

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No 110

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Editorial

Dear Brothers and Sisters and Friends, Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thank you for your letters. One correspondent writes, "Could we please have an article about Immortal Emergence in the Circular Letter? There are so many who believe in mortal emergence in spite of the evidence contrary to it. It is plain common sense to me that if my Lord shed His blood for me it would not be given back to Him. Leviticus 17:11 tells the story. Why should we believe something different?" This request arrived too late to be able to include an article in this month's Circular Letter, but next month's Issue will be devoted largely to this very important subject.

The Schofield Reference Bible has an interesting comment on Leviticus 17:11 - "The meaning of all sacrifice is here explained. Every offering was an execution of the sentence of the law upon a substitute for the offender, and every such offering pointed forward to that substitutional death of Christ which alone vindicated the righteousness of God in passing over the sins of those who offered the typical sacrifices. (See also Romans 3:24, 25, Exodus 29:36.)"

Following a request last month another correspondent writes, "Some of our Brothers and Sisters want to discuss what the Kingdom will be like in that day, but we think our time would be wasted; far too many, even some who confess the name of Jesus, appear to be well off the narrow way: much seed still needs sowing in the Truth."

There are indeed far too many well off the narrow way. Even so, it is my humble opinion that we should find time for studying all Bible subjects, and the scriptures tell us so much about the coming age (e.g. Psalm 72) that we find tremendous encouragement in reading of future joy and peace. As Paul writes: -

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope", so can we not study this subject without neglecting other aspects of Bible doctrine?

However, the Circular Letter should include articles which meet with the approval of all so please write and say what you would like to see included.

With Best Wishes to all our readers with Sincere Love' in the Master's service,

Russell Gregory.

Exhortation

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Greetings to all, near and far away.

The circumstances of the small community of the Nazarene Fellowship makes it not possible for most of us to remember the wondrous sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ with the added joy of fellowship one with another. Here and there of course, they can and the words of Jesus are then so appropriate: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst of them." Jesus foresaw surely, the state of affairs which would exist for many of His redeemed ones, not only in the late 20th century, but down the ages till this time.

If we are denied the factor of fellowship one with another, let us not forget that the important issue really is that in remembering Jesus through the symbols of the Bread and Wine that we do have fellowship with God through His Son, through whom all must be done, as we know. So in remembering the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us who believe (especially) , we are also worshipping God, even if we are quite alone when we do so. We are related then, to the provisions of what Jesus wrought in His death on the cross; the re-creating of the bridge over which we can cross back to God. In Eden, Adam said 'No, I will do what I want to do' and his relationship with God was disrupted. He was expelled from the garden, and access to the Tree of Life, which was God Himself, was prevented. In due time the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world, was born whose will it was, unlike Adam, to be obedient to and about His Father's business, and He was born, not by the will of the flesh, but of the Holy Spirit yet nevertheless capable of sin, from which He refrained; knowing His mission and work was to redeem His brethren by laying down His uncondemned life - His very riches on the cross of Calvary.

With the knowledge we have of God's plan of salvation and the reverence in which we hold our Saviour, our eyes having been opened to the truth about His atoning sacrifice, then we should never feel lonely and alone - because we are not. "I will never leave you or forsake you" said Jesus; "My peace I leave with you." "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yolk is easy and my burden is light." How light and easy Jesus has made it for us by paying the price of sin for us all!

It is possible that our Fellowship will never become large in numbers, and I am sure that we all realise this, but let us face another comforting fact - our waiting for the coming again of Jesus is no further away than the rest of our natural lifetime, as the Apostle Paul said, "for we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." In other words, the time we remain asleep in death is not known to us no matter how long it may be, but the resurrection call will seem as the last moment of consciousness before we experienced physical death. This surely is what Jesus meant when He said, "He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. That is, that those regarded as saved in God's sight will not die eternally.

So we have the comfort of knowing that we are already related to the things that God has prepared for those that love Him; that we are never really alone, and that the "restitution of all things" is not far away from any of us, and nearer probably than any of us think.

It was the experience of Jesus Christ to be contradicted, misunderstood, lied about, hated and, finally, murdered by the Jewish leaders. He came to the "Fig Tree", "Israel" and it bore no fruit or promise of fruit (love and kindness) and He was forced to say "Behold your house is left unto you desolate, and it shall be given unto others bearing the fruits thereof." Jesus, nevertheless remained resolute in His purpose in spite of all and set His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem knowing full well what awaited Him there. And when on the Cross He said "It is finished" (i.e. the work of accepting the inflicted death of which Adam was warned), the veil of the Temple was suddenly ripped from top to bottom. Yes, Jesus had redeemed us and the way into the Holy of Holies was now open to all who will; Jesus had brought us back to God. The bridge was there and Eden was restored. We can cross back (as we have done) to covenant relationship with God. Now, therefore, we live and are in a state of grace, by which we are saved by and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Not by works, lest any should boast but by grace are we saved.

What then of good works, and good conduct, and good intentions, and kindness and forbearance that we ought to have? To say nothing of keeping the Ten Commandments. All these Jesus did perfectly! Well the Bible does say that this is “our reasonable service” and Jesus says, “When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” Nevertheless, we are adopted children through grace and our righteousness and faith is the righteousness and faith that Jesus had, and He sums up this aspect in Revelation: “Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me to give every man as his works shall be.” In other words, our works do not save us, for by grace are we saved, and that not of ourselves for it is the gift of God. But, and it is profound but, our works will establish our status in the Kingdom of God - when Christ comes to make up God’s Jewels for a crown of righteousness for us to wear them.

What lies ahead, brethren and sisters, is breathtaking in the wonder of it all. Let us then remain steadfast and unmovable, whether lonely or not, whether despairing or not, for the joy that is set before us is beyond our greatest expectations. Amen.

Brother Harold Dawson.

Romans Chapter Seven

This chapter is much quoted in defence of the theory that Adam’s nature was changed at the fall and unhappily, this is believed by most professing Christians, but if due regard is given to the context it should be seen that from verse 5 of this chapter a digression is made by Paul from the main theme of the previous chapter, that the believer has been made free from the law of sin and death by faith and baptism; they have in symbol been crucified with Christ and raised to newness of life and been given a sure and certain hope of eternal life, having by faith in Christ’s loving sacrifice escaped sin’s wages of eternal oblivion.

In the first four verses of chapter seven Paul speaks to Jews like himself and uses the simile of their relation to the Law of Moses as that of a wife to a husband, the death of whom would release the wife and give her freedom to marry another, in like manner they had become dead to the law by the death of Christ and were free to marry another, even the incorruptible risen Christ. From verse 5, as in parenthesis, Paul recounts his own experiences and feelings as a Jew under the law and those of like position saying, “When we were in the flesh”, which obviously does not mean their physical flesh, but an opposite position to that which they now had of being “in the spirit”, or “in Christ”, when Saul (as he was previously) came to an understanding of the law of ordinances that it was indeed a ministration of condemnation and of death from which he sought vindication by a meticulous keeping of the ‘letter’, he failed to see in the endless sacrifices of animals whose blood could not take away sin, a type of one who could. The promised seed of the woman, who would fulfil all the types and, although he realised that “the law was holy, just and good” it condemned him as a sinner to death from which there was no escape, therefore he found no real incentive to strive against sin and allowed his ‘members’ to perform things contrary to his better judgement, thus making him ‘wretched’, alluding to the law of Moses (which incorporated the Edenic law of sin and death) as a “body of death from which he now thanked God that Christ had delivered him, when, in his fanatical zeal for the law, he went in pursuit of Christ’s followers to Damascus but was brought to a halt on the road by a vision of the risen Christ, so bright in glory as to strike him blind for three days, during which time no doubt he was able to fit in all the missing pieces which a true knowledge of the sacrifice of Christ supplied (for he was no doubt well versed in his understanding of the scriptures, being a Pharisee brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, who was an eminent scholar but was blind as they were to the spirit of the law) so that after he was baptised he was able to preach the gospel to others almost at once.

The 8th chapter may now be seen to be a continuation of the 6th and 7th to verse 4. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus.” The third verse of this chapter is supposed to teach that sin is in the flesh, and because Jesus was flesh he had to die to save Himself and us, as a representative man. This view is a complete violation of the truth, because, properly understood, and in harmony with other scripture concerning our Lord, this verse is a keynote to the Atonement.

Now all scripture points to Christ “without blemish and without spot”, as a sacrifice for the sin of mankind just as the typical animals offered had to be perfect to be acceptable. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh (being in the Adamic bondage) God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of Sin’s flesh (i.e. flesh belonging to sin) and (by an offering) for sin condemned sin (while He was) in the flesh”, “being made a little lower than the angels that He might taste death for every man.” The ransom price of our redemption, for Jesus Himself never needed redemption, not being generated by any man of Adam’s stock, but .by the Holy Spirit power of God, keeping in mind that the condemnation was not physical, but legal it may be seen that Mary, the mother of Jesus, being a Godly Jewess, believed in a coming Saviour, she was God’s redeemed handmaid as testified in what is now known as the ‘magnificat’ how could any doubt her faith upon reading those wonderful words. Usually there is no difficulty in seeing the federal principle re. the ‘body of Christ’ (one head with many members) into which body the believer enters by an act of faith without any change of our physical nature, why then should it be so difficult for some to see that, upon enlightenment, one is “in Adam” in a similar way? The believer has now “put off the old man” (Adam) and “put on the new man” (Christ) by baptism, and is typically clothed with a garment of righteousness, not our own, but that of Christ. We are now redeemed, or bought back from the dominion of sin, - the tree has been made good and God looks for its fruit to be good - to fulfil the law of loving God first and our neighbour as ourselves, knowing that our High Priest is working as intercessor with the Father. This proves that believers are being judged now, and if we repent of our sins we can be forgiven as we are assured in 1 John 1:9. We must expect chastening for our faults and as a test of faith, but if we have true faith and keep it to the end, eternal life will be ours, and our standing at the judgement seat of Christ will be for rewards of works of faith, but eternal life is the free gift obtainable by faith only. How simple, then, to see that the first resurrection is for those “in Christ”, who will be raised incorruptible and will not come into judgement (Condemnation) reserved for the unbelievers and unfaithful at the end of the Millennium (if they have died before Christ comes - Revelation 20:5,6). But the living unfaithful and unrepentant will be dealt with at Christ’s advent, as many scriptures predict.

The nation of Israel was a miniature, or type, of all who have knowledge of God’s law, therefore accountable or responsible. The Mosaic Law was their school master designed to bring them to a knowledge of Christ through the various types and ordinances. It was added to the Edenic law and the promises as a measure of educating and making known again the need of redemption by making the offence (of Eden) to abound (Romans 5:20) but when (the object of) faith came in the person of Jesus Christ they were no longer under a schoolmaster and could, by faith in His sacrifice, be made free from the law of sin and death.

It is clear that natural death, the result of a corruptible body, is not alluded to here. Animal sacrifices were slain, or put to death, as Christ, the antitype was, and Adam should have been in the day he sinned (Genesis 2:17), had not love and mercy prevailed. Paul could not have been speaking of himself as a Christian in Romans 7 using such terms as “I am carnal, sold under sin” (v. 14) for he had been bought with a price, even the precious blood of Christ. It would have been a complete negation of all that he had said in the previous chapter and elsewhere. Paul, as a Christian, said, “I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me”, also “be ye followers of me as I am of Christ.” If Paul was a follower of Christ he would not be in the double-minded state as depicted in verse 14-23, for did not James say “a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.” (James 1:8). Was Paul unstable? He said, “I keep under my body lest I who have preached to others should myself become a castaway.” (1 Corinthians 9:27). Even Dr John Thomas wrote that Paul in this chapter was “seeing himself as an unenlightened son of the flesh” so that any who think to excuse themselves on the strength of this chapter should think again.

Sister Evelyn Linggood

Trees of the Bible

It was on the third day of creation when God said “Let the earth put forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth; and it was so. And the

earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.” All of these things were made for the glory of God, as we read in Psalm 148 “Praise the Lord ...mountains and hills; fruitful trees and all cedars.”

When we consider the importance of trees and their place in the environment we come to a fuller understanding of the wisdom of God. For without trees and shrubs with their ability, through photosynthesis to take up carbon dioxide and give off oxygen, the place of animal life in creation would soon be in dire straits. For this one reason alone trees are essential to life on earth, but their benefit does not end there for their multitudinous fruits provide sustenance for humans and animals alike. The Lord said, “Behold I have given you every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.” Trees also provide shelter, fuel, building materials, and also affects climatic conditions. The earth, without their benefit of cover and shade, becomes parched and arid, a state of affairs that has become evident as the years go by, with man becoming profligate in his felling of the great forests for gain, ignoring exhortations to replant and replenish.

In the scriptures thirty or so varieties of trees are mentioned, all familiar to us except two, and these we only know through God’s purpose with mankind. These trees were planted in the Garden of Eden, “God planted a garden eastward in Eden and there he put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and is good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Genesis 2:8.)

These two trees were specifically designed to give instruction. To the Tree of Life Adam had free access “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying. Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.” This tree was available but denied by command, and man’s future well-being was dependant upon his obedience to this ordinance. The scriptures give us no indication that during his sojourn in the garden whether Adam partook of the Tree of Life, or not, nor whether it was necessary for his physical day-to-day well-being. That it bestowed life is indicated in Genesis 3:22 “And the Lord God said, Behold, the man has become as one of us, to know good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden.” It would appear that the early access was necessary to this tree to stop the ageing process which all nature suffers, and Adam’s removal from the garden and access to the tree obviously allowed natural decay to set in, finally leading to death. As the Psalmist wrote, “As for man his days are as grass, as the flower of the field so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it and it is gone.” Through his disobedience man could no longer sustain his life, but, through the mercy of the Almighty, was given another opportunity to enter the Kingdom of Glory, this through sacrifice and the shedding of blood.

All parts of the tree are used in scripture, from the roots, through the trunk, branches, leaves and finally the fruit. Its roots are likened to a man who trusts in the Lord. From Jeremiah we read “Blessed is the man who trusteth in the Lord and who’s the Lord is. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out his roots by the river, and shall not fear when the heat cometh, but his leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from bearing fruit.” (Jeremiah 17:8). And again in the Psalms, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the council of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And in His law doth he meditate day and night. He shall be like a tree, planted by the streams of water that bringeth forth its fruit in his season.” (Psalm 1:3). Here, clearly demonstrated, is the importance of founding one’s trust in the ordinances of God, for in them is the very essence, the food and nourishment necessary for the development of the man able to walk uprightly in the sight of God.

“The original seed of righteousness may be only very small as witnessed by Christ in the parable of the mustard seed “which is less than all seeds,” but it has the potential in a fertile situation, to develop into a mature tree. In like manner, the spiritual seed may enter the heart of man and if sufficiently nurtured, develop into the righteous understanding of salvation in Christ Jesus, leading to eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Whether it be the development and maturing of a tree, or the spiritual growth in ourselves time cannot be rushed. With the tree many years may pass before the first indications appear of flowering and even then

it may not be able to produce fruits of any great value, and only by good husbandry will it finally bear a rich harvest.

In Leviticus we read that the Israelites were admonished not to pick the fruit from the trees they planted for several years. Chapter 19 and verse 23, “And when ye come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as their circumcision, three years shall they be uncircumcised unto you, and it shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy, for giving praise unto the Lord, and in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase.”

We know from modern husbandry that when a tree first shows its fruits that it is advisable to remove them for a year or two, thereby preventing the tree from dissipating its strength, endorsing the words of Leviticus. By this patient tending a tree will bring forth a bigger reward in quality and quantity.

In a similar manner we cannot expect great results early in our spiritual life. Careful nurturing over the years allow us to grow and reach maturity and be of benefit to our brethren and sisters. Even our Lord was referred to in Isaiah as a tender plant, and thirty years were to elapse before He made known to His disciples that He was the chosen of the Lord God. During these years of development we know from Luke’s gospel that He advanced in wisdom and stature, in favour with God and man.

It is not until a tree has reached maturity and born fruit that it can be judged, as shown in a parable that our Lord used in His Sermon on the Mount “By their fruits shall ye know them, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruits. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.” (Matthew 7:17).

The Psalmist wrote, “The righteous shall flower like the palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. They that are planted in the courts of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God; they shall bring forth fruit in old age, and shall be full of sap and green.” (Psalm 92:12).

To those who walk in the way of the Lord He promises rain in season and an increase in the yield of the land and trees in their fruits. But there is also a warning to the ungodly, and we should take to heart the warning given to the Israelites, mentioned in Deuteronomy if they strayed from the way of the Lord. “Thou shalt plant vineyards and dress them, but thou shalt neither drink of the wine or gather the grapes, for worms shall eat them. Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy borders but thou shalt not anoint thyself with oil, for the olives will cast their fruits, all thy trees and the fruit of the ground shall the locust possess.”

Despite trees beautifying the countryside and providing fruits and shelter, the Israelites were forbidden from planting groves on consecrated ground, Deut 16:21 “Thou shalt not plant thee an asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of the Lord thy God, which thou shalt make, neither set thee up a pillar, which the Lord hateth.” A timely warning, for they were soon to enter the land of promise and make contact with the idolatrous worship practised by the inhabitants of the land. Asherahs were worshipped by the Canaanites along with Baal; they were groves of sacred poles, substitute for sacred trees, revered by early Samaritans, these wooden poles were overlaid with precious metals and adorned with woven hangings. It would appear from the earlier admonition that these groves of poles were also surrounded by fairly quick growing trees such as the chestnut, now recognised as the plane tree. A tree of beautiful form bearing thick verdant foliage, no doubt affording grateful shade to the weary traveller coming to worship. It was strakes from this tree that Jacob laid in the water troughs when he tended the flocks of Laban that they might conceive and bare mottled sheep to his own gain. (Genesis 30:37).

These groves were established time and again as the Israelites departed from the worship of their God and turned to worship idols, ignoring the earlier instruction in Deuteronomy. How little they realised that provided that they did not turn away from the living God, He would always be with them and there was little need for worship in particular places.

There appears to be only one occasion when a tree was planted and an altar erected, and that was done by Abraham. In Genesis 21:33, we read that he planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.

Conservation was also commanded by the Lord for as the Israelites approached the land of promise they were forbidden to cut down the fruit bearing trees when laying siege to cities. “For thou mayest eat from them, and thou shall not cut them down, only the trees thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shall destroy and cut them down, and thou shall build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee, until it fall.”

Unfortunately, this piece of wisdom was not practised by other nations who, over the centuries, subjugated the Israelites, in particular, the Romans who in their final purge denuded the surrounding countryside of trees, turning a green and fruitful land into a semi-arid desert. The land remained in this condition, populated mainly by nomadic tribes, until the Jews returned, setting up their kibbutzim, establishing settled communities that reorganised agriculture, using age-old methods. This has regenerated the arboreal cover necessary to re-establish the ecological climate. They found that by surrounding each tree with a circular platform of rocks that as the rocks cooled each evening, dew condensed on them and helped irrigate the tree.

The earliest reference we get to a particular type of tree used by man was in the Lord’s instruction to Noah “make thee an Ark of Gopher wood.” Gopher wood in all probability was either the cypresses or cedar, both slightly resinous and easily worked. A most suitable timber as it is extremely durable and not susceptible to attack by insects or fungus. It is rather surprising when we consider the size of the Ark that Noah had the tools to construct such a vessel, let alone fell the trees, for they can grow to well over a hundred feet high and thirty feet in circumference, and with the Ark being approximately 550 feet long, 91 feet wide and 54 feet high. Little wonder he took 120 years to construct it, and in all this time his tenacity of purpose did not waver and there is little doubt that during this time he had to withstand a vast amount of mockery and ribald comment from the local populace.

Another tree specifically mentioned is the shittim, or acacia tree, used in the construction of the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant and it’s sacred utensils. It grew in profusion in the desert from northern Arabia down to Ethiopia. In colour it resembles bos wood, very hard and suitable for intricate carving. Being of a very fine grain it was an ideal timber for overlaying with gold. Some reference books only refer to it as a small tree similar to a mulberry, but reading the details of the Tabernacle given in Exodus where boards of 18 feet in length and two feet in breadth were required indicate that it was a much larger tree, possibly similar to the sycamore, a type of wild fig and not to be confused with our own sycamore which is of the maple family. This tree grew to over 50 feet high and had a very large trunk.

Although the Israelites had been forbidden to have graven images the construction of the Ark and the Tabernacle were necessary to provide a focal point in their worship of Jehovah. It was a continual reminder of the presence of their God, especially as they were preparing to enter Canaan, a country riddled with idolatrous worship, and abounded in shrines. Precisely what became of the Ark we do not know. It was certainly placed in the sanctuary of Solomon’s temple and from there was probably taken when Shishak removed the treasures from the temple in the reign of Rehoboam, as recorded in 1 Kings 14:25, “and it came to pass in the fifth year of King Rehoboam, that Shishak, King of Egypt, came up against Jerusalem, and he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord...”

During the time of the building of the Tabernacle we find the first reference to the pomegranate a tree much prized for its apple sized fruit. The Israelites esteemed it as one of the great luxuries they had enjoyed in the land of Egypt, sadly missed in the wilderness of Zinn and they complained “Wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us into this evil place? It is no place of seed, or figs, or vines, or of pomegranates.” No doubt they missed the succulent fresh fruit and also the cooling drink of sherbet made from the juice. In the Song of Solomon we find he extols the pomegranate, “I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of the pomegranate.” (Song of Solomon 8:2). The rind of the fruit was also used extensively for the tanning of leather.

From the details of the tabernacle and of Solomon’s temple it obviously had sacred significance. On the High Priests robe we find woven pomegranates and around the hem, golden pomegranates were alternated with golden bells. “A golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate upon the skirt of the robe round about. And it shall be on Aaron to minister, and the sound thereof shall be heard

when he goeth into the Holy Place before the Lord.” (Exodus 28:34). Its flowers and fruit were used as models for decorating the pillars of Solomon’s Temple. The record tells us that 400 pomegranates for the two net-works, even two rows of pomegranates for one net-work to cover the two bowls of the chapters that were on top of the pillars.

Another tree much valued by the Israelites was the almond. It was the earliest harbinger of spring, bursting into blossom in late January, before its leaves appeared. The fruit is a great favourite, it can be eaten green before the shell hardens, and when ripe, is used as a sweetmeat. Its oil is also highly prized. Its fruits were also used as a model when designing the golden candlesticks for the Tabernacle, “And in the candlestick shall be four bowls like unto the almond”.

Almonds were included in the present Jacob sent to Joseph in Egypt. He instructed his sons to carry down to Joseph a present, a little balm, a little honey, spices, myrrh, nuts and almonds. A present no doubt appreciated by Joseph for the almond does not flourish in Egypt.

When trouble arose among the leaders of the twelve tribes in the wilderness, Moses was instructed to take rods, one for each tribe, and lay them before the testimony in the house of meeting. These must have been from the almond tree for we read “on the morrow Aarons rod had budded and brought forth buds and blossom and bore ripe fruit”, thereby dispelling any idea of fraud by Moses that he had removed Aaron’s rod and substituted another, for to bear fruit, blossom and buds was an impossibility in the natural order of things.

The great cedars of Lebanon come into focus again when we move on to the building of Solomon’s temple. From the details given in the book of Kings, although the outer walls of the temple were made of stone, it was necessary to line its interior with timber to facilitate the ornamental carvings overlaid with gold. In chapter 6 we read “and there was cedar on the house within, carved with knops and open flowers, all was cedar, there was no stone seen. And the whole house was overlaid with gold until the whole house was finished.” Considering the size and the complexity of the temple it is amazing to read that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was building. I very much doubt whether any of our modern construction companies would undertake such an erection under these restrictions. In the Holy of Holies Solomon had carved two cherubim with out-spread wings to cover the Ark. These cherubim were carved not from cedar or acacia but from olive wood, a tree frequently used in reference by the prophets as a figure of righteousness, individually and collectively. Entirely appropriate when we consider that the cherubim are the guardians of the tree of life and the spiritual truth. The Psalmist refers to them “as bearers for the Lord God Almighty”, and again, “I called upon the Lord and he heard my voice, and he rode upon a cherub and did fly”, and in a later Psalm, “give ear, oh Shepherd of Israel, that sitteth between the cherubim and shine forth.”

Throughout the scriptures trees are used illustratively of rulers and nations, whether they thrive and bring forth fruits, or wither and are cut down. When the wrath of the Lord was turned against the King of Assyria, Isaiah prophesied that the glory of his forests would be consumed and his fruitful field, both body and soul. “Behold, the Lord of Hosts shall lop the boughs with terror and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down and the lofty shall be brought low. And He shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron.”

And Daniel records Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a mighty tree cut down, and the interpretation. The tree represented the King in all his might, but when he became boastful, personally claiming the glory for his achievements, the Lord punished him, making him no better than a beast of the field.

When we turn our attention to the Israelites, the Lord’s chosen people, we find references to a particular tree, the olive tree. Rather appropriate when we consider the importance of the olive to their every-day existence, for it provided oil for cooking and lighting, was useful as a medicament and for anointing the body, keeping the skin moist through the heat of the summer, and also as a salve on bruises and wounds. A single olive tree could supply a whole family with fat for a year. The tree also provided some welcome shade and its wood was the main source of fuel. Indeed, many eastern Mediterranean nations recorded their wealth by the abundance of the olive harvest. The olive trees were part of the bounty of the land of Canaan promised to the Israelites. “And it shall be, when the Lord shall bring you into the land, which He swore unto your fathers, Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee, great and good cities which thou buildest

not, and houses full of good things which thou findest not, and cisterns hewn out which thou hewedst not, and vineyards and olive trees which thou plantest not, and thou shalt eat and be full.” (Deuteronomy 6:10).

The olive tree was the first to bring new hope to Noah and his family in the Ark, when the dove returned with an olive leaf. This tree with the vine is linked throughout the Old Testament with the house of Israel and the blessing of the Lord. Jeremiah records, “the Lord of Hosts had planted thee a green olive tree, fair with good fruits.” And again, in Hosea, “I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall blossom as a lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the olive tree.” The oil was also used for anointing kings, and was used by Samuel to anoint Saul and, later David.

Reading through the scriptures we find the olive tree is synonymous with spiritual righteousness, and as we move into the New Testament we find reference to the grafting into the olive tree of new shoots as the gospel of salvation is preached to the nations. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, wrote, “Thou, being a wild olive, was grafted in among them and did become partaker with them of the root of the fatness of the olive tree.” This is rather unusual, for here we have a wild olive being grafted onto a good tree, the reverse of the natural run of events where grafts are taken from a selected fruitful olive and grafted on to less fruitful stock, thereby increasing the harvest.

Herein is shown the merciful grace of the Lord, as Paul puts it to the Ephesians “God, being rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, quickened us together with Christ. By grace ye have been saved. That ye were separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye that were once afar off are made nigh in the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:12).

What man is unable to do, God is easily able to achieve, and does so through Jesus Christ His Son.

The olive tree provided a setting for other momentous events in the time of our Lord. It was in the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, that He retired from His disciples, to commune with His Father shortly before His arrest. It was on this same mount that His disciples witnessed His ascension into Heaven.

There is another hint of grafting in when we come to Christ’s words “I am the true vine and my Father is the Husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away, and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit... I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit, for apart from me ye are nothing.” With grafting there is a blending together, a closeness, and integration, and without it the graft does not take and the scion withers and dies, but the good graft will develop, taking its vigour from the main stock to the benefit of both.

This bonding to the true vine in Christ is essential to our salvation, for the fruits which we produce now are to the glory of God, as Paul wrote to the Romans “When ye were servants of sin, ye were free in regard to righteousness. What fruits then had ye at that time, in the things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of all things is death. But now being free from sin, and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification and in the end, eternal life.”

The fig, another fruitful tree of the eastern Mediterranean, appears very early in the scriptures for we are told Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to make aprons to cover their nakedness. An obvious sign of disobedience.

The fig also was counted as part of the abundance of the land of Canaan, for the spies Moses had sent into the land came back with branches bearing clusters of grapes, pomegranates and figs. In Deuteronomy, where the land is referred to as a good land, “a land of brooks of water and fountains and depths springing forth from the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates and olive oil and honey.

Whilst the Israelites were an obedient nation their fig tree brought forth plentifully, but when they departed from the way of the Lord, their fig trees dropped their young figs. The fig tree is rather unique in

that it produces two crops in the year. The first young figs appearing in March and then the leaves. Many of these early figs do not reach maturity being easily blown off in gusty weather conditions. Those that do not fall reach maturity in early June and are especially esteemed for their delicate flavour. The prophet Micah writes, "My soul desireth the first ripe fig." In June the main crop begins to form and steadily grows to produce mature figs in August.

Whereas the olive tree stands for the spiritual Israel it would appear that the fig represents natural Israel, which give the explanation of Christ's curse on the unfruitful fig tree shortly before His arrest and crucifixion. As the Passover is early in the year, our Lord would not have expected to pick mature fruits as we are told in the narrative "the time of figs was not yet", but He would have anticipated picking the young delicate fruits, and to see evidence of a greater harvest later. But as we read in Mark's account "and seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves. He came if haply He might find anything thereon, and when He came to it He found nothing but leaves, and cursed it, causing it to wither." It was the want of promise of future fruitfulness in the nation that was condemned in the parable of the fig tree. Natural Israel was shortly to condone the putting to death of God's Son, saying, "His blood be upon us and on our children". Until our Lord's return they will remain barren and then will He make Himself known to them and they will acknowledge their guilt and repent. And God will again bless Israel and make them fruitful once more. "And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced and they shall mourn as one mourneth for his only Son," and "I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and keep my judgements. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field." And from Joel, "For the tree beareth fruits, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord, for He giveth you the former rain in just measure. He causeth to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the later rain in the first month. And the floor shall be full of wheat and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil." (Joel 2:23).

The Palm tree. According to Josephus, the palm tree was plentiful in the land, covering the Jordan valley from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. For the Jews the palm had both practical usefulness and symbolic significance. Its Hebrew name is Tamar, and symbolises grace and elegance. A single trunk rising up to a hundred feet topped with a crown of fan shaped leaves beneath which hang clusters of succulent dates. This is a particularly valuable plant for it provides starch, sugar, oil, wax, and fruit, and its leaves are suitable for weaving into mats and containers. Paper and thread are made from its fibres and liquor is extracted from its sap. When viewed in the desert it indicates water. We read that the Israelites in their travels came to Elim where there were twelve wells of water and three score and ten palm trees.

Its large feathery leaves were used as emblems of victory and triumph. When our Lord entered Jerusalem, riding on the colt, the people took palm leaves and strewed them in the way. Carvings of these trees were used to adorn Solomon's temple, and again appear in the details of Ezekiel's Temple "The space above the door even unto the inner house and without, and by all the walls round about within and without by measure. It was made with cherubim and palm tree, and the palm tree was between cherub and cherub, every cherub had two faces, so there was the face of a man towards the palm tree on one side, and the face of a lion on the other side, and thus was it made through all the house. And the door to the sanctuary cherubim and palm trees like as were made on the walls." The juxtaposition of the cherubim and palm tree emphasises the sacredness of this tree and it has persisted through the ages up to our present time. Modern Jewry waves palm leaves in their synagogues today when celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. Palm leaves will be waved as a sign of triumphant rejoicing in the new Jerusalem "for after these things I saw and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all the tribes, and people and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb arrayed in white robes and palms in their hands. And they cried with a great voice, saying, "Salvation unto our God which sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb."

With our Lord's return peace and righteousness will be established and desecration of the land will cease, as recorded in Micah, "In the latter days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains and it shall be exalted above the hills, and all people shall flow unto it. And he shall judge between many people and reprove strong nations afar off and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has spoken it."

Here we have come full circle from the righteousness in the Garden of Eden to the righteousness in the kingdom with the Holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. “And the river of the water of life, bright as crystal proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb. And on this side of the river and on that, the trees of life, bearing twelve manner of fruit and yielding its fruits every month, with its leaves for the healing of the nations.”

It is up to us now to take note of the admonitions we read earlier in the chapter from Isaiah, “Incline your ear and come unto me. Hear and you shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace, the mountains and hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.”

Brother Jeff Hadley,

Prayer is Power

Dear brethren and sisters, in the moments of prayer is the secret of peace, a feeling of renewed strength and a warm feeling of comfort. Our Lord prayed long and very often. Very early in the day it was His custom to seek a solitary place to pray. In pressing times He resorted to the mountain top to draw close to His Father. He came down with an even greater desire to do His Father’s will.

It is a fact that if we enjoy someone’s company, we seek every opportunity to meet and spend time with them. God would have us take pleasure in His company that we should likewise seek to spend much time, through prayer, with Him. The scriptures reveal that all the servants of God have been and are, men and women of prayer. Can we neglect to be so minded? Prayer is an essential. While it is self-sacrificing, nevertheless it brings a fullness of joy known only to those who practise it.

The time spent communicating with the Father is time well spent and makes us more sure that we are forgiven of our many shortcomings and makes the way seem brighter, and makes us more determined to do our best for Him.

“Watch and pray” is an action we do well to get involved with. We cannot call on God too often, we should feel our dependence on Him for whatever our need He is available to us through Jesus Christ in prayer.

Prayer is power, for by it we can renew our strength and motivation and feel comforted. The world we live in is full of evil and uncertainty, waxing worse as each year passes. All around us men cry, “Here is Christ” others, “He is with us”! Many of them are very good people, in whose company we could find pleasure and a type of fellowship. It is at times like these when prayer is most needed, for whatever else, the end result of watching and praying is to keep us from succumbing to the temptation of a less than perfect fellowship.

Our prayer, to be effective, must be sincere. We must do it with importunity, faith, and a complete reliance upon God. We must believe He is willing to grant our petitions, forgiving us now, and’ not at some future time. Believing this, the power we shall receive through prayer will overcome all fear and temptations.

Brother Eric Moore.

The Fruit of Righteousness

Selected from the Mount Zion Reporter.

When the Israelites left Egypt, before they entered the Promised Land, they were exhorted by Moses to “serve the Lord thy God only,” and not go after the other gods around them. “To observe His commandments and statutes, and it shall be righteousness unto us, if we observe to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as He hath commanded us.” (Deuteronomy 6:25). In Psalm 15:1, the psalmist asks, “Lord who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle, who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?” and the answer is: “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness and speaketh truth in his heart.”

Righteousness, or self-righteousness?

The heart, says Jeremiah in chapter 17:9, “is deceitful above all things.” It will deceive us into thinking we are righteous when we are self-righteous only. True righteousness is a complete forgetfulness of self, as we are shown by the life and teaching of Christ our Lord. He came to Israel at a time they were fulfilling the letter of the old law but were blind to its spiritual meaning. Their prophets had warned them of this. In Hosea 6:6, the Lord says, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” The Pharisees who followed Jesus, not to hear his words, but to find occasion to arrest him, even disobeyed the law laid down by Moses when it suited their evil purpose.

There is an instance of this in John’s gospel, chapter 8, where the Scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to him, saying they had taken her in the very act of adultery. They told Jesus, “In the law Moses commanded us to stone such; what sayest thou of her?” Jesus said nothing in reply, but stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground in the dust. When they continued asking him, he looked up and said, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.” He then stooped and wrote again on the ground. His answer confounded them. They were convicted by their own conscience, and slunk away, one by one, leaving only the woman. “When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her. Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man Lord. And Jesus said unto her. Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more.” The Scribes and Pharisees were the rabbis, teachers of the law, trained to teach its lessons to others in their synagogues so that they had no excuse of being blind or ignorant men. They pretended to follow the law, but in their self-righteousness were actually misusing it, using this woman and her sin to try to find occasion against Jesus. We find in Deuteronomy 22:24, that according to the old law, not only the woman but also the man should have been stoned, Also, in Numbers 5:18, there is a clear evidence of the lengthy procedure taken by the priest to judge the guilt or innocence of the accused in such a case. It was not a matter of moments, but of a long trial. “And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the Lord, and the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water.” They had brought the accused woman to Jesus, who was teaching, seated on the ground of the Temple court, the floor of the tabernacle. We do not know what he wrote, but this simple action in writing in the dust on the floor of the tabernacle may have rebuked them far more than any word from him could do. They saw that they were breaking the law themselves and were convicted by their own lack of innocence, and they slunk away, the eldest being the first to go. This simple story very aptly demonstrates an important difference between self-righteousness and righteousness. The self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees, who were themselves guilty, accused; while Christ, who was righteous, forgave.

The Lilies of the Field.

Jesus made much use of the illustrations of nature in his parables of the kingdom. He compares Solomon in all his glory with the humble lily of the field, a flower which grows wild in many countries. He says that one little sparrow does not fall to the ground without the Heavenly Father knowing and caring. He warns his listeners that every one that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. He chose for his disciples not the high and powerful but humble fisher folk who had nothing to give but their love and trust. His disciples were very human men, with human faults and failings. As we read the Gospels we can learn much from the accounts we are given of their experiences and trials.

Self, the Enemy.

In Matthew 16:21, Jesus was breaking the sombre news of his approaching death to his disciples and impulsive Peter, shocked by his words, said, "Master, God forbid! This shall not be unto thee." But Jesus saw in his well-meant words another attempt by the Adversary to turn him from the path laid down for him by his Father and he turned and said to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me." Jesus was not calling Peter Satan, but driving home the lesson which followed, "If any one desires to follow me, let him renounce self and take up his cross and follow me." The love of God must surpass all human loves, and self is the adversary we must all fight. Service to others will win us the victory as it did for Christ our Lord, but it must be done in love, and not from any thought of reward.

The Rock of our Salvation

In Luke 9:18 Jesus asked his disciples, "Whom say the people that I am? They answering him, said, John the Baptist, some, Elias, and others say that one of the old prophets is risen again. He asked again, But whom say ye that I am?" and it was Peter who answered, "The Christ of God." On another occasion, in John 6:66, many of his disciples left him, and went away. Jesus therefore appealed to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" "Master", replied Simon Peter, "to whom shall we go? We believe and know that you are indeed the Holy One of God." This answer must have greatly refreshed the soul of the Master after all the opposition and unbelief he had endured, and he replied, "I say unto you, thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my church." The rock was the confession of belief in Jesus as the Messiah, God's anointed; and in this belief we are all baptised into His Name, Jew and Gentile, one church, one flock. When Jesus was arrested, it was Peter who followed, "a good way off." He was sitting by the fire in the Temple court when a maidservant recognised him and said, "This man also was with him." Peter denied this three times, fearing for his own life. No sooner had he spoken than a cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked on Peter, and Peter recollected the Master's words:

"This very day before the cock crows, you will disown me three times." And Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Jesus was in the tomb, sleeping the sleep of death, for three days and nights, and on waking, he appeared to Peter before any of the others. This is recorded in Corinthians 15:5, "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." The name Cephas is the same as Peter, meaning 'a Rock'. In John 21, when Christ appeared to his disciples for the third time, following his resurrection. He gave Peter, and us also, the great command to "Feed my Lambs... Feed my Sheep..." "After the resurrection of Christ a new dimension appeared in the lives of the servants of God. It is impossible to quote the whole of the 14th chapter of John's gospel in a short article, but we can read it again and again and still be astonished at the love and mercy shown by the Almighty Creator to His sinful sons and daughters. It tells us that the Holy Spirit of God, the Comforter will dwell in the hearts of true believers. "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

The Comforter

This came to pass in no uncertain fashion on the day of Pentecost - "And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where we were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." (Acts 2). There were dwelling at Jerusalem devout men out of every nation under heaven, and when they heard the noise of this mighty wind they came and were confounded because every man heard the disciples speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying, one to another. Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue?" (Acts 2:7,8). "Then they that gladly received the word were baptised, and the same day there were added to the church about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41). And all these would have returned to their own countries and spread the good news to their fellow countrymen. This work is continuing to this day. It is a glorious calling, for those of us who believe and follow Him. We must be steadfast and bold; but we also have need of patience, diligence and avoidance of fruitless arguments. James says in his letter, chapter 3 and verse 17: "The wisdom which is

from above is first pure, then peaceable, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

Let us then go forward, trusting in Jesus for help in the storms of life, so that He will have no occasion to say to us at his return, “O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?”

Letter from one Christadelphian to another:-

Dear Bro. Beesley, I was very glad to get your letter in reply to my note... It has been interesting in this discussion to note that every writer without exception has made the same error in misunderstanding my position. It is not that the position is so very complex or involved but simply that brethren have quite false ideas of what is termed the Renunciationist position. All start with the assumption that the Christ I believe in is a being of a different nature. This is not the case. The scriptures are perfectly clear and definite on this head. Hebrews 2:14 is quite sufficient to prove to me that the Lord Jesus Christ partook of the flesh and blood of the children. But alongside that scriptural idea you have in common with most Christadelphians two unscriptural and false assumptions which are the root cause of all the dividing we have had.

First, you assume that the Lord Jesus was as we are, a condemned man under Adamic condemnation; and secondly, you assume that the nature is physically unclean and needs atoning or cleansing. Neither of these two assumptions are scriptural or true. Both are based on the wrong idea of what the condemnation was. The usual and wrong statement is that “This mortality is our condemnation in Adam.” Then you reason Christ was mortal, consequently condemned.

“The Lord God saw all that he had made and behold it was very good.” This cannot be made to apply to character for man is not created with a ready made character and the lower animals never develop one. consequently the handiwork of the Lord God was physically very good. Yet a few thousand years after God said to the Children of Israel through Moses that certain animals should be unclean to them. These formed part of the very good creation, now pronounced unclean - so how were they unclean? Legally. Further, that the embargo is now removed with the passing of the law all were made clean. However, one feature of that uncleanness was this - no unclean animal was fit for sacrifice. Consequently if the Christ was unclean He was not fit for sacrifice, yet He was so used. Study that thought, Bro Beesley. An unclean Christ is not the Christ of God. “We are sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus once for all” shown clean every whit in type. Could we be cleansed by an unclean offering? Do not let us “do despite to the spirit of grace and count the blood of the covenant whereby we are sanctified an unholy or unclean thing.”

Now let us consider the basic error, that “This mortality is our condemnation in Adam.” How was Adam created? Was he condemned? No. Yet he was created mortal. Do we not turn to the account of the creation of man to prove that this is a fact? “The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground.” Paul comments on this in 1 Corinthians 15 and says, “The first man was made a living soul”, or natural body, “he was made of the earth earthy” and in that same chapter he says, as a synonymous expression “this mortal must put on immortality.” To make the scriptures square with this theory Christadelphians are driven to invent a third nature. Something neither mortal or immortal, a kind of semi-angel as representing Adam at first, and yet the scriptures conclusively prove that Adam was created a non-abiding body - not made for continuance - dependant on food for life - made as the Psalmist says “of spirit that passeth away and cometh not again.” We are mortal, then, by creation and not by condemnation. Some would contend that the nature was changed but there is no support for that theory to be found anywhere in the scriptures. It is therefore unscriptural to speak of a condemned or unclean nature. It is the man or the race who were condemned because of transgressions and who became legally unclean by sinning. It is in the power of the Son of God to make mortals clean, for in the days of His flesh He said to His disciples, “Now are ye clean.” It is possible for mortals to be free from condemnation and yet continue in their mortality, for Paul tells the believers that “there is now no condemnation unto those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and death.” To one holding the popular theory both these glad messages are robbed of half their comfort by being made prospective when the fact is that it is a position now to be enjoyed. A condemned sinner is alienated from God and cannot serve Him. He must

change sides. He must leave the service of sin and become God's servant and son. Until that condemnation is removed no one can please God. We are not yet perfect, no certainly not. We are in this mortality for a purpose. That purpose is shown in the example of God's only begotten free born Son - to be made perfect through trial and suffering.

Christadelphians say Jesus Christ was unclean; He needed purifying, purging, cleansing, to be atoned for. He was unclean, filthy, sinful. And the scriptures never once so speak. It is a significant fact that the word "redemption" does not occur in the Birmingham Statement of Faith - it is a subject that, with the theory of a Christ that needed to be atoned for, cannot be understood. These are scriptural facts, the Lord Jesus was freeborn, not condemned, this mortality is not the condemnation, neither has the nature been changed. With these three facts in mind the scriptural way of saving mankind becomes clear.

Suppose we consider the statement that Christ had to offer for Himself or to atone for Himself. For what? The scripture atonement was for sin. Now Jesus had no personal sins therefore that is ruled out of account. So it is said it was to atone for His sin nature. Do you mean His physical body? If so did He make it? Can you make Him offer or atone for the possession of a body of flesh and blood as created by God? Offer for God's handiwork? The suggestion seems too ridiculous to consider. Was it necessary to atone for the impulses or desires because these lead to sin, are the desires reckoned sin? If so then God made man with those faculties. Is it for a natural mind? Adam had a natural mind before transgression. Christ kept His mind always in subjection. His body always under control, and there was no cause of death in Him. Consequently He needed not to die for Himself in any sense. He was in no sense a sinner. He died for us. The Just for the unjust. He freely laid down His life to purchase us from the possession of sin and now we can "Sing praise the tomb is void where the Redeemer lay; Sing of our bonds destroyed, our darkness turned to day."

Brother Harry Warre

Underneath Jerusalem

One day, nearly 150 years ago, a man was taking his dog for a walk around the walls of Jerusalem when near the Damascus gate it vanished into the thick undergrowth. Dogs are sometimes very useful animals, with their tendency to explore and follow exciting trails. His owner went to find him and after searching for a while he was surprised to see the dog apparently crawling from underneath the high walls of the city, through a small hole hidden by dense bushes and the accumulated rubbish of centuries. Very intrigued by this, the next day the man returned with a search party and lanterns; they widened the opening and found themselves in an immense cavern stretching away into the gloom. They had discovered King Solomon's quarries!

Even today the opening is comparatively small and the yawning black emptiness ahead is not very inviting. The Arab at the entrance reluctantly let us in after much persuasion, and we cautiously entered stepping carefully on the slippery wet ground. There were no other tourists there, just two of us in this eerie underworld of another age.

From the entrance the broad uneven path led steeply down into an enormous cave like a cathedral, high passages led off in many directions. Here and there in the darkness a few lights cast great shadows; there were long flights of steep steps with no handrails; deep black holes with only wooden planks across. The rock fell away to lower workings, to more distant and deeper caverns disappearing into the endless darkness. And, worse, it was very wet and dangerous underfoot.

The entrance is near the Damascus Gate, in the north wall of the Old City, and the quarry runs southwards for a distance of about 250 yards right through a cliff and right under the densely populated Old City of Jerusalem. It ends close to the large platform area on which the Dome of the Rock now stands and where King Solomon so long ago built his temple. The quarry cavern is 350 feet wide and the roof is supported by large pillars of rock. It is thought that the vast amount of stone used for the Temple, its

foundation and the royal apartments nearby came from here. The stone is pure white, soft to work but hardening rapidly when exposed to the air. Josephus, the Jewish historian, when speaking of the Temple says that it was like a mountain of snow and was built entirely of white stone. How beautiful it would look in the bright clear sunshine against a brilliant sky, high up and dominating Jerusalem, a constant reminder of the true worship of God and of the many blessings he had given His people. A white Temple showing the purity of God.

God chose Jerusalem as the place where his Temple should be built, and in the Bible plans are given in great detail from every aspect so that we can imagine the building quite clearly. The materials used were the finest available in wood, stone and metal, gold, silver, bronze, iron and all sorts of precious and coloured stones and marble. These were collected over many years by David so that his son could build the Temple to God's honour and glory.

One verse, which has always seemed hard to understand, says, "When the house was built, it was with stone prepared at the quarry; so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the Temple, while it was being built." (1 Kings 6:7). The building was to be a work of God "fitly framed together."

Considering the amount of noise thousands of hewers of stone would make while busy at work, it might be thought that the stone was prepared a long way from Jerusalem, and that large heavy blocks of prepared stone had then to be hauled to the city. But, in His wonderful forethought, God had placed the white stone which was to be quarried for the eventual building of His holy Temple practically underneath the site where it would be erected ~ on Mount Moriah!

That foresight is demonstrated in every aspect of God's dealing with His people - the Jews - and in all that has happened to them as part of the Divine purpose which is leading up to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ as King. There is a pattern, and a purpose in the world events that are now coming to their climax. Soon it will become apparent to all that God has been quietly preparing a new people, from Israel and from all nations. Like prepared stones (1 Peter 2:5), when the time is right, they will be found ready to be fitted together, to comprise a new dwelling place for the God of Israel.

Selected from Glad Tidings.

ELI - JUDGE AND PRIEST

After their wilderness journey the Israelites entered the Promised Land led by Joshua. The conquest of the land was never completed owing to the people's lack of faith in God. By the time of Joshua's death the people had begun to mingle with the surrounding tribes, contrary to the commands of God and after Joshua there was no leader to take his place. The people quickly forsook the Law and the worship of idols became widespread. Because of their evil ways God punished them by bringing evil against them until "they cried unto the Lord" and then for a period of about three hundred years God sent them Judges, leaders from amongst them to lead them as God's representative. God was their King and the nation was God's Kingdom, though it is doubtful whether many in the nation thought of themselves in that way. Judges chapter 2 and verses 11 to 23 give us a picture of the times: "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashteroth. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and he sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those who spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them..."

Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.”

These judges were men chosen and called by God to lead the people out of their troubles and were chosen from among the poor and the humble. None had reason to glory in the flesh. It was a sad period when “every man did that which was right in his own eyes,” (Judges 21:25) and the result was civil war, famine, religious confusion and immorality. And whenever the “anger of the Lord was hot against Israel” and “the people cried unto the Lord”, the Lord sent them judges, as we read in Judges 3:9, “the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel...” and again at verse 15, “...the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud...” Also 4:3; 6:6; 10:10; and so on. These judges did not follow on one directly after another for there were times when there were two judges and other times when there was no judge.

We come now to the time of Eli, who was the 14th judge. Before him was Samson, the 13th judge, and after him followed Samuel, the 15th judge. The book of Ruth which tells us the stories of Naomi, Elimelech, Mahlon, Chilion, Orpah and Ruth comes within this time and it is possible that Ruth and Boaz would have known Eli as a young man.

Worship at this time was in the high places, which were not necessarily places of idolatry though many were. These high places existed through all the land, and worship of God was acceptable so long as it was true worship, but the influence of other nations corrupted many of these high places with false teachings and evil practices. The Tabernacle, which had for so many years been carried throughout the wilderness journeyings, was now at Shiloh, ‘a high place’ some 20 miles north of Jerusalem. Because the Ark of the Covenant was here it was regarded as the most important high place, and here too, the priests accepted the offerings and sacrifices of those who were faithful to God and offered according to the Law of Moses.

The sons of Aaron were chosen to be priests before the Lord, and Aaron had four sons, two of whom died in the wilderness for their self-will, leaving Eleazer and Ithamar. The priesthood then followed through the descendants of Eleazer and scripture names 22 generations of this line up to the captivity of Israel. We are told nothing of the descendants of Ithamar until we read that Phinehas, Eli’s son, is a descendant and then we hear of three more generations up to the time of Solomon, when the priesthood is transferred back to Zadok of the line of Eleazor. As Phinehas was a priest of the line of Ithamar then so must Eli have been.

But how did Eli become a judge? All previous judges attained the position by delivering the children of Israel from their enemies. Some commentators think that Samson and Eli became judges at about the same time and while Samson judged Israel for only twenty years Eli continued for a further twenty so making up the forty years mentioned in 1 Samuel 4:18. Of Samson we read in Judges 13:5, that “he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines”, so did Eli continue this deliverance after the death of Samson? Eli was a priest and no priests ever engaged in battle so it would seem that his leadership was of a spiritual nature endeavouring to turn the hearts of the children of Israel back to their God and this seems to have been to some extent successful for by the time of Samuel the people were no longer subject to the Philistine yolk.

Let us turn now to the 1st Book of Samuel and chapter 1. Here we find the first mention of Eli who, with his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas were priests at Shiloh. Elkanah and Hannah and Peninnah go “up to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of Hosts in Shiloh.” Here, Hannah, in sorrow and affliction goes to the temple (Tabernacle - for the Temple of Solomon was some 170 years later) and prays earnestly for a son and makes her vow to God. Eli watches her and mistakes her distressful behaviour for drunkenness. “How long wilt thou be drunken? Put away thy wine from thee.” (Verse 14). A sharp and unwarranted rebuke to a person of such fine character and one wonders if drunkenness was sometimes seen in the court of the tabernacle for he was quick to remonstrate with Hannah without first making even the simplest enquiry of her and so avoid his blunder. Or, if that is not a right picture, then was it such an unusual occurrence for someone to be praying so earnestly and in tears? Were there so few who came in distress, seeking comfort in prayer that Eli, the priest, was not familiar with the sight that he should think this was drunkenness? However, as soon as Hannah spoke he realised his mistake and answered in the only way possible, saying, “Go in peace; and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.”

A few years later Eli receives custody of the young child. In verse 26 Hannah comes to him and says, "I am the woman that stood by thee here praying unto the Lord." Evidently this was sufficient introduction to remind him of the earlier occasion of her visit. "For this child I prayed - the Lord has given me my petition which I asked of Him." The very words that Eli had used to her and no doubt he remembered. "Therefore I have lent him to the Lord: as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord." Eli at this time was well advanced in years though his two sons are described as young men in the next chapter. And now Eli had another child to take into his care. He knew his sons were wicked and perhaps he saw in Samuel God's answer to his problem for he was no doubt ashamed of his sons but what could he do? Or what should he do? He had tried to correct them but they took no notice and so here Eli trusted that this child would become great in Israel "and he worshipped the Lord." (verse 28).

We would no doubt wish to digress here and consider Hannah's beautiful prayer and spend time studying it, but it is not our subject at present and we reluctantly pass over it to chapter 2 verse 12, "Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord. And the priest's custom with the people was, that, when any man offered sacrifice, the priests servants came, while the flesh was in seething, with a flesh hook of three teeth in his hand; and he struck it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the flesh-hook brought up the priest took for himself. So they did in Shiloh unto all the Israelites that came thither. Also before they burnt the fat, the priest's servant came, and said to the man that sacrificed, Give flesh to roast for the priest; for he will not have sodden flesh of thee, but raw. And if any man said unto him, Let them not fail to burn the fat presently, and then take as much as thy soul desireth; then he would answer him, Nay; but thou shalt give it me now: and if not I will take it by force. Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord."

As God fearing people such as Elkanah and Hannah came up year by year to offer their sacrifices to the Lord their hearts must have been greatly saddened to see the abuse of their offerings by Hophni and Phinehas. Why did not Eli remove them from office for he knew of their practice and their adulteries, as we read from verse 22: "Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man shall sin against the Lord, who shall entreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them."

Under the law the punishment for adultery was death. The very law which they, as priests should have upheld by teaching and example. But such was their baseness, and who would stone them to death as the law required? The law was not upheld by the majority of the Israelites and adultery was not uncommon so who would throw the first stone? Someone equally as guilty? And Eli would not go so far as to have his own sons stoned to death but they should not have been left in office for they were not fit to mediate between God and man. But who would take over their duties? Eli was too old and his eyesight was failing. Where were the descendants of Eleazer at this time? Why were they not in office? Perhaps Eli hoped his sons would one day repent and turn back to God. When they first took up office they were not corrupt and perhaps there was still hope for them. After all, look at the ways of Samson; look at his misdeeds, and yet God never completely forsook him. He had little respect for the Nazarite vow he was under. He was headstrong and wilful. The lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh and the pride of life overruled all his actions, and in the end he suffered severely for his misdeeds, and when he was weakened, blinded and bound in fetters his faith did not fail him. Would Eli's sons have such faith to see them through? If this was Eli's hope it was in vain for Hophni and Phinehas showed by their actions only contempt and not faith.

But God was not pleased with Eli, for by allowing them to stay in office he was condoning their actions. Eli was placing his sons before God and honouring them rather than the Lord, and the terrible punishments foretold in verses 31 to 34: "Behold the days come that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth that God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them."

In chapter three we find the child Samuel a little older now and here we read of his first calling from God, for he was old enough to see things were not as they should be with the worship of the Lord and were not done in accordance with the law, of which he would at this time be receiving instruction from Eli. When the Lord called Samuel He told him, "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at the which both the ears of every one that heareth shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever." God saw no remedy other than to destroy Hophni and Phinehas and the punishments on their descendants were terrible; "All the increase of thy house shall die in the flower of their age." We can follow the fortunes, or rather, misfortunes of this family for three more generations, to the murder by King Saul in his later years, of 85 members of this family. The grandchildren and great grandchildren and the great great grandchildren of Eli. Only Abiather escapes and he joins David in hiding. Later, when Solomon becomes King, Abiather is found conspiring with Joab to make Adonijah king in the place of Solomon. For this Joab and Adonijah are slain, and Abiather, though worthy of death, says Solomon, was banished and not put to death because he was a priest. The priesthood was then taken from Abiather and given to Zadok.

By the time Eli was 98 years old the Philistines again assembled an army and attacked Israel. The battle went against Israel who lost some 4,000 of their army and the Elders said "Let us fetch the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us and save us." An unwise decision. Did they feel that they had a right to be saved and that they could demand such help from the Lord? Hophni and Phinehas go with the Ark of the Covenant and Eli was helpless to stop them even if he knew about it. Samuel would certainly have known but, again, there was nothing he could do against the wickedness of those two sons of Eli and his protests would have been ignored. But the Elders were wrong and the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines. Hophni and Phinehas were killed along with some 30,000 more of Israel. Eli sat trembling by the wayside, unable to see, and could only wait and listen stricken with a fearful foreboding. In chapter 4 and at verse 14 we read, "And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth this? And the man came in hastily and told Eli. Now Eli was 98 years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see, and the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled today out of the army. And he said. What is there done, my son? and the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there also hath been a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the Ark of God is taken. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the Ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years."

Looking over his life we see Eli must have been a disappointment to God. In his early life he was perhaps full of zeal for which he was chosen to be a judge and priest, but without strength of character the cares and disappointments in his life and the waywardness of others wore away his resolve and determination to do the Lord's will to the end. In his rebuke of Hannah we seem to glimpse a past energy in his defence of the Sanctuary of God, but sadly, this energy cannot be seen in the rebuke of his own sons for their very serious abuses of their high calling. His sons showed him insolence and he was helpless. He was too easy going for the position he held and showed himself lacking in determination and self-discipline. Nevertheless God allowed him to fulfil 40 years as judge in Israel and we dare not say that had we been in his place we would have done better.

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