perfecting of the saints” is the purpose of those gifts. But the second and third “for”, indicate that the purpose for which the saints must be perfected, or fully prepared, is that they may exercise ministry or service, and be built up together as “the body of Christ”. For God’s people today it means that we must be thoroughly acquainted with the apostolic teaching in the New Testament in order to serve and function as we should in the assembly. Now we can see the importance of “gave gifts unto men” in the quotation from Psalm 68. While the gifts given were men, those to whom they are given are male and female – all the saints, all the members of His body.

The Goal (Verse 13)

But again, service and mutual edification are not the final purpose in view. To sum it up in one word, the goal is *Christ*. “Till we all come”, till we all arrive at, “the unity of the faith...” – full dependence on Christ,

“and of the knowledge of the Son of God” – full acquaintance with Christ. The final result should be not only unity, but conformity: “Unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”. He is the only “perfect man”, full of grace and truth, and “of His fulness have all we received” (John 1:14,16). God’s ultimate purpose is for His Son to be the Firstborn among many brethren; all conformed to His image (Romans 8:29). Surely His purpose for us today, both individually and collectively is that Christ may be our all in all. May it be our purpose as well!

Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

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The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 16:16-31

Europe’s second convert, the deliverance of a demoniac (v.16-18)

“And it came to pass, as we went to prayer” suggests that this was on another Sabbath Day, but not necessarily so, as they made regular visits to the place of prayer, see verse 18. On the occasion referred to they meet “a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination ... which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying”.

This person is a slave girl who was possessed by an oracular spirit by which she predicted the future. Luke, the medical practitioner, records categorically that she is possessed by an evil spirit. This narrative will show salvation at the opposite end of the social spectrum to that of Lydia. Lydia was a business woman; this girl was employed by business men. The Gospel is for the destitute as well as the affluent, for the reprobate and the religious.

The girl was exploited by her owners who secured “much gain” from her fortune telling. This was a lucrative business for them. However, her status was merely that of a slave owned by these exploiters; as well as being a slave to Satan.

“The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation’”. [NB. Paul is distinguished from the “us” here, and also at the end of Acts 21:18, both of which are at the end of “we” sections.] While that which was announced was true, the demon likely had an ulterior motive to discredit the Gospel by associating it with the occult. “Most high God” is a ‘common denominator’ term for deity applied by Jews to God and by Greeks to the pagan ‘god’, Zeus. This title, when used by pagans, usually refers to the deity most commonly worshipped in the local area. The Devil therefore is operating in his ‘angel of light’ capacity: however, he will never speak of Christ as Lord and Saviour! Nor is there any mention of sin or repentance. Her outburst was an accurate, but very limited, summary of the Gospel and was therefore a perversion of it.

The term “salvation” would mean different things to the different people who heard her, but she keeps on crying out about “a” way of salvation. One wonders how many people heard this and, particularly, if the person we call the Philippian jailer did? Anyhow, the girl’s shrieks continued for many days with Paul becoming deeply disturbed, troubled, indignant and dismayed by this inappropriate publicity. He therefore turns and addresses, not the girl but the controlling spirit, “I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to

come out of her". The authority and example of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 1:25) was invoked by the Apostle. This use of His name implied compassion as well as authority. He would no longer accept unchallenged publicity from the enemy, cf. Mark 1:34; Luke 4:41. Thus Paul demonstrated the Gospel's uncompromising hostility to Spiritism. It is another warning of the dangers and power inherent in the occult.

"And he came out the same hour" implies immediacy. Luke does not specifically refer to her conversion, or baptism, but the fact that her deliverance took place between those of Lydia and the jailor infers that she too became a member of the Philippian assembly.

The hostile reaction to the deliverance (v.19-24)

Not everyone is pleased when gospel blessing comes! The Gospel here touched the slave masters' pockets: "And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone". They were not concerned about the slave girl herself, she was only incidental, as their hope of profit was in the expelled spirit! The Acts of the Apostles indicates that Gentile opposition to the Gospel often resulted from a perceived threat to their commercial interests, cf. Acts 19:23.

Lydia's conversion did not seem to cause any ripples in Philippian society, but this one did and the slave-masters attack the preachers, "they caught Paul and Silas [interestingly there is no reference here to Timothy or to Luke, who were from a Gentile background], and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers". This is the agora, which was not only the market place, but a central public space in ancient Greek city-states. The literal meaning of "agora" is "gathering place" or "assembly". The agora was the centre of the athletic, artistic, business, social, religious, political and public life of the city. What was to take place here was, essentially, in the blaze of maximum Philippian publicity.

The preachers are brought before the supreme magistrates, the praetors, the leading officials in a Roman colony who presided over civil and criminal trials. This is the highest court in the city. The charge made against the preachers is, "These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans". This represented a blatant appeal to anti-Jewish prejudice and a false charge that the preachers were causing riots. It was also an appeal to civic pride as being a Roman colony; Philippians were very conscious of the perceived superiority of their Roman citizenship. As Roman citizens could not practice 'alien cults' that had not received official sanction of the state to confirm that they did not involve any political or social crime, it seems that this may have been used in the charges made against Paul and Silas.

There is no fair trial here, indeed mob rule prevails with the crowd attacking them. Rather than Paul and Silas inciting any trouble, the "multitude rose up together against them". The anti-Jewish sentiment carried through to the actions of the praetors, "and the magistrates rent off their clothes [those of Paul and Silas], and commanded to beat them". Thus the lictors, the bodyguards of the magistrates, stripped and beat the preachers publicly with rods. No miraculous intervention saved Paul and Silas; there is a cost to Christian service even when it is very demonstrably further to divine guidance. This is one of the three occasions when Paul was beaten by rods carried by lictors (2Cor. 11:25).

This punishment was a severe flogging on their bare flesh, they "laid many stripes upon them". Having completed this very public humiliation, they were "cast ... into prison" to be kept under close guard with the jailer specifically charged "to keep them safely". The jailer, "having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks". Not only were they incarcerated in the 'inmost' prison, but an instrument of torture was employed to hold their legs wide apart to cause discomfort and pain.

Yet in all of this Paul and Silas exhibit passive non-resistance to this injustice. They were following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ (1Pet. 2:19-23).

The great awakening (v.25-29)

We then have a remarkable verse, "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them". In spite of enduring such pain and discomfort, instead of cursing men they

blessed God, “Who giveth songs in the night” (Job 35:10). They are fulfilling the Lord’s words and example (Matt. 5:44; Luke 23:34). Truly “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Neh. 8:10). As this is so diametrically opposite to life in general it must have had a remarkable impact on the other prisoners. No wonder they were listening!

Then there was a violent earthquake, yet its effects were under God’s strict control. The God of creation vindicates His servants with an earthquake of sufficient magnitude to shake the foundations, yet not destroy the prison. It had sufficient power to open all the prison doors and remove all the prisoners’ chains, yet without causing injury to anyone.

If the keeper of the prison hadn’t heard the prayers and praises of Paul and Silas, he certainly couldn’t miss the earthquake! So, “awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled”. Allowing any to escape would have meant forfeiture of life, so the jailer, considering that he had failed in his duty, preferred suicide to a judicial execution. Jailers lived by a harsh code, and would accept as their terms of employment that their death would be required should a jail-break occur when they were in charge.

Possibly Paul had seen the jailer silhouetted in the doorway and discerned his intention. However, before the jailer could take his own life “Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do thyself no harm: for we are all here’”. Whether Paul and Silas restrained the other prisoners from escaping, or the prisoners were stunned by the violence of the earthquake or restrained by the power of God we are not told. However, by remaining they saved the jailer’s life. Paul and Silas’ actions in this crisis demonstrated the genuineness of the God they served and the Gospel they preached.

The jailer then called for light and entered the prison and “came trembling” (a violent action) and “fell down before Paul and Silas”. This is a trembling similar to that of Moses in the presence of God’s majesty and glory, cf. Acts 7:32; Heb. 12:21. The jailer’s actions suggest that he recognised his nothingness in the presence of a divine action; it was conviction of sin.

The great deliverance (v.30,31)

The jailer “brought them out”, which suggests that he had an orderly, well-disciplined character. The question he then asked is startling, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” His expression opens with a title of respect or courtesy. However, the remainder of his words about being saved must have been astounding to the preachers.

The only other time that such an expression was used in this Philippian context was the cry of the slave girl prior to her deliverance when she repeatedly shouted “These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation” (v17). Had her repeated cry over the course of “many days” found a lodging place in the mind and heart of the jailer? Perhaps her words had been quoted in the presence of the magistrates with the jailer in attendance? Or he may have considered the earthquake as a supernatural vindication of the preachers. Whatever the circumstances, one thing is clear, he was, in the extreme situation in which he was found, expressing the deep longing of his heart.

The missionaries first give him a straight answer, that he must personally trust the Lord Jesus Christ: “they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house’”. We note the absolute harmony between the preachers as they stressed the obligation to believe and the Person in whom that trust should be placed. For salvation to be experienced there must be trust and reliance upon Him.

As an aside, this is the only time in Scripture where this particular expression, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved”, occurs. Interestingly it was spoken by preachers to a man who had first been thoroughly awakened to his need and danger. Too many evangelical organisations use that statement at the end of a question and answer sequence aimed at producing profession, often without reality. Salvation is never produced by employing a human formula!

(To be continued D.V.)

Jesus the SAVIOUR

- S** is for **SALVATION**, He is Willing to Save
A is for **ALMIGHTY**, He Arose from the Grave
V is for the **VICTORY**, He Won at the Cross
I is for **INTEREST**, He Shows in the Lost
O is for **ONLY**, there is but One Way
U is for **UNCHANGING**, Christ Remains the Same
R says He will **RAPTURE** all who Believe,
at His Returning His Own to Receive

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Get to Know Your Bible

OLD TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 6.

NUMBERS

The book of Numbers is sequential with Exodus and Leviticus. Exodus tells about the congregation of Israel leaving Egypt, arriving in the wilderness of Sinai in the third month. From the third to the twelfth month, they received the Law and the pattern of the tabernacle. Leviticus contains the many aspects of the sacrificial system and worship in the tabernacle of the congregation. In Numbers, the tribal descendants of Jacob have become a united congregation and now the nation, the people of Israel are numbered by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers on, “the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt” (Num. 1:1). Their priestly, civil and military structures are now set in order in preparation for their worshipping, journeying and conquering as a nation. Numbers therefore, reiterates the necessity of faith and obedience emphasising the value of priesthood for the preserving of the spiritual relationship with God and the leadership in the ranks as they cross a trackless wilderness.

THE DISTINCTION OF THE BOOK

The Hebrew title of this Book is, “In the Wilderness”. The English title, from the Latin Vulgate, and the Greek Septuagint focuses upon the numbering; the census taking (Ch’s 1-4,26). This is the numbering of the tribes by pedigree, age and ensign establishing the order in the camp, leaders of the tribes, and ranks of the hosts able to go forth to war. The tasks assigned to the Levites are given in chapter 4. The years in the wilderness are covered in chapters 1-21, while chapters 26-36 begin with a second census of the new generation about to enter the land of Canaan. The story of Balaam forms a literary parenthesis connecting the two sections.

THE DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK

“And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tabernacle of the congregation” (1:1). This expression, “the LORD spake unto Moses” appears more than 80 times in the book. Along with the statement, “Moses wrote their goings out” (33:2), this forms a very detailed list of the divisions of the book

and can be used in profitable study. In the interest of brevity, we shall use 5 major sections to deal with the Egypt to Canaan journey.

THE CONGREGATION AND THE STANDARD (Chapters 1-2)

The character of God is a vital theme in Numbers. Evidence of God's Increase; 70 souls went down into Egypt. After 215 years, 603,550 men "from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war" (1:45), went out at the Lord's command. By God's Power; A mighty host of over two million people were fed and sustained, as they camped and marched according to God's order. It was not a rabble mob. God's presence was promised in their midst. God's protection was manifest, as the Ark of the Covenant went before them. God's path through the trackless wilderness was clearly marked out by the pillar cloud. God's providence; is seen in each individual leader mentioned, "by their names". This is not wearisome repetition. God's Purpose; for the bringing in of the Messiah can be seen. Israel, distinct from heathen nations, has retained an accurate register of the tribes and the families that will be used in the allocation and boundaries of the land in the future Millennial Kingdom.

"Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel ... From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war ... by their armies" (1:2-3). They are not now counting slaves in Egypt but soldiers in their armies. They are not just pilgrims in the wilderness but an army in hostile territory. They were "males" in the vigour of their strength. "By the house of their fathers", the head of an ordered household, "by their polls". They were well known men, "the men that shall stand with you" (1:5). In NT language: "Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him Who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2Tim. 2:3-4). To be a soldier, each man had to declare, "their pedigree" (1:18). They were to be a true born Hebrew, not an Ishmaelite, or an Edomite as relatives or of the mixed multitude who had no reason to defend what is of God and may have sympathy with the enemy. They were known to God as to tribe, family, parentage, and fitness. The mixed multitude hungered to go back to Egypt. Those who are hangers-on, idlers or grumblers, are among the people of God because they are related to them by the flesh, often fall away when the enemy attacks and may become traitors. The "pedigree" brought oneness of descent with Abraham, the man of faith; of origin as freed from the bondage of Egypt; of covenant relationship with the people of God; the Red Sea crossing and the song of victory; and a name in the register of the Redeemed.

Warfare for the believer is not aggressive but defensive. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with the truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:13-15). We are called to military service being "set (appointed) for the defence of the gospel" (Phil. 1:17). "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (1John 2:14). Today, what is of God is under relentless enemy attack, especially the purity of the Gospel and the Word of God.

"Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch by his own standard, with the ensign (banner) of their father's house: far off (some distance from) about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch" (2:2). Order was to be observed, counting the soldiers (Ch. 1), and marshalling of the people (Ch. 2). There was a position for marching, a place for camping; each by his own standard, the sign of his father's house, side by side, the tabernacle of God's presence being central. Thousands of men, women and children in a trackless desert cannot be left to wander aimlessly as they desire. The camp was marked by: (i) Godly Order. "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1Cor. 14:40). In the assembly, things are to be done not by man's arrangement but by Divine Order; (ii) Unity. No conflict of procedures, no dispute of priority between Reuben the first born, or Judah, the largest company. The desire to be accounted the greatest leads to civil war; (iii) Dependency upon the presence of the Lord among His people is still central. "Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20), is the N.T. assembly pattern; (iv) Security. The Ark of God's presence and the Pillar Cloud of His protection, gave security day and night.

THE CONGREGATION AND THE SERVICE OF THE SANCTUARY Chapters 3-4)

These two chapters record two censuses of the Levites. In chapter 3, all male Levites more than a month old are counted. They took the place of all the firstborn redeemed out of Egypt. The number of male Levites fell short of the number of firstborn Israelites. These extra Israelites had to be redeemed in a different way by paying the redemption money of, "five shekels apiece by the poll" (3:47). This second poll or census was of all the Levites between 30 and 50 years of age for the service of the tabernacle to transport, erect, and guard it.

(Chapter 3) The Calling of the Levites. "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister unto him" (3:6). Levi was the smallest tribe; their maintenance would not be burdensome. It was the separated tribe who in a time of crisis obeyed the call, "who is on the LORD'S side" (Exod. 32:26). They were the sanctuary tribe, close to the tabernacle on three sides (Moses and Aaron being on the fourth side) ready to serve, ready to move at any time. Their service was not an any man ministry. They were those whom God called, not human choice, no room for envy and not a democracy giving every man a turn. It was not a one-man service. They were the named "sons of Levi ... Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari ... by their families" (3:17-19). It was not a clerical, pastoral service of one man all the time. It was not an anyhow ministry but a sober, serious call under the "oversight" of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, and "them that kept the charge of the tabernacle" (3:32).

(Chapter 4) The Carrying of the Vessels. The Levites were numbered not for war but for work, not as soldiers but as servants. "From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work of the tabernacle of the congregation" (4:3).

KOHATH (4:4-20). The Furniture; to bear "the most holy things"; to carry and to place the precious vessels of the tabernacle in their proper place. This would correspond to the teachers in the assembly, to set in order before the saints, the preciousness of the PERSON of CHRIST, typified in the holy vessels.

GERSHON (4:21-28). The Fabrics; "the curtains"; and the "coverings", "the hangings" and the "cords". The covering of things to be preserved is comparable to the work of the shepherd in the assembly, to care and to preserve the assembly in the principles of separation and protection from influence which are detrimental and damaging.

MERARI (4:29-33). The Framework; "the boards", "bars", "pillars", "sockets, and their pins". Like the work of the Evangelists, the heavy work, the first men on site, the work of the sons of Merari was to set up the pillars. The lessons are that all work is to be received in the good of priestly ministry (4:16), not secular standing, academic schooling, or business success, but the "anointing oil" of the Spirit and godly "oversight". No detail was too small, every "cord" (v26), and "pin" (v32), was vital and needed as they came to the next stop. Each man carried a weight and burden according to his own capacity. Carrying Holy vessels required careful steps. Anything fallen, damaged or lost reflected upon the glory of God. When we meet, deficiency reveals unfaithfulness. We must each feel the weight of our service, "lest ye die" (v20). At Sardis, spiritual mortification had set in, "a name that thou livest, and art dead" (Rev. 3:1). Every time the tabernacle was set up, the pattern was always exactly the same. Today, the pattern of assembly testimony in many ways, is being changed. We are losing things that glorify the Name, Lordship and Headship of Christ, by dropping the truths of the silence and head covering of the sisters as being non-essentials. The external covering of the tent of meeting was unattractive badger skins. To replace this with the variegated colours of the curtains of fine linen would have been an invention of man to make the tent of meeting more appealing, which would have been a complete reversal of the Divine will.

With holy reverence the priests covered the vessels. The Levites were not to "touch any holy thing, lest they die" (4:15); "not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die" (4:20). The Kohathites carried the Ark of the Covenant which they never saw. The Levites camped around the tabernacle (Ch. 3). They carried it (Ch. 4), so they were never far from it. If we are in the fellowship of a scripturally gathered NT assembly, we are part of the assembly daily and bear testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ, not merely on Lord's Day but on Monday to Saturday, at home, in the office, at work on the farm, and before the neighbours day and night. Bearing the vessels speaks of Christ *officially*: The Table, Christ our fellowship

with the Father: The Lampstand, Christ, the Light of the Sanctuary: The Gold Altar of His Intercession: the Brazen Altar of Acceptance: the Ark of His Presence. The Curtains and Coverings are a figure of Christ *personally*, beautiful, pure and pleasing in every detail. The Framework speaks of Christ *morally* which hold together the whole mystery of godliness, God manifest in flesh.

THE CONGREGATION AND SANTIFICATION (Chapters 5-6)

The congregation was called, counted and charged but the camp must be clean. "Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead" (5:2). Sanctification Godward, manward and self-ward, affected relationships within the camp.

The expression, "The LORD spake unto Moses" again divides chapter 5 into three sections presenting three problems.

(Ch. 5:1-4) DEFILEMENT. The leper, every one that had an issue or was defiled by the dead. This was dealt with by PUTTING OUT. Compare; "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy" (1Cor. 3:17). "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1Cor. 5:13).

(Ch. 5:5-10) DECEIT. "When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty" (v6). This involved a PUTTING RIGHT, confessing their sin and by recompensing his trespass with the principal, adding a fifth part, and giving unto him against whom he had trespassed. Paul sternly rebuked the Corinthians for going to law brother with brother before the unbelievers (1Cor. 6:6).

(Ch. 5:11-31) DISLOYALTY. "If any man's wife go aside (act unfaithfully against her husband) ... and it be hid from the eyes of her husband, and be kept close" (vs. 12-13). This was to be dealt with by PUTTING TO THE TEST, the trial of jealousy before God in the presence of the priest. "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?" (1Cor. 10:22). The Scriptural assembly is vested with authority to execute discipline. The elders must wait for God to bring the sin to light, they cannot act upon mere suspicion. They can only discipline on the grounds of personal confession or clear evidence by witnesses. The camp must be kept clean.

(Ch. 6:1-21) "When either man or woman shall separate themselves (consecrates as an offering) to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD". God is not partial to priests or Levites. Any male or female at any time for as long as he or she desires to be separated unto the Lord. Holiness is expected; separation from evil is mandatory in chapter 5, but this is voluntary, not compelled or commanded but a spontaneous response to God's mercy, redemption, salvation, preservation, communion, and worship in God's house. For the Nazarite, it involved his or her *appetite* for wine, vinegar or grape that would stimulate earthly joy, a function of the WORLD. It affected his *appearance*, the locks of his hair were to grow making him increasingly distinct, curtailing the natural appeal of the FLESH. He was to be careful about his *associations* and to "come at no dead body". The DEVIL dominates the sphere of death, his kingdom is a graveyard of corruption. At conversion, we are to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). After what Christ suffered on the cross to forgive us our sins and make us His own, the Christian life should begin with this total commitment and irrevocable presentation. The body is now a channel through which the righteousness of God is manifest.

(Ch. 6:22-27) This chapter that begins with separation ends with blessing.

"The LORD (3 times) bless thee, and keep thee". PROTECTION. The protection by the sleepless keeper of His people (Psa. 121:4).

"The LORD make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee". PARDON. The face of God hidden in the darkness of Golgotha now shines upon sinners who are forgiven (2Cor. 4:6).

"The LORD lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace". PEACE. "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you" (John 14:27).

This is the PRESERVATION of the congregation on the wilderness journey if they follow the path of faith and obedience (Psa. 121:4).

THE CONGREGATION AND THEIR SIN (Chapters 7-18)

After the priestly benediction of chapter 6, the congregation were invincible as they prepared to move forward into the wilderness if they only had obeyed the Word of God as the Lord commanded Moses. The trumpet call, the pillar cloud and the Ark of the covenant rendered them independent of circumstances, to move contrary of surroundings under sun or stars, day or night, by light or darkness. "They journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed" (9:21). "And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony. And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai" (10:11-12). The journey of 11 days took 38 years. What happened?

(Chapter 11) "The people complained" (11:1). "The mixed multitude" lusted (11:4). They despised "this manna" (11:6), FOOD REJECTED. In the Garden of Eden, God said, ye may "freely eat"; Eve said, "eat"; she left a word out. Here they said "we did eat in Egypt freely" which for a multitude of slaves in strict bondage was highly unlikely. They put a word in. The manna, like the Bread, was God's daily provision of bread from heaven; "white" and pure; "sweet" to taste; "round" never ending; "fragrant" fresh daily from heaven in contrast to onions, leeks and garlic, smelly root crops of earth. The Saviour said "I am the Bread of Life". If we do not get our daily food from Him, we become spiritually weak and unsatisfied. Today the Word of God, the Scriptures are being altered and changed in modern versions to suit carnal tastes, as the manna was "gathered, ... beat, ... and baked" to make it like "fresh oil", more palatable, more easily swallowed.

(Chapter 12) "And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses" (12:1). LEADERSHIP REJECTED. If we despise the Word of the Lord, we will soon despise the Lord of the Word. Moses was God's chosen leader. The passage stresses Moses' meekness: "meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (12:3). Moses' faithfulness: "who is faithful in all Mine house" (12:7). Moses' uniqueness: God says "with him will I speak mouth to mouth" (12:8). Miriam, evidently the ringleader and elder sister, became leprous. Aaron was always easily led (Exod. 32:2). Moses said nothing to them. Moses speaks to God, "Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee" (12:13). The camp did not journey for seven days because of the critical tongue of a woman about the oversight. In the message to the church at Thyatira, the Lord says "I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest (allow, tolerate) that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce My servants" (Rev. 2:20).

(Chapters 13-14) "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel" (13:1-2). They are now at Kadesh-barnea on the border of the promised land. Twelve men were chosen to go in to view the inheritance and taste the grapes of Eschol. Ten men brought back an evil report saying "eateth up (devours) the inhabitants", "all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature", we were "in our own sight as grasshoppers" among the Sons of Anak (13:32-33). Unbelief always talks nonsense. When Joshua and Caleb said, "The LORD is with us: fear them not. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle" (14:9-10). THE INHERITANCE WAS REJECTED. The Lord's punishment was that as they had searched the land for forty days, so a year for a day, they would wander in the wilderness for forty years. "Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole (entire) number, from twenty years old and upward, which had murmured against Me" (14:29). With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, they are not now numbering soldiers for the battle but counting carcasses in the wilderness.

They said "Would God we had died in this wilderness" (14:2). Four times (vs. 29,32,33,35) they are told that their wish would be granted, six hundred thousand, three thousand, five hundred and forty eight would die in the wilderness. The lesson from this story reverberates through Scripture, e.g. 1Cor. 10:1-2; Heb. 3:7-4:14. In the last days there will still be those whose sole mission is to discourage those who seek to gain the spiritual inheritance in Christ Jesus. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2Tim. 4:3-4).

(Chapter 15) "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks

upon the Sabbath day" (15:32). THE LAW REJECTED. It may be said that this was insignificant, something that could be overlooked as a nonessential. The observing of the Sabbath of rest from secular work was not optional, it was to give God His rightful place. We cannot pick and choose from the Word of God, observing what we want and in a day of departure, letting other truths drift in the interest of our own mindset and comfort. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments ... that ye may look upon it, and remember the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes" (15:38-39).

(Chapters 16-18) Korah, Dathan and Abiram, with 250 princes of the assembly, "gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy" (16:3). PRIESTHOOD REJECTED. This is the spirit of democracy saying, everybody is equal, we are all holy, we will all take censers, we will all go in to offer incense before the Lord. In effect Moses said, "You try it"! The result was that, "the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses ... and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them" (16:31-33). The next day the congregation murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "Ye have killed the people of the LORD" (16:41).

Wrath from the Lord, brought a plague upon the people and another 14,700 died. Aaron took a censer, put fire from off the altar and incense in it and ran into the midst of the congregation. "He stood between the dead and the living: and the plague was stayed" (16:48). Priesthood was needed. Priesthood was attacked in chapter 16. Priesthood was approved and vindicated in chapter 17. "Thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi" (17:3). The fact that the rod of Levi budded, bloomed and yielded almonds proved that Moses and Aaron were not wrong in asserting Divine appointment to leadership over the people.

"And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear (be responsible for) the iniquity (guilt related to) of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood" (18:1). This gives Divine authority to Aaron, the priests and the Levites to guard against any unauthorised person trespassing in the tabernacle. In recognition of their altar service, the priests were to receive parts of the sacrifices, the first fruits of the harvest and the first born of animals. Their inheritance would be God Himself, providing also for their families through His people's gifts (18:8-20). Provision through tithing was also made for the tribe of Levi (18:21-24).

The Divine summary in the NT and lessons for us are given in 1Corinthians 10:5-6. "But with many (most) of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown (strewn) in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted".

THE CONGREGATION AND THE SECOND GENERATION (Chapters 19-36)

God is the God of recovery, seen in three beautiful types of the Lord Jesus in the next three chapters.

(Chapter 19) The Ashes of the Red heifer for Purification. "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer", not a bullock (strength) but a female (bearer of life): Christ was the bearer of life. "In Him was life" (John 1:4) – THE FULNESS OF LIFE. "Red" the colour of blood, "the life of the flesh is in the blood" – THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE. "Without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke (unimpaired vigour, vitality, energy, unwearied)" (19:2) – THE FRESHNESS OF LIFE. This sacrifice was to be slain without the camp, the blood was to be sprinkled directly before the tabernacle seven times, and the heifer was to be burned. "And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin" (19:9). All around in the wilderness was death and possible defilement by contact with a dead body (v13), death in the tent (v14), in the open field (v18), a bone, one slain, one dead, or a grave. The touch may have been accidental, unintentional, even in an unseen grave, God is the God of forgiveness of sins in the life of the believer. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1John 1:9).

(Chapter 20) The Water from the Rock for Revival. "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before

their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink” (20:7-8). Israel complained about a total lack of drinking water at Rephidim, thirty eight years previously (Exod. 17:6). On that occasion Moses was told by God to “smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it”. At Calvary, Christ was, “stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:4). “They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1Cor. 10:4). On this occasion they were told to “speak”, a plural verb, including Aaron, “unto the rock” (“*sela*”, a different word, an exalted rock, a cliff), indicating permanence, unchanging grandeur, speaking of a Risen Christ Who preached, “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink” (John 7:37).

(Chapter 21) The Uplifted Brazen Serpent for Forgiveness. In the Arabian desert, venomous reptiles abounded. Divine protection was withdrawn for the first time from the sinful people, who spoke against God and Moses and “they bit the people; and much people of Israel died” (21:5-6). Only those who confessed their sin and looked by faith upon the brazen serpent lived. The Lord Jesus uses this incident as an illustration of His own vicarious death, uplifted upon the cross without sin, to show the necessity of believing faith for salvation (John 3:14-15). These three chapters in Numbers are worthy of comparison with John chapter 3, the Serpent upon a pole: John chapter 4, the woman at the well of water and the man of John chapter 5 who had made no progress in thirty and eight years.

“The Book of the wars of the LORD” (21:14). The congregation having confessed their sin and repented were forgiven, refreshed, cleansed, purified, and restored. They experienced God’s Love, Mercy and Provision when they hungered, thirsted and were defiled. Now they are ready to make *progress*. “The children of Israel set forward” (21:10). “They journeyed, ... toward the sunrising” (21:11). “Then Israel sang this song”. It had been a long time since the congregation had sung the song of *praise* at the Red Sea (Exod. 15). “Spring up, O well” – no rod, no smiting, not even requested, just cheerfulness and unity; “The princes digged the well”, God blessed their exercise; “the nobles of the people digged it”, leadership; “by the direction of the lawgiver”, obedience; “with their staves” – the staves of a *pilgrims* (21:17-18). They were now recovered, reunited, ready to defeat their enemies. The lesson is that we need to have right conditions internally in the camp, if we are to have victory externally against the adversary.

Chapter 20:14 – Edom, grandson of Esau, refused passage to Israel, NATURAL foes who, as the Palestinians, still hate Israel. Chapter 21:1 – Arad the Canaanite (“traffickers”, traders), the MATERIAL foes, “Took some of them prisoners”. Chapter 21:21 – Sihon king of the Amorites, their “border was strong”, the INTELLECTUAL opposition, can still hinder progress. Chapter 21:33 – Og, king of Bashan, the giant with the large bed (Deut. 3:11), PHYSICAL comfort and laziness can hinder advancement to the promised inheritance.

(Chapters 22-25) Balak king of Moab sought the help of Balaam the prophet. In the Bible, this is called the way, the error, and the doctrine of Balaam. His name is mentioned fifty times in these chapters. He tried to lead the Israelites into the cult of Baal-peor, (25:1-5; 31:16). Balak said, ‘Come curse Jacob’. Balaam said, ‘I cannot curse Israel, but I can corrupt them with the harlots of Moab’. This doctrine of mixtures will continue until the condemnation of the church at Thyatira (Rev. 2:14), and the horror of Babylon the mother of harlots (Rev. 17:5).

(Chapters 26-27) “Take the sum of all the congregation” (26:2). This SECOND CENSUS is now taken because the conquest of Canaan was imminent. The allotment of territory in the Promised Land, proportionate to each tribe must be declared. The law of the inheritance for the new generation is detailed and the new leader Joshua is publically honoured as the successor of Moses to lead the congregation into the land (27:1-23). They are not now only numbering soldiers or servants but prospective sojourners in the land.

(Chapters 28-29) “And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the PASSOVER of the LORD” (28:16). The Passover reminds us of Christ, the death of the Passover Lamb – CHRIST DIED. “Also in the day of FIRSTFRUITS, when ye being a new meat offering” (28:26) – CHRIST RISEN. “In the seventh month, on the first day of the month ... it is a day of BLOWING THE TRUMPETS” (29:1) – CHRIST’S COMING. “One kid of the goats for a sin offering; beside the sin offering of ATONEMENT” (29:11) – CHRIST AND THE NATION. “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month ye shall have a holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work,

and ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days” (29:12) – The feast of TABERNACLES speaks of CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM GLORY.

(Chapters 30-36) “These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out the land of Egypt”. “And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD: and these are their journeys according to their goings out” (33:1-2). The congregation chosen, called, counted, cleansed and consecrated in these closing chapters are to keep Holy Convocation before the conquest of the land of promise given by covenant with Abraham. Numbers records events that reveal God enabling power to overcome the great obstacles of the past. The background of the laws in chapters 33:50-36:13 clearly deal with the guarantee that the congregation will soon be able to implement those same laws in the promised inheritance. The lesson for the people of God today, from the reiteration of the Feasts of the LORD, is to focus our faith and expectation upon the Lord Jesus and His coming Glory.

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My Old Bible

**“But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? ... It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof”
(Job 28:12,15)**

Though the cover is worn,
And the pages torn,
And though places bear traces of tears;
Yet more precious than gold,
Is the Book, worn and old,
That can shatter and scatter my fears.

When I prayerfully look,
In the precious old Book,
Many pleasures and treasures I see;
Many tokens of love,
From the Father above,
Who is nearest and dearest to me.

This old Book is my guide,
It's a friend by my side,
It will lighten and brighten my way;
And each promise, I find,
Soothes and gladdens my mind,
As I read it and heed it today.

To this Book I will cling,
Of its worth I will sing,
Though great losses and crosses be mine;
For I cannot despair,
Though surrounded by care,
While possessing this blessing divine.

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Looking, Longing, Labouring, Living

Repeatedly in his **Second Epistle to the Corinthians**, Paul dwells on the true motives of a genuine servant of God and the course of conduct which inevitably results from them and so demonstrates their presence. For right motives are vital in the sight of God and vital in His service. Not only is right conduct unacceptable to God if triggered by wrong motives; right conduct cannot be continued in for long without right motives (Hosea 14:9). Of all engaged in the work of God without His commission it must be said, "But they shall proceed no further" (2Tim. 3:9). There comes a point beyond which unreality cannot go. This is very largely due to the costliness of the path of obedience and true service for God in this present world, and Paul constantly refers in this epistle to the exceptional sufferings endured in his labours and the constant danger of death to which he was thereby exposed and under which he was content to continue. This surely was unanswerable proof of his genuineness.

LOOKING

He dwells on this subject in chapter 4:7 onwards and indicates how he was enabled to labour under such dire perils: "While we LOOK (lit. LOOKING) not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (4:18). His constant sufferings and dangers were regarded as "momentary light afflictions" because viewed in the light of "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory". There is only one power which can make unseen things real, and that is FAITH (Heb. 11:1), and especially to make unseen things more real and more motivating than seen things. Visible things naturally occupy our mind's vision and it is only by a constant, deliberate exercise of the will that we can tear our eyes from those things which naturally engross them and fasten them upon unseen but eternal realities.

Paul was a man who moved, as by necessity every true servant of God must move, in the "spirit of faith" (v13; Compare 5:7). He was constantly LOOKING (Present participle), deliberately setting his eyes upon things unseen and eternal, especially the eternal glory, and so was able to keep present sufferings and losses in true perspective.

To what extent are we prepared to suffer presently, whether materially, physically or socially for the work of God? To what extent are we "looking" at things unseen and eternal, rather than things seen and temporal? This is a true index of our sincerity and reality as the servants of God. We can only continue in the path of true service as "FAITH" keeps us "LOOKING".

LONGING

Paul was able to live under the constant threat of death because he *knew* that if death overtook him, he would be raised from the dead (4:14; 5:1). But although death held no terrors for him, and he, in fact, had a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better (Phil. 1:23), his eyes were set on something better still! He says, "For in this (body) we groan, earnestly desiring (Lit. LONGING) to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed, we shall not be found naked" (5:2-3). Here we learn the apostle's deepest LONGING and his HOPE. He was longing for the coming of Christ in his lifetime, that he might never die and pass into the unclothed state, but rather "be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1Cor. 15:51-52), so putting on incorruption and immortality as a garment, over the top, as it were, of his present body. This is the sense of "clothed upon" or "over-coated" and of mortality being "swallowed up of life" (5:4). The only true preparation for death is to live in the hope of Christ's return and our never dying! (See 2Tim. 4:6-8).

Paul's service for God was pursued in the vibrant, living, vitalizing HOPE of the imminent personal return of the Lord he loved and the Saviour he served. It strengthened him in life's darkest days and sanctified him in life's brightest days. He did not labour to gain a place in this event for he knew this was all of grace, a part of that salvation for which Christ had died, and all a result of God's working in him, not his working for God

(5:5). It was the assurance of all this, confirmed by “the earnest of the Spirit”, that made that hope so sure and real. The presence and fruit of the Spirit within him were a foretaste of that “life” that could only be his in its fullness at the Lord’s coming, and which made living for present things such a showy and unsatisfying waste of time.

Again these things are a challenge and test to us as servants of God. Is the Lord’s return such a bright reality to our souls that our hearts are continually longing for it, even Him, and for that brighter world and fuller life into which it will introduce us, so that this present world and this present life are no distraction to us in our service for God? Does “HOPE” keep us “LONGING”?

LABOURING

But inseparably connected with the Lord’s coming is that solemn event, “the judgment seat of Christ” (5:10) before which every believer must “be manifested”. It should be noted that it is not a matter merely of putting in an appearance at the judgement seat, but of being manifested at it. There every Christian will be turned inside out, the inmost secrets of the heart will be revealed, and all unreality exposed (1Cor. 4:5). What a solemn consideration this is; no wonder the apostle speaks of “the terror [fear] of the Lord” (5:11).

This statement is often applied to the ungodly, dreading to meet God at the great white throne and the fearsome outcome of meeting God in their sins. The Greek word, ‘*phobos*’, is elsewhere translated as “terror” or “fear” in this sense (Matt. 28:4; John 19:38; Rom. 13:3; 1Pet. 3:14; Rev. 18:15). Others, due to the context, would consider it as a reverential “fear of the Lord” as ‘*phobos*’ often implies (Luke 5:26; Acts 5:11; 1Pet. 1:17) and applies to believers. We find the same variance of thought where Hebrews 12:28-29, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire”, is applied to either saint or sinner.

The same expression “the fear of the Lord” occurs only elsewhere in the New Testament in Acts 9:31 where the sense is clear, and a close parallel is in our epistle (7:1). The thought then in Paul’s mind would be the solemn, searching, awe-inspiring reality of the Christian being manifested before the judgement seat of Christ and his answering for deeds done in the body.

Paul says, “Wherefore we LABOUR, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of (well-pleasing to) Him” (5:9). Paul’s great ambition, his point of honour, as some expound the word “labour”, was that whether he should die (as well he might, and in fact did) or remain alive unto the Lord’s coming (as he longed to do), he might in any case be found well-pleasing to the Lord when his life and service was reviewed.

Is that what we have set our sights upon? Is this what we desire above all else, to be found well-pleasing to the Lord and to earn His “Well-done”? Are we living in the solemn, sobering sense of being manifested at the judgement seat? If the awesome sense of standing before the Lord to be judged grips us now, it will empty us of all insincerity, it will strip us of all sham in our lives, and it will cleanse us of all pretensions on our lips. Paul knew he was manifested to God, but he had to persuade men concerning his divine mission and ministry. When he did so it was in the fear of the Lord, in the solemn sense of that soon coming day when he would be manifested in everything and recompensed for everything. Only a true servant of God can live in the fear of the Lord and the light of His review. Does this wholesome, healthy “FEAR” keep us “LABOURING” to be found “well-pleasing to Him”?

LIVING

Later in the chapter Paul says, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that He died for all, that they which LIVE should not henceforth LIVE unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (vs. 14-15).

It is a moot point whether “the love of Christ” is Christ’s love for us or our love for Christ, for the context is speaking of our response to what He has done for us in dying for us. That He loved us and died for us means that we are dead and the life we now have is not our own but His. This lays upon us the moral obligation to shut ourselves up to a life of consecration to Him in responsive affection and gratitude. Here is another

great motive for the service of God, LOVE; and love which manifests its reality by shunning all self-seeking and selflessly LIVING for Him. See a similar lesson in John 21:15-19; 1Cor. 13:1-3; Gal. 5:6; 1John 4:19. Without love we are nothing and our works are nothing, but love must be “in deed and in truth” (1John 3:18). Love will be tested (12:15) and may be misunderstood (11:11) but will endure (1Cor. 13:7) and can be known (1John 5:2-3).

Once again the challenge comes to our own hearts as to our motives. Do we love the Lord enough to deny self and live entirely for Him? Is this the spring and character of our service, rejecting totally man in the flesh, whether in ourselves or others (5:16)? This is the hallmark of a true servant of God: “LOVE” will keep him “LIVING” for Christ.

The reality of a man’s divine call and commission will be manifested in his occupations, his aspirations, his ambitions and his affections. “FAITH” will keep him “LOOKING”, “HOPE” will keep him “LONGING”, “FEAR” will keep him “LABOURING”, and “LOVE” will keep him “LIVING” for the One who died for him and rose again.

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MEN OF GOD SERIES

(21) JOHN THE BAPTIST

“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist”

(Matthew 11:11)

This testimony by his Lord to this faithful servant introduces us to a unique man of God. John said that he was not the Bridegroom, but the friend of the Bridegroom: he was not the Word but he was the voice; he was not the Light but a lamp; he was not the Shepherd but the porter; he was not the brilliance of the Son but the brightness of a star. John said that he was “not worthy”; but the Lord Jesus said, there was none greater.

John’s father wore priestly garments; John wore camel’s hair and a leather girdle. John announced a Kingdom coming yet he ate locusts and wild honey. He preached in the wilderness; he reproved sin in the palace. In his short period of service, multitudes came to his meetings; he pointed them all to Christ and then died alone in prison.

HIS FASHION

“The same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins” (Matt. 3:4). The camel is known as the ship of the desert. John was a pilgrim passing through, accomplishing his brief period of public service in the desert region round about Jordan. An animal had been killed, its blood was shed, to cover his shameful state with a leathern girdle. As a Nazarite, he surrendered his natural attraction with long hair which increased with age, and maintained his separation by avoiding the dead, abstaining from the fruit of the vine which would excite the flesh.

HIS FOOD

“His meat was locusts and wild honey”. “Locusts” nourished the tent dwelling Arabs, when served with butter. They were the produce of green spots in the wilderness. John contented himself with simple plain life, satisfied with small things. He said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). “Honey”, is the sweet produce of the cooperation of many. There is sweetness when God’s people work unitedly together. Canaan was known as the land flowing with milk and honey, not the synthetic artificial products

of man but nourishing, healthy and medicinal. John was careful to maintain a simple healthy diet for physical wellbeing. The servant of the Lord in spiritual realm is to be, "A good minister (one who serves as a deacon) of Jesus Christ, nourished up (nourishing thyself, middle voice) in the words of faith and of good (health giving) doctrine" (1Tim. 4:6). This is a healthy, suitable diet of Scriptural Truth. These are the actual words (plural) of the body of doctrine in which Truth is expressed, the fundamentals and instructions of a health-giving spiritual ministry.

HIS FAITHFULNESS

"There was [came] a man sent from God, whose name was John" (John 1:6). John, (Jehovah is Gracious), is like Elijah (My God is Jehovah) of the Old Testament, appearing from the freshness of God's presence to serve in a day of sad departure among the people of God. Such men, who knew God, are scarce in every age. It can still be said today that some went and some were "sent". John was born in "the hill country" (Luke 1:39), to aged parents, thirty years before he began his public service. If his parents were now deceased, he was fatherless, motherless, brotherless and sisterless, a lonely man. All who came to hear him preach were pointed to Christ. He was raised up as the Herald of the Coming King foretold by Isaiah over 700 years earlier (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1). He was a "voice", a vehicle of thought, transient and passing in contrast to the abiding "Word", the Lord Jesus. The "Word" exists before the "Voice" articulates. This "Voice" cried in the wilderness, to the barren state of the nation. He preached by the River Jordan, the symbol of death.

He called the people to repentance meaning death to self, symbolic in the baptism of repentance in the waters of Jordan at "Bethabara" (John 1:28), or "Beth-barah", the "house of passage" at the crossing of the Jordan (Judg. 7:24). "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 3:1-2). John preached plainly with power being filled with the Holy Ghost, saying "flee from the wrath to come", with no outward attractions he preached pointedly, "bring forth fruits meet for repentance". He sought reality, warning the unfruitful in Israel that the axe was laid at the root of the trees. He earnestly pleaded with urgency stating that the chaff would be consigned to the fire unquenchable. After the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, salvation is offered by faith alone in Christ alone, water baptism is not now essential for salvation.

HIS FEARLESSNESS

John boldly proclaimed, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight" (Matt. 3:3). The herald ran ahead of the chariot of his Sovereign and cried that everyone should make ready for His arrival. The Lord could have cleared the way Himself, but He graciously used His servant that the hearts and consciences of his hearers should repent (Matt. 3:6).

John looked at the proud arrogant Pharisees and said, "every mountain and hill shall be brought low". He exposed the depths of the sins of the publicans and declared, "every valley shall be filled". The crooked tax gatherers needed to be, "made straight". He had rough ungodly sinners, perhaps jailers and soldiers in mind when he said, "the rough ways shall be made smooth". He was speaking spiritually rather than physically, when he said, "all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:5-6). Fearlessly he exposed the false teachers and leaders as, "O generation of vipers" and the deadness of the nation as lifeless "stones" and dead "wood" (Matt. 3:7-10). He foretold the ingathering of the Kingdom, "He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:11-12).

John, in the power of the Holy Spirit, preached to reach each soul in every class of society from the king to the beggar, to bring to conviction, repentance, and reality clearly seen in fruitfulness and obedience in the Kingdom of God. It is much better to enjoy the fellowship of a few genuine warm hearted, obedient believers in a scripturally gathered assembly with some empty seats, than to fill seats with false professors who are not saved at all.

Present conditions in this world can be described as very “crooked” (dishonest). Amid moral, social, political, ecclesiastical, national and international conditions, we live in a crooked and perverse generation. “The crooked” cannot straighten “the crooked”. “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation (generation), among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:14-15).

John rebuked Herod Antipas for his illicit relationship with Herodias, who was another man’s wife. Elijah rebuked Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel. They hated Elijah and they hated John. Today, there is moral sin in the Palace, corruption in the corridors of government and immorality is rampant in society. The Lord prayed to the Father for His own; “I have given them Thy Word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14).

HIS FOCUS

Even the enemies of John had to admit, “All things that John spake of this Man were true” (John 10:41). Although they were cousins for thirty years, John said, “I knew Him not” (John 1:31). What he was granted was a special revelation at His baptism, when he saw the heavens opened with the Spirit descending like a dove and heard a voice from heaven saying, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

John spoke of His ETERNITY, “He that cometh after me is preferred (hath precedence of) before me: for He was before me” (John 1:15). His SOVEREIGNTY, “Make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1:23). His SUPREMACY, “Whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (John 1:27). His HUMANITY, “After me cometh a Man” (John 1:30). His AUTHORITY, “The same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost” (John 1:33). His DIETY, “I saw (as an eye witness), and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34). His GLORY, “He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:8-9).

“The Lamb of God” was foreseen by Abraham, foretold by Moses and foreshadowed by Isaiah. It was the great privilege of the faithful forerunner, to be chosen to literally identify the Lamb of God on two successive days in the valley of the Jordan river. “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “The next day after John stood” (having reached the climax of his mission, he had no further to go), and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked (the Blessed Lord had much further to go), he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!” (John 1:35-36).

HIS FOLLOWERS

“And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus” (John 1:37). John was no party leader. He did not use his gift or testimony to enhance his own importance. John watched the retreating forms of his departing disciples with supreme satisfaction as they followed Christ. Andrew, one of John’s disciples, found his own brother Simon Peter and declared, “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). John was the porter to guide the sheep to Christ, the shepherd. John was not the Bridegroom but was content to be the friend of the Bridegroom.

HIS FULNESS

John’s public ministry may have lasted 18 months. He possibly spent one year and 4 months in prison. John had declared, “This is He”. John sent a message from prison, “Art Thou He?” (Matt. 11:2-3). John knew that he had been sent to fulfil the words of Isaiah the prophet, (Isa. 40:3-4). The Lord graciously informed His tried servant that Isaiah’s prophecy was being fulfilled. “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them” (Matt. 11:5; Isa. 61:1-2).

The faithful servant’s satisfaction, as he awaits the executioner’s sword, is the fulfilment of God’s Word which he has preached by faith. This was true of the Lord Himself as He gave up the ghost on the Cross, knowing “That the Scripture might be fulfilled” (John 19:28).

John was not a reed shaken by the wind, or a man clothed in soft raiment. As the disciples buried the headless body of His messenger, the Lord said; “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11).

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The Prophetic Page

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

Why should we study Bible Prophecy?

1. It concerns the Person and Glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My Glory” (John 17:24). This glorious sight has never been so near.
2. That the Pitfalls of the past may not be repeated in the present. “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The Scriptures record the cycles of man’s failure so that prophecy is often history repeated.
3. The Prospect of the future helps us to live in the present. We are not here on earth to help to improve this present world, but we seek to see sinners saved to enjoy with us, the new earth. “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2Pet. 3:11-13).
4. It Promotes Praise. “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery ... that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom. 11:25). How God will fulfil this great mystery in His prophetic programme calls for an exclamation of praise. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33).
5. It Provides Comfort in a time of sorrow. Believers at Thessalonica were being persecuted, some had died, others were discouraged. “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1Thess. 4:16-18). To be “caught up” means to be Raptured. The Rapture is imminent.
6. It Produces Stability in a world of deception. “Be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled ... Let no man deceive you by any means” (2Thess. 2:2-3). The believers were worried by present circumstances, stressed by events in the world and stirred up by spurious teaching that the day of God’s wrath had already begun on earth. “Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work” (2Thess 2:16). “The Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep (guard) you from evil (the evil one)” (2Thess. 3:3). The Church will not be left on earth to go through the Tribulation wrath.

7. A Scriptural grasp of future prophetic events has a Practical Outcome in every day life. It does not just produce charts, or graphs to fill our heads. It enables *feet* that will soon walk on the street of heaven, to walk in godly paths down here. "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation (behaviour), and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God" (2Pet. 3:11-12).

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"What is Truth?"

We may often ask, "**What is THE TRUTH?**"; in many contexts this can prove difficult to establish. In His 'defence' to Pontius Pilate, the Lord Jesus Christ made this statement, "**To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the TRUTH. Every one that is of the TRUTH heareth My voice**".¹ Pilate lightly responded with, "**What is TRUTH?**"

Pilate was being faced with truths about man's existence, purpose of life, ultimate accountability and eternal destiny, challenged by the Man who stood before him who came to "**bear witness**" on these critical matters, who Pilate repeatedly acknowledged to be innocent. While Pilate succumbed to the Jews threats and sentenced Jesus to death, history indicates that he also ignored these issues and died without God's great salvation and is now suffering the eternal consequences.

Such issues are not topics for conjecture or fanciful debate. Truth about God and our existence, now and hereafter, **MUST** be absolute, not relative! Even in our day of confusion and moral decline, when truth has fallen in the street, with so many voices from speculative science, religions, cults etc., all clamouring for our attention, these essential truths can be assured to those who really want to know the truth!

The LORD – The One TRUE and Living God

*"I am the LORD: that is My Name: and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images."*²

People reason today that God is progressively revealing Himself by different Names via multiple "faiths" to ultimately achieve a unified world order. Such notions mock God. Equally, "**the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God**";³ creation witnesses to "**His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse**."⁴ The **ONE TRUE GOD** and **TRUTH** are inseparable. This "**God, that cannot lie**"⁵ has consistently revealed Himself to mankind (male and female) after creating them as living souls. This has been in mercy and in judgement, to individuals and to nations.

We, His creatures should, as Moses of old, ascribe "**greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He**",⁶ the God who is Light and Love. But by seeking to erase this true God from his thoughts, mankind finds himself plunging deeper into global crisis and turmoil. The evidence is overwhelming.

The Bible – The One Source of Spiritual TRUTH

*"All Scripture (the whole Bible) is given by inspiration (by the breath) of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"*⁷

Again it is often insisted that many writings exist for spiritual guidance and that the Bible, while instructive, is not God's exclusively written narrative for mankind. The Bible is a remarkable book, written by some 40 men over 1500 years, claiming itself as God's unique written revelation to mankind; it testifies to one God

as a tri-unity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Its many prophecies, which only an omniscient God could foretell and fulfil, are powerful witnesses of divine ‘authorship’. Its singular message, faces and answers authoritatively those deep spiritual issues indicated earlier, being relevant for all nations and individuals, narrating the truth of creation, man’s fall into sin and need of salvation from death and hell, and God’s remedy in Christ. Read it to be wise; believe and obey its Gospel truth to be blessed!

The Holy Spirit – The One Guide to Spiritual TRUTH

“When the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me ... When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.”⁸

Many look to various guides for enlightenment, even to help ‘interpret’ the Bible, including their own hearts and consciences, to give assurance of the pathway of light and truth. The Bible warns, **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”⁹** – we dare not trust ourselves with such vital issues! Again, it warns, **“Try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”¹⁰** In a day of propagation in false teaching, we need to be on our guard as to what we read or hear. If we allow, rather than deny Him, the holy **“Spirit of Truth”** will faithfully apply the Bible’s teaching to show us our need of Christ, to **“reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”¹¹**; then to teach those who repent and believe the Gospel, to learn of Christ.

Jesus Christ – The One TRUE Way of Salvation

The Lord Jesus said ... “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”¹²

The devil – the father of lies, deceives multitudes with false notions such as; “all roads lead to God/Utopia/Paradise etc.”; “Just try your best”; “No one can be sure”; “Death ends it all”! The Bible states, **“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”¹³** The God who made us, **“Now commandeth all men every where to repent.”¹⁴** By refusing the Lord Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for our sins on the cross, we will face God with our sins unforgiven to suffer Hell’s torments forever. Christ’s selfless sacrifice, His bodily resurrection from the dead and His ascension truly qualifies Him to be **“The Way, the Truth and the Life”**. Believe upon Christ who only spoke truth; receive Him as your Lord and Saviour to find peace with God and to receive the Holy Spirit. The reality of salvation is that you will be found walking in the truth, listening and obeying Christ’s teaching in the Bible as you serve Him with joy while you await His final call; **“Every one that is OF THE TRUTH heareth My voice.”** Pilate’s indifference ever remains as a solemn warning!

Bible Ref’s: ¹ John 18:37-38; ² Isaiah 42:8; ³ Psalm 14:1; ⁴ Romans 1:20; ⁵ Titus 1:2; ⁶ Deut. 32:3-4; ⁷ 2Tim. 3:16; ⁸ John 15:26; 16:13; ⁹ Jeremiah 17:9; ¹⁰ 1John 4:1; ¹¹ John 16:8; ¹² John 14:6; ¹³ Hebrews 9:27; ¹⁴ Acts 17:30.

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