

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No 144

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Editorial

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

A few weeks ago it looked as if the peace and safety cry we have so long expected had come, but now the drama of those few days has died down. Momentous changes took place, for now the Palestine Liberation Organisation has officially recognised Israel's right to exist and other Arab states, notably Jordan and Syria are actively seeking terms of peaceful co-existence with Israel.

It was in 1987 that Brother Harvey Linggood wrote, "Until recent weeks it was the constant aim of the P.L.O. leaders to drive Israel out of the land and into the sea and take back the city of Jerusalem from Israel. The P.L.O. leaders would on no account recognise the State of Israel. But suddenly there has been a change; I am speaking of Yassar Arafat who is now prepared to allow recognition."

It has taken six years for that recognition to become fact, but how safe is any agreement with Arab nations? The Israeli leaders would do well to learn the lessons of history and of prophecy, but they are unlikely to do so, for their over-riding concern is to make peace with their neighbours, and they want to believe that they are well on their way to achieving this aim.

So was it the peace and safety cry of which Paul wrote, to the Thessalonians? No, I don't think so, for if the sudden destruction which is to follow it is the attack upon Israel from the north, then where is the nation capable of making the attack at this time? There are power struggles going on at present amongst countries to the north of Israel but I see no country yet in a position to overrun the Promised Land. (In this respect we may do well to watch developments in Georgia).

So we have to be patient and wait a little longer, for "the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance..." 2 Peter 3:9.

When the peace and safety cry does come I feel sure we shall recognise it for, "of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety? Then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape, but ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober... putting on the breastplate of faith and love? and for an helmet, the hope of salvation, for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as ye do." (Thessalonians 5:1-10).

This Circular Letter has been held back a day or two because I wanted to tell of my visit to Sister May Lockett. This morning, October 1st, Brother Arthur Speed and I spent an unforgettable hour and a half with "Aunt May" as she is affectionately known, who was born in May 1889 which makes her nearly one hundred and four!

Sadly, Sister May is physically weak and unable to walk without help, she is partially sighted and unable to read anything smaller than newspaper headlines and she is hard of hearing, so is unable to follow ordinary conversation. All this makes life very frustrating for such a lively mind. Yes, Sister May has a very lively mind and a delightful personality - not to mention her sense of humour!

We talked of many things and it is clear that Sister May's reasoning of the Scriptures is, above all else, carefully and prayerfully considered in order to get it right to the honour of our heavenly Father and His Son, our Lord and Redeemer. Reading was always one of her delights and this she misses very much. Visitors are indeed so welcome and she looks forward to them greatly. This morning was my first visit but, if the Lord will, it was the first of many.

Sister May has asked me to send her Love and Best Wishes to all the Brethren and Sisters, to which I add my Sincere Love to all.

With Sincere Love to all, in the Master's service, Russell Gregory.

THE TESTIMONIES OF JONAH AND PAUL

As with all books that tell of an event in history, our attention is usually fixed on the main theme. Today let us consider a small matter of detail which may easily have escaped us. It is the fact that the mariners of the boat in which Jonah fled, or tried to flee, from the presence of the Lord tried their level best to avoid throwing Jonah into the sea. They tried their utmost to control the steering of the boat, but all efforts were in vain, until they carried out God's will. By this statement we do not intend to imply that these mariners were rebellious to God. On the contrary, they knew that Jonah was a prophet that he tried to run away from God. They had every good reason to fear God because of the storm that raged around them. No, they did what all of us would probably have done in similar circumstances. To throw somebody deliberately into the sea is after all, a terrible thing to have to do and we would most certainly have tried to avoid it just they did.

What I want us to notice is the fact that God brought about circumstances that just forced them to carry out that disagreeable task; they just could not control their ship by any other means, and so the only thing left to do was what Jonah commanded - and immediately the storm calmed down.

This is one of the many instances in history, of Biblical as well as post-biblical times, in which God brought about circumstances which forced people into doing His will, just as it must have seemed to those sailors, it was nevertheless God's will that Jonah should be cast into the sea and be swallowed by the fish which He had especially prepared. And if God wills a thing He arranges things so that even the most rebellious people are forced to make decisions which bring it about. Many such examples could be given and to mention only a few, such as Pharaoh's determination not to let the children of Israel go. Nine times Pharaoh broke his word, then, after the tenth plague there were only two alternatives left for him - to do God's will or to risk all Egypt to be destroyed. At last he made the right choice. Or the circumstances during World War 1 which forced the British Government to take over the protection of the Holy Land; and subsequently, after World War 2, their futile attempts to curb Jewish migration into Israel. Or again, the supreme example of God's rule as shown in the Book of Esther in which circumstances were brought about such that Haman was made to honour in public the very man he intended to hang, and Haman himself was hung on the very gallows intended for Mordecai.

Yes, God rules not always by spectacular miracles - these, too, have their place - but also by these much less obvious means of just overruling man's circumstances and capabilities.

Next we notice that after the mariners had cast Jonah into the sea, and the storm ceased, they were, as might be expected, greatly afraid and they sacrificed unto the Lord and made vows. This is not the only incident where heathen people sacrificed to God. There comes to mind the sacrifice of the lords of the Philistines after the Lord had plagued them because they took the Holy Ark. We may never know whether God accepted their sacrifices; they were not brought according to Divine Law. That which the mariners brought was not made at the appointed place at Jerusalem. That which the Philistines put into the Ark was far removed from anything God had commanded. It consisted of golden images symbolising the plagues which God put upon them. But the Word of God makes it abundantly 'clear that responsibility is reckoned according to enlightenment, for "sin is not imputed when there is no law," and "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light..." The motive and heart count a lot. The Philistines were unenlightened; the mariners who took Jonah were perhaps a little enlightened. They did the best they could in their ignorance but it was meant well enough. Had the Israelites sacrificed what the Philistines did, it would have caused extreme Divine anger with all its grave consequences. It would have been idolatry in its extreme. As it was, the children of Israel as God's chosen people, were responsible for the Ark. They, especially the Levites, had to know how to treat it. As early as in the days in the wilderness two sons of Aaron died for offering strange fire before the Lord, and in David's days, Uzziah died suddenly before the Lord for putting forth his hand to save the Ark. Only the Levites were to touch it and then only after they had sanctified themselves. This act of Uzziah was no doubt well meant, but being an Israelite he should have known better. He was more enlightened and therefore more responsible. To him it was sin.

We who have been abundantly blessed with enlightenment have our responsibilities. We do not live in Old Testament days when the Law of Moses was in force and when a mistake like Uzziah's had such grave consequences; but it is our responsibility to see that we "let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven."

In that ship Jonah was the only prophet among many heathen mariners. He could have enlightened them on God's ways, His laws, His dealings with men, yet what a bad testimony he gave! We can be quite certain that those sailors never forgot that journey for the rest of their lives. They had truly learned something about God on that journey, but alas, they only learned to fear Him. They never learned of God's love and mercy - at any rate, not on that journey. It is sad to think that they may have learned more of God but for Jonah's folly. It shows what damage one person can do by bad testimony of this sort, and this applies to us as well. Better not mention the Truth than mention it and not show it in our lives.

Some eight centuries later, the Bible tells us of another rough sea journey. Once more there was just one of God's servants among a lot of unenlightened sailors. This time it was Paul who described himself as "the prisoner of the Lord." On this journey, unfortunately, Paul was also the prisoner of the Roman authorities. Not because of any wrong he had done but as a consequence of his standing up for the Master; for that he got into trouble.

What a difference between Paul's testimony to the sailors in those moments of peril and that of Jonah's. Paul took bread and before them all gave thanks to God. Then he comforted them by telling them their escape. Soon after they found out for themselves that God means what He says - when they all escaped safely to land.

The impression which Paul left with his travelling companions and guards on that journey was quite different to that left by Jonah some eight hundred years earlier. Far from trying to run away from God he courageously served Him, regardless of what man could do to him.

Now, like Paul and Jonah, we are God's ambassadors, often perhaps the only true Christians among a crowd of unbelievers. It is for us to decide what kind of testimony we give; like that of Jonah, or like that of Paul. Let us follow the example of the latter, as well as that of so many other faithful witnesses. Let us always bear in mind the responsibility consequent upon enlightenment and let us walk worthy of our high calling.

Brother Leo Dreifuss.

ABRAM THE PATRIARCH

The Bible offers two reasons for Abram's departure from his home city of Ur. The first that Terah, his father, had decided to move out and travel to Canaan. The other one, the direct bidding of God. "Get thee out of thy country." Genesis 12:1.

These points are not necessarily contradictory - it could be that his father had made the decision first and Abram, under Divine guidance agreed to accompany him. How God's bidding reached Abram, whether by vision or word of mouth is not recorded.

We do not know what prompted Terah to move from Ur, a city of some consequence with a well established pattern of life, and set out on a journey of over 600 miles. It must have been quite an upheaval moving all the family, their belongings, servants and herds.

How it was that Abram worshipped Jehovah, since we know from Joshua 24:2 that Terah worshipped other gods, is not explained. It could be that this influence came from his mother's side and this could also be the reason that the houses of Haran and Nahor also worshipped Jehovah. We have no knowledge of Abram's position in the city but his name means 'Father of the High Place,' so it may be that he held a high position in the temple, possibly a priest, and it could be here that the Lord's message came to him.

Leaving Ur, Terah and his family travelled to Haran and lived there until his death. While sojourning here we read that the Lord again appeared to Abram, with an instruction to move, but this time included a number of promises. The first instruction "Get thee out of thy country" had been accomplished by leaving Ur. The second - "And from thy father's house" now followed, so in Haran he left all his kindred except for his nephew, Lot, and moved towards the land of Canaan, as we read in Genesis 12:9, "and Abram went as the Lord had spoken unto him, and Lot went with him."

The seven promises he received in Haran and contained in only two verses, must have astonished him, especially the first - "I will make of thee a great nation," for Sarah, his wife, was barren as is recorded in the previous chapter, and both she and Abram were really getting past the age where an offspring could be expected. Such a promise could only be accepted and believed by one of exceptional spiritual faith.

The second promise, "I will bless thee," was to become obvious over the years through his increase in material wealth, for we read that the Lord gave him flocks and herds, silver and gold, men servants and maid servants, camels and asses. But far out-weighting all these were the Divine blessings as he drew nearer to his God.

The third promise was, "I will make thy name great." His name as Father of Israel appears in the generations of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham. A name renown throughout Israel.

Fourth promise: "Thou shalt be a blessing." Through a life of obedience Abram showed an example to us today, and is commended by God as we read in Genesis 18:19, "I have known him, to the end that he may command his children, and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment."

Fifth promise: "I will bless them that bless thee." A promise made evident in the blessing that God applied to those who have dealt kindly with the seed of Abram, the children of Israel - and the promise goes further - to those who share his faith, the spiritual Israel. Even as Paul wrote to the Galatians, "So then they which share Abraham's faith are blessed with him," and again as Christ said to His disciples, "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you he shall not loose his reward."

Sixth promise: "I will curse them that curseth thee." Here the opposite is true as God declared to the Israelites "I will be enemy to thy enemies and an adversary to thy adversaries." We have seen over the centuries how nations that have oppressed the Jews have themselves sunk into obscurity. This promise made

to the natural seed of Abram also holds good for his spiritual seed. Paul, in his letter to Thessalonica wrote, "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that have afflicted you."

Seventh promise: "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Another promise picked up by Paul in his letter to the Galatians, "the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed, so they which be of the faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Further in the same chapter, "that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus that we might receive the promise of the spirit through faith." This promise first had a national application, that to Israel, but was to develop into an all embracing promise, covering all who will listen, that is, redemption through Jesus Christ.

With the move from Haran, Abram's life style underwent a dramatic change. From being a city dweller he now undertook the life of a nomad, moving steadily south towards Canaan, no doubt wondering when the Lord would show him the land of promise. "By faith," we read in Hebrews "he became a sojourner (a traveller) in the land of promise as in a land not his own. His first awareness that this was the land was at Shechem, where Jehovah appeared to him saying "unto thy seed will I give this land." We notice the land being promised to his seed before it was promised to Abram. We can imagine the joy with which Abram received these words. At last he had arrived at his destination, and here he erected an altar and made sacrifice, and it became a focal point for his worship of God.

Now, whether he felt unsettled here because of the Canaanites or whether it was necessary to keep moving to find sustenance for his considerable flocks, we are not informed, but Abram continued on towards the south and soon, because of the scarcity of fodder carried on into Egypt. It would appear that the faith that had given him the strength to leave his home town and travel so far failed him. Sarah, his wife, was obviously a woman of some beauty, and Abram, fearing for his life as her husband decided to say that she was his sister. It is difficult to understand why he undertook this step for God had promised that his seed would inherit the land of Canaan and since he, as yet, had no offspring, surely with a little thought he should have known his own life would be completely protected. This deception only threw Sarah into danger, for she was taken into Pharaoh's house and a bride price paid to Abram, that of Sheep, oxen, men servants and maid servants, she-asses and camels. How Abram's conscience must have pricked him when all these gifts were showered upon him! But the Lord, ever careful for His children, made clear to Pharaoh by plaguing his house, that Sarah was not available. Exactly how it was indicated that Sarai was indeed Abram's wife we are not told, Pharaoh's action shows up in a very good light - "Behold thy wife, take her and go thy way." An extremely magnanimous gesture considering the gifts he had already showered upon Abram, and to round it off gave his men charge to see him safely on his way.

There can be little doubt that Abram learnt a sharp lesson because of this episode, namely, to put his trust in the Lord. Presumably now the famine in the land had ceased for we read Abram returned to the altar he had built in Bethel. Here he called upon the name of the Lord, no doubt admitting his weakness in Egypt and ask forgiveness, and giving thanks for Divine intervention, and renewing his bond with his God.

The time had now arrived to make a break from his nephew, Lot. No doubt the combined families, servants, flocks and herds were becoming too large to control easily in their nomadic existence, and strife was breaking out between the two groups, possibly over pasture and watering. Abram, generous as always, gave Lot the opportunity to select the area he would prefer. Genesis 13:8, "And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray Thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand I will go to the right or if thou depart to the right hand I will go to the left." Lot obviously looking to the main chance chose what appeared in his eyes to be the best of the land. Verse 10, "and Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere... and Lot chose all the plain of Jordan." It was not such a good choice in the long run for we read that the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the Lord exceedingly and it became clear in a short time he had dispensed with his nomadic ways and become a citizen of that place.

After Lot's departure Abram no doubt enquired of Jehovah what his next move should be. Quickly he received the answer, "Lift up thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number the dust of the earth then shall thy seed be numbered.” For the first time the Lord was being explicit to Abram and it could be that at this time he looked for an early fulfilment of the promise of the land, but the years passed and he possessed none of it. Abram learnt patience and slowly came to realise that the promises pointed to a future time, and a seed comparably more worthy than any offspring he might have.

Following the promise came the instruction, “Arise, walk through the land, in the length and breadth of it, for I give it unto thee.” But from the next few verses we get the impression that he did not undertake any long journeys, for we read he only moved to Mamre - no great distance, and then came news of the plight of Lot, taken captive by the King of Elam. This spurred Abram to travel the length of the promised land and in a brilliant campaign Abram, with only 318 of his servants, pursued the king for over 100 miles and defeated him, freeing the prisoners and recapturing the plunder. This raised the esteem of Abram in the sight of the surrounding peoples, and he could, in a very short time, have become a power in the land. But he was prepared to await God’s time. The land had been promised as God’s gift, and he had not been instructed to go out and conquer it or receive it from any other Lord.

Returning, Abram neared Jerusalem, or Salem as it was then known, and there he was met by the grateful king of Sodom who, in thanks, was prepared to give him all the plunder, provided all prisoners were turned over to him. Abram, very wary of being indebted in any way to the king, declared, “I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread even to a shoelace and that I will not take anything that is thine lest thou shouldst say, I have made Abram rich.” A firm declaration that he wanted nothing to do with Sodom or its idolatry. The only condition made was that his small army should receive due payment.

It was also here that Abram was met by Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God. Abram’s attitude to this king was in marked contrast to that of the king of Sodom. The refusal to benefit from Sodom’s offer was set against his humble submission to Melchizedek and the payment of tithes. Here also Abram partook of a meal prepared by Melchizedek and from him received a blessing - “Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth.” “This blessing foreshadowing when redemption through the seed of Abram would come to fruition, is picked up by David in his reference to Christ in the Psalm 110: 1 & 4, “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right” hand... Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec.” Also by the writer to the Hebrews who emphasised the exalted position of the Son of God pointing out that he was a High Priest by virtue of who he is and not because of his ancestry. A Priesthood valid for every age and for every man who seeks justification, and the blessing of Abram through faith in Him, “by so much also hath Jesus become the surety of a better covenant.”

While at Salem the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Possibly over the years Abram had become worried because there was still no sign of an offspring and his faith needed bolstering. As affairs stood at that moment the heir to his property was his steward Eleazar and Abram appealed to the Lord, “Lord, what wilt thou give me seeing I go childless?” Then came the comforting message in vision - “Fear not Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. This man shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. Look toward the heavens and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them so shall thy seed be. And he believed the lord, and it was counted to him for righteousness.”

The earlier promises had referred to the seed as the dust of the earth for number, on this occasion it is as the stars of the heavens. Here was yet reference, not only to the natural seed, but to the spiritual host, heirs to everlasting life and the Kingdom of God. Paul points this up in his letter to the Romans (9:6), “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.”

Despite the promises, still Abram had some doubt and needed a little more re-assurance - “Oh Lord, whereby shall I know?” The Lord’s response was unique. He made a pact, a covenant with his servant, by a sign that made a profound impression upon Abram. He was instructed to prepare a sacrifice of specific animals and birds and lay them out in two lines. When all was prepared Abram watched over them, waiting, driving away any birds of prey which came too near. The time must have been fairly long because as the sun set he fell into a deep sleep and a great horror of great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord spoke to him

and he now received a quite detailed promise concerning his seed, their sojourn in the land not theirs, their suffering and their deliverance. As for Abram himself he would dwell in peace and die a good old age. At the climax of this promise we read that “a smoking furnace and flaming torch passed between the pieces of sacrifice. In that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram. The term covenant is generally used in the sense of an agreement between two parties, entailing both parties passing between the offerings implying that if one defaults they should be as the offerings. Amazingly, in this case, God was making a binding promise to Abram, for it was His glory that passed between the pieces, a covenant that was one-sided, and then the promise from God “unto thy seed have I given this land.” During his life-time Abram was not to see the fulfilment of this promise and yet the land had been promised to him as an everlasting inheritance. In this way an understanding of future resurrection came to him.

The glory which appeared between the sacrificial pieces also appeared to the Israelites as a pillar of cloud and fire, the thunderous storm on Sinai, and the radiance of the transfiguration; a glory the saints will observe with Abram on our Lord’s return.

Now, Abram, whenever any doubt came into his mind, had only to recall this incident for the doubt to be cast out, and surely he would need this recall for ten more years were to pass by and still the promise of a son was not fulfilled.

They were long years also for Sarah for her faith began to fail. Genesis 16:2, “Behold now the Lord has restrained me from bearing, go in I pray thee, to my handmaiden, it may be that I will obtain a child by her.” Possibly Sarah had broached this subject several times before knowing how eagerly Abram looked for a son. This time we read, Abram hearkened unto the voice of Sarah “and Hagar conceived.” It was a catastrophe. Now Sarah was belittled in her maidservants eyes and realising her mistake appealed to Abram for redress. Abram understanding her anguish leaves the solution in her hands; “Do to her that which is good in thine eyes.” Apparently Sarah could not turn Hagar out of the household, but she contrived to make life so unbearable that Hagar was only too glad to go of her own volition. From the script it appears she fled under the pressure of emotion with little thought or preparation. For all she could answer to the angel’s query “Whence camest thou or wither goest thou?” was “I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.” Possibly her main fear being that Sarah would claim the child as her own, but the angel reassures her - “Return to thy mistress and submit thyself under her hands,” and promises that she will have a son, for he said “the Lord hath heard thy affliction.” To emphasise the point that the child would be Hagar’s she was to have the naming of him, Ishmael, and through him would spring up a nation, “He will be a wild ass of a man, his hand will be against every man and every man’s hand will be against him.”

These are quite opposite to the promises made to the Abramic seed - “In thee shall all nations be blessed.”

Hagar returned, the child was born, and Abram willingly agreed to Hagar’s wishes to call him Ishmael - “God will hear.” Another lesson learnt! God’s purpose was not to be hurried and needed no help from man.

Paul picks up the lesson of Hagar in Galatians, “It is written that Abram had two sons, one by a bondmaid and one by a freewoman. The one born after the flesh and the other by promise.” He likens them to the Law of Moses and to the Gospel of love in Christ, and although those born in bondage now afflict those of promise, points out that Christ has set us free.

More years passed but Abram and Sarah had learnt their lessons well. Patience and faith were needed. Then in Abram’s ninety-ninth year an angel appeared to him - “I am almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect, I will make my covenant between me and thee and multiply thee exceedingly.” A reiteration of the covenant made years before that Abram was not likely to forget. This time, surely it must mean that God would implement his promise and we read that Abram fell upon his face in abeyance. The promises that he now heard opened up an incredible prospect, “Behold my covenant is with thee and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations.” Not only the father of natural Israel but of spiritual Israel drawn from all nations.

Here is the explanation of the seed like the stars of heaven in number, the multitude of nations reckoned to be the seed of Abram. His name was no longer to be Abram but to be Abraham - Father of a multitude of nations.

The promise continued, "I will make thee exceedingly fruitful and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee." Again the promise of the natural seed and the multiplicity of the spiritual seed. The first to be ruled by the Davidic kings of Jerusalem, the second by the great King - the Messiah. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and they seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant. And I will give to thee and those after thee all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession." We are reminded by the Apostle Stephen's exposition that during Abraham's natural life He gave him no inheritance in the land and that this promise once again pointed to future resurrection in the Kingdom of God.

Sarai was not omitted from this promise for her name also was to be changed - to that of Sarah, meaning Princess, very apt considering the quote "Kings will come out of thee." And now for the long awaited moment - "I will bless her and moreover I will give thee a son of her, yea, I will bless her and she shall be a mother of nations, kings of peoples shall be of her."

And we read that Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart "Shall a child be born unto him who is 100 years old and shall Sarah that is ninety years old, bear?" It reads as though Abraham laughed in disbelief and yet it can be construed differently. It could be that Abraham fell on his face in prostration before his Lord and laughed for joy that at last the promise was to be fulfilled. This latter view appears to be confirmed by Jesus as recorded in John's gospel "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, he saw it and was glad."

As a further token of God's covenant Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a special sign of approbation for his faith, as is recorded by Paul in his letter to the Romans, "Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of righteousness of faith which he had while he was yet uncircumcised." But circumcision, like baptism, is of little value unless it comes from an understanding and commitment of faith in the salvation that is offered by Jehovah.

How different was Sarah's reaction when she overheard the messenger - "and Sarah laughed within herself, saying, after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Genesis 18:12). This was the laughter of disbelief and how shocked she must have been to hear the words of the angel "Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord?" These words must have wiped out all doubt from her mind, and from this time she would comprehend more fully the promises made to Abraham.

The time came and Sarah conceived and brought forth a son and named him Isaac, as the Lord had commanded. Definitely a child of promise and under miraculous circumstances and pre-figuring Abraham's Messianic Seed, also conceived under miraculous circumstances.

As might be expected, as the lad Isaac began to grow up Ishmael, his elder brother began to mock him. After all he was the first-born, and friction developed in the household. Protectively, Sarah reacted "Cast out this bond-woman and her son, for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son." (Genesis 21:10). This prejudice of Sarah against Ishmael upset Abraham "and the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son." But a revelation from God removed all doubt, Ishmael had to go. "In Isaac shall thy seed be called," and the message made it clear that Hagar and her son would be cared for, for it continued "also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed,"

Again the allegory of those who lived under the law and those who lived under the gospel of Christ, both circumcised, the one born after the flesh and the other born through promise. In his letter to the Galatians Paul writes, Galatians 4:31, "So then, brethren we are not children, of the bondwoman, but of the free." With freedom did Christ set us free. Galatians 5:6, "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision: but faith which worketh by love." And verse 5, "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." The attitude of mind being the most important factor and faith in the promises made by the Almighty.

Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines for some years and Isaac grew and developed. How old he was when Abraham was instructed to take the lad and offer him as a sacrifice is not indicated. Usually he is

shown as a young lad in his teens but as he is to prefigure the sacrifice of Christ surely we may conclude that he was nearer Christ's age when He was crucified.

Abraham's response to God's instruction now showed how much his faith had increased. This time there was no query 'Whereby shall I know?' for we read that in the morning Abraham arose early, saddled an ass and prepared to move off to Mount Moriah. By his action it is obvious that in his mind Isaac was as good as dead. Here was the new Abraham, strong in faith, accounting that God was able to raise up his son from the dead, for the Lord had promised "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Arriving near the Mount the young men were left behind and Abraham and his son climbed to the point of sacrifice. Here the altar was built and the wood laid in order. Isaac would possibly be a little puzzled that although they had the necessary fire and wood they had no burnt offering, but on questioning his father was satisfied with the answer that he received - "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering."

With everything prepared Abraham bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar. In allowing himself to be bound Isaac shows the great trust he had, that whatever his father did before the sight of God must be right.

Preparing to strike with the knife Abraham's hand was stayed. "And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." In place of Isaac God provided a sacrificial lamb for "Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns" and Abraham offered up this ram for a burnt-offering "in the stead of his son."

Abraham's willingness to offer his son in sacrifice brought him nearer to God than he had ever been before at any time in his life and it brought the last great promise, "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

Again, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son demonstrated his utter trust in God. To lift his hand to destroy Isaac, his beloved son of promise, demanded supreme faith. God had made promises arid of a surety he would fulfil them. The restoring of Isaac to his father and the promise of the seed in whom all nations should be blessed indicated to Abraham that Isaac was not the true sacrifice for sins, and yet his willingness to offer his son illustrates God's willingness, in due season, to give His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the sacrifice for the taking away of sins. This is clearly indicated in Peter's appeal to the Jews in Jerusalem "Ye are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And unto you first, God, having raised up his servant sent him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

Abraham saw all this with the clear eye of vision, and returned home justified. As James writes in his epistle, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, in that he offered up Isaac, his son, upon the altar. It was reckoned unto him as righteousness and he was called the Friend of God."

Abraham lived through the sorrow of Sarah's death and celebrated with joy the marriage of his son Isaac to Rebecca, and finally, at the age of 175, the Friend of God died, an old man, full of years.

Throughout his life his faith in God increased and he lived a life of obedience and patience, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Because of his faith and obedience we are privileged to share in the blessings that come through his Seed, even the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul, writing to the Galatians stated, "For ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ, did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise."

Indeed we are all blessed in having knowledge of these things and let us, like Abraham, draw near to God, the Almighty and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; for herein lies redemption and our hope of salvation and entry into the Kingdom of God.

Brother Jeff Hadley.

Thinking Aloud - About Ezekiel's Temple

As a young man I questioned whether the Temple of Ezekiel's prophecy was past or future and recall being told it was most certainly future. No doubt I was at the time given reasons which satisfied me then, but I have forgotten them and I have never again questioned the matter until a few months ago.

Now I see good reasons to believe that Ezekiel's Temple was the Temple built after the children of Israel's exile in Babylon - the second Temple.

First of all we see that the dates of Ezekiel's prophecy and the building of the second Temple fit very well - and here I am using the dates given in Young's Analytical Concordance and in The Schofield Bible.

Ezekiel started his prophetic ministry in the year 595 B.C. and gave the prophecy regarding the Temple in the year 574 B.C. while in exile in Babylon. He was told to shew the plan of the Temple to the people as we read in Ezekiel 43:10 & 11, "Thou son of man, shew the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, shew them the form of the house... and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof and all the ordinances thereof, and do them."

Some 38 years later Cyrus conquered Babylon and he favoured the Jews greatly. In Ezra 1:2 we read, "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth: and he hath charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah..." Cyrus' coming to power had a two-fold effect upon the Jews in Babylon. One was that they were now given a wonderful opportunity to return to their own land and there build, or rather rebuild the Temple and worship God in spirit and in truth; the other effect was that, under Cyrus, life became so comfortable that many felt they were better off staying where they were. This helped to ensure that those who chose to return to the Land of Promise did so for the right reason - to serve their Creator in the appointed way.

The prophecy of Ezekiel's Temple was meant to engender and encourage zeal for the worship of God but in the event less than fifty thousand men, women and children returned under Zerubbabel, and only a small number of these would have worked on the building of the Temple. One can speculate upon what might have been if only the Jews had returned 'en masse' with great zeal for their Lord and it seems to me that this is the picture which Ezekiel portrayed in his prophecy. However, sadly, the Jews failed to respond to their God-given opportunity as had so often happened in the past; such is the way of man.

Building the Temple progressed very slowly due to lack of numbers and also opposition from the people who occupied the land of Israel. A temporary altar was set up and services continued as required by the Law of Moses while construction of the Temple went on.

In Ezekiel 44:15 & 16 we are told, "But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord God. They shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, and they shall keep my charge."

Surely we see this fulfilled in Ezra for in Ezra 7:1-5 we find that he was a son of Zadok, and in verse 6 "This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a ready scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God had given: and the king granted him all his requests, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him." And in verse 10, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

Scripture record shews that it was indeed Ezra who restored the law and re-established the Temple worship with all its ordinances.

While all this favours the view that the Temple of Ezekiel's prophecy was the second Temple, I wonder how those who think it is yet future are able to reconcile the language used in parts of this prophecy with events we can expect in the Kingdom age. I give just one example; referring again to Ezekiel 43:10-& 11, "... that they may be ashamed... And if they be ashamed..."

One of the first events after Jesus' return will be the pouring of the spirit of grace upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem as recorded in Zechariah 12:10, "... and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon. And they shall mourn every family apart..." There can be no doubt about the shame that will be felt by the Jews when they learn that it was their Messiah they crucified on Calvary. But this shame and mourning has nothing whatever to do with the building of the Temple. And suppose that a Temple is to be built in Jerusalem in the coming age the Jews will not have occasion to mourn and be ashamed all over again.

Having thought along the above lines for some time I wrote to Brother Phil Parry expressing my unease at the generally accepted view the Ezekiel's Temple being in the future Kingdom and he replied with a few more ideas and thoughts and here are some extracts from his letter:

"I am pleased to know you are coming round to my view of Ezekiel's Temple... Jesus, being a Priest after the order of Melchizedec and of the Tribe of Judah, it should rule out a priesthood of the Levitical tribe in the Millennium, and furthermore, not even Melchizedec, Priest of the Most High God, offered a blood sacrifice in the case of Abraham, but brought Bread and Wine - very significant in our case in remembering the sacrificial death of Jesus, and which He said He would again participate with His disciples in His Father's Kingdom by eating bread and drinking wine, also saying that from the time of instituting the bread and wine of the Passover Table, He would drink no more wine until the Kingdom of God shall come. (Luke 22:18; Mark 14:24-25; Matthew 26:28-29).

Regarding Ezekiel 43:18 where God is telling Ezekiel what he must do - verses 19-27; all this cleansing points to types that prefigured the antitype and also to the fact that Ezekiel himself is to perform much of the requirements; so either this was done after the return from Babylon, or Ezekiel will be doing this office during the presence of Christ.

Another point - if natural Jews will look on Him who was pierced they will know the history of Calvary and why Jesus died without slain animals to remind them.

Some Christadelphians have entertained the view that the glorified saints whom they think to be the sons of Zadok, will perform the rituals of sacrifice in a future Temple, but in Ezekiel 44:18 "They shall not gird themselves with anything (like wool) that causes sweat." This has reference to those of the nature of flesh and blood, for spirit nature would not be subject to sweat.

One thing I am not sure about at this point is whether Ezekiel was of the tribe of Levi, yet if told to do these things I would think he should be. Paul says, "The law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." This it did and was superseded by Christ's fulfilment of it.

One in a certain place says of the Christian era or dispensation of which we are now under, and in the future, "They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." Surely, not by a return to that which is old and has now vanished away where we are concerned and Israel after the flesh? Hebrews 8:13; 7:18-19; 10:1-9. Are the Jews and Gentiles to come unto the mount that might be touched? I think not. But to Mount Zion. Hebrews 12:18-27."

I thank Brother Phil Parry for his views regarding Ezekiel's Temple. Is any one able to answer his query as to whether Ezekiel was a Levite? I have recently read that he was a "Zadokite priest" but I am unable to find any support for this in Scripture apart from the implication that he should be if he was to carry out duties ascribed to the sons of Zadok.

Brother Russell Gregory

GENESIS

The message of the Creator to Adam and Eve - Acknowledge Him and obey His instructions for continuance of natural life.

As a result of disobedience sin entered on the scene and so did the shedding of blood = death by Adam's sin but not by the shedding of his own blood. Coats of skins provided by this means of bloodshed of the animals, for each, as typifying Jesus, the Lamb of God who would appear at the appropriate time to fulfil the types.

Adam and Eve redeemed, a new life begins outside of the Garden of Eden for them and their descendants, but under what instructions and conditions? Can they be read in Genesis up to the time of Noah? Men corrupted God's way - what was that way? Noah was righteous, but what made him righteous? Genesis does not state the answer on the surface.

Genesis 7:2, "Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female:" "Get wisdom. Get understanding" - How did Noah perceive the clean from the unclean? Did it not originate from the Garden of Eden? If not, how did Abel know what was acceptable to God in contrast to Cain?

Leviticus 11 was not written then; but they must have known what was acceptable to God - and the reasons why. If there are no reasons then why the statements by God to Noah in Genesis 9 demonstrating the importance of life in the blood? Consider Genesis 9:16. The everlasting covenant was already in existence and God need only remember it, for it concerned the earth and all flesh. God established or confirmed it with Noah (verse 17). In Genesis 8:20-21 it is obvious that Noah was doing here what he had done before the flood. Therefore sacrifices must have been appointed for observance and covenant relationship.

There can be no doubt that the blood of Jesus was the blood of the everlasting covenant typified in Eden. The everlasting covenant enveloped and confirmed all others that God made from Genesis to Revelation. In Ephesians 2 Paul says that at one time they were without God, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise. There must have been covenants before Abraham. Jesus said, "Before Abraham was I am." Where was this but in God's covenant concerning the "Seed" that would bruise the serpents head and which gave Adam the faith and reason to name his wife "Eve" the mother of all living?

Life in the blood is generated through the male for reproduction of the species. The seed of woman for example is dead and useless of itself, so Adam would have realised that no child of Eve or any other woman could fulfil the words of God unless his own life was spared to fertilise his wife's seed in order to produce children and a continuation of a "seed" that when the fullness of the time was come, as it did in the case of Mary, God Himself by His own power would fertilise the "seed" of Mary enabling her to bring forth a Son of God (not a Son of Adam) made of a woman (not made of man and woman) made under the law in order to redeem them which were under the law. Mosaic and Edenic. Abraham was not under the Law of Moses but under the Edenic law. Faith was important under both but Abraham's faith was accounted to him while he was yet uncircumcised, and circumcision became the seal of the righteousness he had by faith, yet being uncircumcised. Romans 4. This righteousness of faith did not begin with Abraham; it began in the Garden of Eden - by grace, not of works. "Before Abraham was, I am;" if Jesus was not there from the foundation of the world as the Lamb of God, where was He? If by one man sin entered the world, was this not the one sin (singular) of the world that Jesus, the Lamb of God, came to take away?

Introduction by faith into Christ came long before Abraham. Some may question this, yet Paul teaches it in all his epistles. One example is in Galatians 3: 26, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3: 29 teaches that if you are a natural descendant of Abraham you are not his seed or his heir according to the promise; you must first be in Christ by faith and baptism into His sacrificial death.

God gave the land to Jesus first. Genesis 15:18, "Unto thy seed (Jesus) have I given this land." Genesis 15:4 refers to Isaac as Abraham's heir - out of his own bowels - of Sarai, not of Hagar. But like Adam, Abraham hearkened unto the voice of his wife and did not wait or have faith that God would open Sarai's womb. Isaac was a child of promise, all the same, and heir.

There was a man greater than Abraham, even Melchisedec, King of Salem and priest of the most high God. He received tithes of Abraham and blessed him that had the promises. "And without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better." (Hebrews 7:7).

Who appointed Melchisedec as Priest of the Most High God? What were his functions? They appeared to be distinct from Noah, and from Abraham; and more the order of Christ - especially in the presentation of the bread and wine - a living sacrifice acceptable to God; that He might offer Him up freely for us all.

After his exclusion from the Garden, did Adam lack faith in God? Did he cast aside all honour in God's Word? Did he take the view that Eve was responsible for the position and say "I want no more to do with you"? Or did Adam remember God's words to them in Genesis 1:27,28, and decide to honour those words? What if he had decided not to do so? Is there an answer? Or is it as Paul says, that according to Scripture it must be seen that even before Abraham God would justify the nations through faith, and this faith was by justification of faith in Christ and His death? (See Romans 5:1-2 and Romans 3:19-20). What knowledge of sin is this? It is surely the sin of Adam under which God concluded all before they were even born. Romans 3:23, and answered in verses 24-31. Explained also in Galatians 3:22-29. We are not baptised into Abraham but into the sacrificial death of Christ; a sacrifice for all - not a martyrdom through obedience - He was not commanded to die; He was asked to submit to death willingly for the life of the world, lost by Adam's sin; and in His willing sacrificial death, life was restored on the principle of God's justice and belief in His Son.

There were many before Abraham who exhibited faith. Jude verse 3 speaks of the common salvation, the faith which was once delivered to the saints/ and to earnestly contend for it. Paul says, "There is one faith, etc..." If we have not this one faith how can we contend for it?

A reading of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 should help. The Gospel Paul preached was before Abraham, but was preached to Abraham. 1 Corinthians 15:1-3. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22:15; Isaiah 53:5; Daniel 9:26; 1 Peter 2:24. Romans 5:15. If through the offence of one many were dead, physically, the grace of God and gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, cannot abound unto many; for the dead in the dust know not anything.

Brother Phil Parry

No. 5 in a series of Bible essays

WHY THE CROSS WAS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION

What is Salvation?

It is a well known fact that all animals, human or otherwise, must inevitably die; one exception recorded in Scripture is that of Enoch, who was translated that he should not see death. But this exception goes to prove that God can alter this rule at His will. There will be, in the future, others who will not die but who “shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at he last trump” (1 Corinthians 15:52), at the return of Jesus.

We are told in John 3:16 that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Also we read, “I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). “I am come hat they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10. See also Luke 9:56, etc).

Thus we see that salvation is a saving from (or out of) death. Believers from the beginning of the Creation who have died, are not reckoned as having perished, for they are all written in God’s Book of Life (Philippians 4:3; Revelation 35; etc.), and they will take part in a resurrection at the appointed day (compare the statement of Jesus “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” to prove to the Sadducees the certainty of the resurrection).

Why does man die?

Paul tells us clearly in Romans 5:12, “By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” This one man was of course, Adam (verse 14) who, by eating of the forbidden fruit, transgressed God’s Law and as a consequence was expelled from the garden of Eden “lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever” (Genesis 3:22). To this day the tree of life is withheld from us and we die. Our own individual sins do not constitute the cause of our dying (for otherwise there would be no infant deaths), nor can our own righteousness bring about everlasting life, “For there is none other name (but Jesus) under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The qualifications of a Saviour

A) The Saviour must be a man.

Since it is mankind which is guilty of sin, it would not be right, even according to man’s view of justice, to inflict the penalty on some animal or creature. Scripture takes this view for in it we read in Hebrews 10:4, “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.” But how can we know that human blood (under certain conditions) may accomplish this. Well, it is laid down in God’s plan of salvation which began to operate in the very earliest days, and we may understand some of it by studying His word. If we turn for a moment to the first pair who sinned we can see some of the principles involved.

After their transgression, Adam and Eve immediately became conscious of a feeling of nakedness which they sought to overcome by wearing aprons of fig leaves. As a mere bodily covering no doubt these served their purpose, but evidently they were not approved by God, who made coats of skins and clothed them, their consciousness of nakedness and of guilt thereby becoming dulled or non-existent.

(We may here remember the words of David, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” Psalm 32:1). But in order to cover them with skins it had been necessary to cause the death of some animal, or animals, and here we see a principle of salvation coming to light. The penalty of Adam’s transgression was death in the day that he ate of the fruit. Adam did not die that day, but some animal did. Now we read in Revelation 12:8 about a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, an obvious reference

to Jesus (See Revelation 5, and so we see that the animal slain in the garden of Eden was but a representative of Jesus - a token payment - a promise that in due time someone should come who by His death, would pay in full the price of Adam's transgression.

It is not surprising that this person had to be a male when we consider the following:-

a) The Law in Eden was given to Adam when he was the sole human on the earth, We are not told whether it was later expressly given to Eve, but undoubtedly she understood the law to be binding upon her also (Genesis 3:3). At any rate, Adam was the responsible party though not actually the first to transgress.

b) Eve was formed from Adam's rib and can still be regarded as being "in Adam" or part of Adam, or, as he himself said, "bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23), and in the same way that Levi is said to have paid tithes in Abraham (Hebrews 7:9), so also Eve may be said to be in Adam.

c) God called their name Adam (Genesis 5:2), thus showing again that the man was responsible, and that the actions of Eve were done in, or under his name.

B) The Saviour must be an Israelite.

This may not have been necessary for the salvation of the Gentiles, but for the Jews it was vital that He should be of their race, for they were under another Law or system of laws, with its own benefits for adherents thereto and its own penalties for infringement. For some offences the penalty was death. Now, we read in Deuteronomy 27:26, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them," and in James 2:10, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Therefore the children of Israel needed to be redeemed from the death penalty - even those who might not have committed sins worthy of death, and to do this their Redeemer must also be under the same law.

C) The Saviour must be sinless.

Obviously a man under the sentence of death cannot be bought back by someone under the same sentence, and so it is necessary that the Redeemer should be guiltless.

D) The Saviour must have a life to give.

It is obvious that a man cannot be said to give his life for someone else if he is bound to die in any case. Therefore a Redeemer must possess a life which cannot be taken from Him without His consent.

E) The Saviour must be willing.

It would not be just to exact from an innocent person the penalty due to a sinner but if the innocent one willingly offers to die in the place of the sinner then there is no injustice.

How Jesus fulfilled all these Conditions.

A & B) Jesus was born the son of Mary who was of the tribe of Judah. The law recognised Joseph, the husband of Mary, as the father of Jesus, but Joseph was also of the tribe of Judah.

C) There are many references which testify to the absolute sinlessness of Jesus. For example, "For such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Hebrews 7:26). "For He hath made Him to be sin (sin-offering) for us, who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust" (1 Peter 3:18). "He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5).

D) Adam was the first son of God (Luke 3:38). Jesus, though not a new creation was the only begotten Son of God, for although He was born of Mary, His life came direct from God who was His Father. For this reason He is called the second man (1 Corinthians 15:47) or the last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45). As Jesus had a life unforfeited by transgression He had the right to eat of the tree of life like the first Adam before His

transgression. Jesus Himself said, "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself" (John 5:26). "I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:17). "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

E) Jesus' voluntary submission to His Father's will was as complete during the suffering on the Cross as throughout the whole of His lifetime - "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15). "I lay it down of myself (John 10:18). "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt." (Matthew 26:39).

Why The Cross?

It was His Father's will that Jesus should endure the sufferings of the Cross, so we must conclude that those sufferings must have been absolutely necessary. A natural death (i.e. one due to old age or "natural causes") would not have sufficed. Most of us die a natural death, but this is not the penalty of sin, as even innocent babies die.

The wages of sin is an inflicted death from which we are saved by belief in Jesus who, though Himself sinless, took our punishment upon Himself. Thus, by His sacrifice, we have been permitted to have life (through Adam, whose life was spared on account of that sacrifice) and those who are accounted worthy will later receive life more abundantly. (John 10:10).

Paul states that "without shedding of blood is no remission" (i.e. of sin) (Hebrews 9:22; Leviticus 17:11). This was in relation to the Law of Moses which pointed forward to Christ (Colossians 2:17) and the principle still applies. Therefore the mode of death of the Saviour necessitated the shedding of blood.

The Jewish method of execution was by stoning, but under the Roman law which was in force over the Jews at the time of Jesus, the method was crucifixion. Now, whereas it may be possible for a man to be stoned to death without the shedding of blood (by a blow on the head, for example) the crucifixion of Jesus made the shedding of blood a certainty for His hands and feet were pierced in order to nail Him to the Cross. (Much more blood was spilled later when His side was pierced with a spear).

But since the blood-shedding could have been brought about some other way there must be some other reason for the use of a cross. Paul explains the reason to us in Galatians 3:10-14. As has been mentioned before, the Law of Moses contained a curse "for everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." It is written in Deuteronomy 21:23 and quoted in Galatians 3:13 that "cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." By His suffering on that wooden cross Jesus took upon Himself that curse (of death) which the law held over the Jews, and by this means He redeemed the Jews from that curse "that the blessings of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Galatians 3:14).

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." - Romans 2:33.

Brother Herbert Taberner.

Extract from

"THE TEMPLE AT THE TIME OF CHRIST"

The Officiating Priesthood

"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." (Hebrews 10:11).

Among the most interesting glimpses of early life in the church is that afforded by a small piece of rapidly-drawn scenery which presents to our view “a great company of priests,” “obedient to the faith.” We seem to be carried back in imagination to the time when Levi remained faithful amidst the general spiritual defection (Exodus 32:26), and then through the long vista of devout ministering priests to reach the fulfilment of this saying of Malachi – part admonition, and part prophecy: “For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” ~ Malachi 2:7. We can picture to ourselves how they who minister in holy things would at eventide, when the Temple was deserted of its worshippers, gather to speak of the spiritual meaning of the services, and to consider the wonderful things which had taken place in Jerusalem, as some alleged, in fulfilment of those very types that formed the essence of their office and ministry. “For this thing was not done in a corner.” The trial of Jesus, His condemnation by the Sanhedrim, and His being delivered up to the Gentiles, must have formed the theme of frequent and anxious discussion in the Temple. Were not their own chief priests implicated in the matter? Did not Judas on the fatal day rush into the Temple, and wildly cast the “price of blood” into the “treasury”? On the other hand, was not one of the principle priests and a member of the priestly council, Joseph of Arimathea, an adherent of Christ? Did not the Sanhedrist Nicodemus adopt the same views, and even Gamaliel advise caution? Besides, in the “porches” of the Temple, especially in that of Solomon, “a notable miracle” had been done in “the Name,” and there also its all-prevailing power was daily proclaimed. It specially behoved the priesthood to inquire well into the matter; and the Temple seemed the most appropriate place for its discussion.

The Number of Priests

The number of priests to be found at all times in Jerusalem must have been very, great and Ophel a densely inhabited quarter. According to Jewish tradition, half of each of the twenty-four “course,” into which the priesthood were divided were permanently resident in Jerusalem; the rest scattered over the land. It is added that about one half of the latter had settled in Jericho, and were in the habit of supplying the needful support to their brethren while officiating in Jerusalem. Of course such statements must not be taken literally, though no doubt they are substantially correct. When a “course” was on duty, all its members were bound to appear in the Temple. Those who stayed away, with such “representatives of the people” (or “stationary men”) as, like them, had been prevented from “going up” to Jerusalem in their turn, had to meet in the synagogues of their district to pray and to fast each day of their week of service, except on the sixth, the seventh, and the first - that is, neither on the Sabbath, nor on the days preceding and succeeding it, as the “joy” attaching to the Sabbath rendered a fast immediately before and after it inappropriate.

Symbolism of the Priesthood

It need scarcely be said, that everything connected with the priesthood was intended to be symbolical and typical - the office itself, its functions, even its dress and outward support. The fundamental design of Israel itself was to be unto Jehovah “a kingdom of priests and an holy nation” - Exodus 19:5,6. This, however, could only be realised in “the fullness of time.” At the very outset there was the barrier of sin; and in order to gain admittance to the ranks of Israel, when “the sum of the children of Israel was taken after their number,” every man had to give the half-shekel, which in after times became the regular Temple contribution, as “a ransom (covering) for his soul unto Jehovah” - Exodus 30:12,13. But even so Israel was sinful, and could only approach Jehovah in the way which Himself opened, and in the manner which He appointed. Direct choice and appointment by God were the conditions alike of the priesthood, of sacrifices, feasts, and every detail of service. The fundamental ideas which underlay all and connected it into a harmonious whole, were reconciliation and mediation: the one expressed by typically atoning sacrifices, the other by a typically intervening priesthood. Even the Hebrew term for priest (Cohen) denotes in its root-meaning “one who stands up for another, and mediates in his cause.” [This root-meaning (through the Arabic) of the Hebrew word for priest, as one intervening, explains its occasional though very rare application to others than priests, as, for example, to the sons of David (2 Samuel 8:18), a mode of expression which is thus correctly paraphrased in 1 Chronicles 18:17; “And the sons of David were at the hand of the king.”] For this purpose God chose the tribe of Levi, and out of it again the family of Aaron, on whom He bestowed the “priest’s office as a gift” - Numbers 18:7. But the whole characteristics and the functions of the priesthood centred in the person of the high-priest. In accordance with the Divine “calling” (Hebrews 5:4) was the special and exceptional provision made for the support of the priesthood. Its principle

was thus expressed: "I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel;" and its joyousness, when realised in its full meaning and application, found vent in such words as Psalm 16:5,6:

"Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Holiness

But there was yet another idea to be expressed by the priesthood. The object of reconciliation was holiness. Israel was to be "a holy nation" – reconciled through the "sprinkling of blood;" brought near to, and kept in fellowship with God by that means. The priesthood, as the representative offerers of that blood and mediators of the people, were also to show forth the "holiness" of Israel. Every one knows how this was symbolised by the gold-plate which the high-priest wore on his forehead, and which bore the words: "Holiness unto Jehovah." But though the high-priest in this, as in every other respect, was the fullest embodiment of the functions and the object of the priesthood, the same truth was also otherwise shown forth. The bodily qualifications required in the priesthood, the kind of defilements which would temporarily or wholly interrupt their functions, their mode of ordination, and even every portion, material, and colour of their distinctive dress were all intended to express in a symbolic manner this characteristic of holiness. In all these respects there was a difference between Israel and the tribe of Levi; between the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron, and finally, between an ordinary priest and the high-priest, who most fully typified our Great High-priest, in whom all these symbols have found their reality.

The Twenty-four Courses

This much it seemed necessary to state for the general understanding of the matter. Full details belong to the exposition of the meaning and object of the Levitical priesthood, as instituted by God, while our present task rather is to trace its further development to what it was at the time when Jesus was in the Temple. The first peculiarity of post-Mosaic times which we here meet, is the arrangement of the priesthood into "twenty-four courses," which undoubtedly dates from the times of David. But Jewish tradition would make it even older. For, according to the Talmud, it should be traced up to Moses, who is variously supposed to have arranged the sons of Aaron into eight or else sixteen courses (four or else eight, of Eleazar; and the other four, or else eight, of Ithamar), to which, on the supposition, Samuel and David each added other eight "courses," or, on the other, Samuel and David, in conjunction, the eight needed to make up the twenty-four mentioned in 1 Chronicles 24. It need scarcely be told that, like many similar statements, this also is simply an attempt to trace up every arrangement to the fountain-head of Jewish history, in order to establish its absolute authority. [Curiously enough, here also the analogy between Rabbinism and Roman Catholicism holds good. Each claims for its teaching and practices the so-called principle of catholicity - '*semper, ibique, ab omnibus*' ('always, everywhere, by all'), and each invents the most curious historical fables in support of it!]

The Courses after the Captivity

The institution of David and of Solomon continued till the Babylonish captivity. Thence, however, only four out of the twenty-four "courses" returned: those of Jedaiah, Immer, Pashur, and Harim (Ezra 2:36-39), the course of "Jedaiah" being placed first because it was of the high-priest's family, "of the house of Jeshua," "the son of Jozadak" - Ezra 3:2; Haggai 1:1; 1 Chronicles 6:15. To restore the original number, each of these four families was directed to draw five lots for those which had not returned, so as to form once more twenty-four course, which were to bear the ancient names. Thus, for example, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, did not really belong to the family of Abijah (1 Chronicles 24:10), which had not returned from Babylon but to the "course of Abia," which had been formed out of some other family, and only bore the ancient name - Luke 1:5. Like the priests, the Levites had at the time of King David been arranged into twenty-four "courses," which were to act as "priests' assistants" (1 Chronicles 23:4 & 28), as "singers and musicians" (1 Chronicles 25:6), as "gate-keepers and guards" (1 Chronicles 26:6....), and as "officers and judges." Of these various classes, that of the "priests' assistants" was by far the most numerous (24,000 out of a total 38,000 Levites), and to them the charge of the Temple had been committed in subordination to the priests. It had been their duty to look after the sacred vestments and vessels; the store-houses and their contents; and the preparation of the shewbread, of the meat-offerings, of the spices, etc. They were also

generally to assist the priests in their work, to see to the cleaning of the sanctuary, and to take charge of the treasuries – I Chronicles 23:28-32.

In the Temple of Herod

Of course these services, as also those of the singers and the musicians, and of the porters and guards, were retained in the Temple of Herod. But for the employment of Levites as “officers and judges” there was no further room, not only because such judicial functions as still remained to the Jews were in the hands of the Sanhedrim and its subordinate authorities, but also because in general the ranks of the Levites were so thinned. In point of fact, while no less than 4,289 priests had returned from Babylon, the number of Levites was under 400 (Ezra 2:40-42; Nehemiah 7:43-45), of whom only 74 were “priests assistants.” To this the next immigration, under Ezra, added only 38, and that though the Levites had been specially searched for, Ezra 8:15,18,19. According to tradition, Ezra punished them by depriving them of their tithes. The gap in their number was filled up by 220 Nethinim, literally, “given ones” probably originally strangers and captives. This is confirmed by their foreign names (Ezra 2:43-58). The total number of Nethinims who returned from Babylon was 612 - 392 with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:58; Nehemiah 7:60) and 220 with Ezra. (Ezra 8:20), as in all likelihood the Gibeonites had been the first “Nethinim” - Joshua 9:21,23,27. Though the Nethinim, like the Levites and priests, were freed from all taxation (Ezra 7:24), and perhaps also from military service, the Rabbinitists held them in the lowest repute - beneath a bastard, though above a proselyte - forbade their intermarrying with Israelites and declared them incapable of proper membership in the congregation.

Duties of Priests and Levites

The duties of priests and Levites in the Temple may be gathered from Scripture and will be further explained in the course of our enquiries. Generally, it may here be stated that on the Levites developed the Temple-police, the guard of the gates, and the duty of keeping everything about the sanctuary clean and bright. But as at night the priests kept watch about the innermost places of the Temple, so they also opened and closed all the inner gates, while the Levites discharged this duty in reference to the outer gates, which led upon the Temple Mount (or Court of the Gentiles), and to the “Beautiful Gate,” which formed the principle entrance into the Court of the Women. The laws of Levitical cleanliness, as explained by the Rabbis, were most rigidly enforced upon worshippers and priests. If a leper, or any other who was “defiled,” had ventured into the sanctuary itself, or any priest officiated, in a state of “uncleanness,” he would, if discovered, be dragged out and killed, without form of process, by “the rebels’ beating.” Minor punishments were awarded to those guilty of smaller offences of the same kind. The Sabbath-rest was strictly enforced, so far as consistent with the necessary duties of the Temple service. But the latter superseded the Sabbath law (Matthew 12:5) and defilement on account of death. If the time for offering a sacrifice was not fixed, so that it might be brought on one day as well as another, then the service did not supersede either the Sabbath or defilement on account of death. But where the time was unalterably fixed, there the higher duty of obedience to a direct command came in to supersede alike the Sabbath and this one (but only this one) ground of defilement. The same principle applied to worshippers as well as priests.

The Week’s Service

Each “course” of priests and of Levites (as has already been stated) came on duty for a week, from one Sabbath to another. The service of the week was subdivided among the various families which constituted a “course;” so that if it consisted of five “houses of fathers,” three served each one day, and two each two days; if of six families, five served each one day, and one two days; if of eight families, six served each one day, and the other two in conjunction on one day; or, lastly, ‘if of nine families, five served each one day, and the other four took it two in conjunction for two days. These divisions and arrangements were made by “the chiefs” or “heads of the houses of their fathers,” On Sabbaths the whole “course” was on duty; on feast-days any priest might come up and join in the ministrations of the sanctuary; and at the Feast of Tabernacles all twenty-four courses were bound to be present and officiate. While actually engaged on service in the Temple, the priests were not allowed to drink wine, either by day or by night. The other “families” or “houses” also of the “course” who were in attendance at Jerusalem, though not on actual duty, were, during their week of ministry, prohibited the use of wine, except at night, because they might have to be called in to assist their brethren of the officiating “family,” which they could not do if they had partaken of strong drink.

The law even made (a somewhat curious) provision to secure that the priests should come up to Jerusalem properly trimmed, washed, and attired, so as to secure the decorum of the service.

These Functions not Sacerdotal

It would be difficult to conceive arrangements more thoroughly or consistently opposed to what are commonly called 'priestly pretension,' than those of the Old Testament. The fundamental principle, laid down at the outset, that all Israel were "a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5,6), made the priesthood only representatives of the people. Their income, which even under the most favourable circumstances must have been moderate, was, as we have seen, dependent on the varying religious state of the nation, since no law existed by which either the payment of tithes or any other offerings could be enforced. How little power or influence, comparatively speaking, the priesthood wielded, is sufficiently known from Jewish history. Out of actual service neither the priests nor even the high-priest wore a distinctive dress, and though a number of civil restrictions were laid on priests, there were few corresponding advantages. It is indeed true that alliances with distinguished priestly families were eagerly sought, and that during the troubled period of Syrian domination the high-priest for a time held civil as well as religious rule. But the latter advantage was dearly bought, both as regarded the priests and the nation.

Nor must we forget the powerful controlling influence which Rabbinism exercised. Its tendency, which must never be lost sight of in the study of the state of Palestine at the time of our Lord, was steadily against all privileges other than those gained by traditionary learning and theological ingenuity. The Pharisee, or rather, the man learned in the traditional law, was everything both before God and before man; "but this people, who knoweth not the law," were "cursed," plebeians, country people, unworthy of any regard or attention. Rabbinism applied these principles even in reference to the priest-hood. It divided all the priests into "learned" and "unlettered," and excluded the latter from some of the privileges of their own order. Thus there were certainly priestly dues which the people might at will give to any priest they chose. But from some of them the "unlettered" priests were debarred, on the ostensible ground that in their ignorance they might have partaken of them in a state of Levitical uncleanness, and so committed mortal sin.

Training of Priests

In general, the priests had to undergo a course of instruction, and were examined before being allowed to officiate. Similarly, they were subject to the ordinary tribunals, composed of men learned in the law, without regard to their descent from one or another tribe. The ordained "rulers" of the synagogue, the teachers of the people, the leaders of their devotions, and all other officials were not necessarily "priests," but simply chosen for their learning and fitness. Any one whom the "elders" or "rulers" deemed qualified for it might, at their request, address to the people on the Sabbath a "word of exhortation." Even the high-priest himself was answerable to the Sanhedrim. It is distinctly stated, that "if he committed an offence which by the law deserved whipping, the Great Sanhedrim whipt him, and then had him restored again to his office." Every year a kind of ecclesiastical council was appointed to instruct him in his duties for the Day of Atonement, "in case he were not learned," or, at any rate, to see to it that he knew and remember them. Nay, the principle was broadly laid down - that "a scholar, though he were a bastard, was of far higher value than an unlearned priest." If, besides all this, it is remembered how the political influence of the high-priest had decayed in the days of Herod and how frequently the occupants of that office changed, through the caprice of the rulers or through bribery, the state of public feeling will be readily understood.

At the same time, it must be admitted, that generally speaking the high-priest would, of necessity, wield very considerable influence, and that, ordinarily, those who held the sacred office were not only "lettered," but members of the Sanhedrim. According to Jewish tradition, the high-priest ought, in every respect, to excel all other priests, and if he were poor, the rest were to contribute, so as to secure him an independent fortune. Certain marks of outward respect were also shown him. When he entered the Temple he was accompanied by three persons - one walking at each side, the third behind him. He might, without being appointed to it, officiate in any part of the Temple services, he had certain exceptional rights; and he possessed a house in the Temple, where he lived by day, retiring only at night to his own home, which must be within Jerusalem, and to which he was escorted by the people after the solemnities of the Day of Atonement, which devolved almost exclusively upon him.

Office Hereditary

Originally the office of high-priest was regarded as being held for life and hereditary; but the troubles of later times made it a matter of cabal, crime, or bribery. Without here entering into the complicated question of the successor to the high-priesthood, the following may be quoted from the Talmud, without, of course, guaranteeing its absolute accuracy: "In the first Temple, the high-priests served, the son succeeding the father, and they were eighteen in number. But in the second Temple they got the high-priesthood for money; and there are who say they destroyed each other by witchcraft, so that some reckon 80 high-priests during that period, others 81, others 82, 84 or even 85." The Rabbis enumerate 18 high-priests during the first Temple; Lightfoot counts 53 from the return from Babylon to Matthias, when the last war of the Jews began; while Relandius reckons 57. But there is both difficulty and confusion amid the constant changes at the last.

There was not any fixed age for entering on the office of high-priest, any more than on that of an ordinary priest. The Talmudists put it down at twenty years. But the unhappy descendant of the Maccabees, Aristobulus, was only sixteen years of age when his beauty, as he officiated as high-priest in the Temple, roused the jealousy of Herod, and procured his death. The entrance of the Levites is fixed, in the sacred text, at thirty during the wilderness period, and after that, when the work would require less bodily strength, but a larger number of ministers, at twenty-five years of age. [It is thus we reconcile Numbers 4:3 with 8:24,25. In point of fact, these two reasons are expressly mentioned in 1 Chronicles 23:24-27, as influencing David still further to lower the age of entrance to twenty].

Disqualification for the Priesthood

No special disqualifications for the Levitical office existed, though the Rabbis insist that a good voice was absolutely necessary. It was otherwise with the priest's office. The first inquiry instituted by the Sanhedrim, who for the purpose sat daily in "the Hall of Polished Stones," was into the genealogy of a candidate. Certain genealogies were deemed authoritative. Thus, "if his father's name were inscribed in the archives of Jeshana at Zipporim, no further inquiry was made." If he failed to satisfy the court about his perfect legitimacy, the candidate was dressed and veiled in black, and permanently removed. If he passed that ordeal, inquiry was next made as to any physical defects, of which Maimonides enumerates a hundred and forty that permanently, twenty-two which temporarily disqualified for the exercise of the priestly office. Persons so disqualified were, however, admitted to menial offices, such as in the wood-chamber, and entitled to Temple support. Those who had stood the two-fold test were dressed in white raiment, and their names properly inscribed. To this pointed allusion is made in Revelation 3:5, "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life."

The Investiture

Thus received, and afterwards instructed in his duties, the formal admission alike of the priest and the high-priest was not, as of old, by anointing, but simply by investiture. For even the composition of the sacred oil was no longer known in the second Temple. They were called "high-priests by investiture," and regarded as of inferior rank to those "by anointing." As for the common priests, the Rabbis held that they were not anointed even in the first Temple, the rite which was applied to the sons of Aaron being valid also for their descendants. It was otherwise in the case of the high-priest. His investiture was continued during seven days. In olden days, when he was anointed, the sacred oil was not only "poured over him," but also applied to his forehead, over his eyes, as tradition has it, after the form of the Greek letter X. The coincidence is certainly curious. This sacred oil was besides only used for anointing such kings as were of the family of David, not other Jewish monarchs, and if their succession had been called in question. Otherwise the royal dignity went, as a matter of course, by inheritance from father to son.

The Dress of the High-priest

The high-priests "by investiture" had not any more the real Urim and Thummim (meaning even being unknown), though a breast-plate, with twelve stones, was made and worn, in order to complete the eight sacred vestments. This was just double the number of those worn by an ordinary priest, viz. the linen breeches, the coat, the girdle, and the bonnet. To these the high-priest added other four distinctive articles of

dress, called “golden vestments,” because, unlike the robes of the ordinary priests, gold, the symbol of splendour, appeared in them. They were the Meil, or robe of the ephod, wholly of “woven work,” of dark blue colour, descending to the knees, and adorned at the hem by alternate blossoms of the pomegranate in blue, purple, and scarlet, and golden bells, the latter, according to tradition, seventy-two in number; the Ephod with the breast-plate, the former of the four colours of the sanctuary (white, blue, purple, and scarlet), and inwrought with threads of gold; the Mitre; and, lastly, the Ziz, or golden frontlet. If either a priest or the high-priest officiated without wearing the full numbers of his vestments, his service would be invalid, as also if anything, however trifling (such, for instance, as a plaster), had intervened between the body and the dress of the priest. The material of which the four vestments of the ordinary priests were made was “linen,” or, more accurately, “byssus,” the white shining cotton-stuff of Egypt. These two qualities of the byssus are specially marked as characteristic - Revelation 15:6, “clothed in pure white and shining linen,” and on them part of the symbolic meaning depended. Hence we read in Revelation 19:8, “And to her” - the wife of the Lamb made ready - “was granted that she should be arrayed in byssus vestments, shining and pure; for the byssus vestment is the righteousness of the saints.”

Allusions to the Dress in the New Testament

We add some further particulars, chiefly in illustration of allusions in the New Testament. The priest’s “coat” was woven in one piece like the seamless robe of the Saviour - John 19:23. As it was close fitting, the girdle could not, strictly speaking, have been necessary. Besides, although the account of the Rabbis, that the priest’s girdle was three fingers broad and sixteen yards long (!), is exaggerated no doubt it really reached beyond the feet and required to be thrown over the shoulder during ministration. Hence its object must chiefly be symbolic. In point of fact, it may be regarded as the most distinctive priestly vestment since it was only put on during actual ministration, and put off immediately afterwards. Accordingly, when in Revelation 1:13, the Saviour is seen “in the midst of the candlesticks,” “girt about the paps with a golden girdle,” we are to understand by it that our heavenly High-Priest is there engaged in actual ministry for us. Similarly, the girdle is described as “about the paps,” or (as in Revelation 15:6) about the “breasts,” as both the girdle of the ordinary priest and that on the ephod which the high-priest wore were girded there and not round the loins (Compare Ezekiel 44:18). Lastly, the expression “golden girdle” may bear reference to the circumstances that the dress peculiar of the high-priest was called his “golden vestments,” in contradistinction to the “linen vestments,” which he wore on the Day of Atonement.

The Breast-plate and the Mitre.

Of the four distinctive articles in the high-priest’s dress, the breast-plate, alike from its square form and the twelve jewels in it, bearing the names of the tribes, suggests “the city four-square,” whose “foundations” are twelve precious stones - Revelation 21:16,19,20. The “mitre” of the high-priest differed from the head-gear of the ordinary priest, which was shaped like the inverted calyx of a flower, in size and probably also somewhat in shape. According to the Rabbis, it was eight yards high (11). Fastened to it be two (according to the Rabbis, by three) ribbons of “blue lace” was the symbol of royalty - the “golden plate” (or Ziz), on which, “Holiness unto Jehovah” was graven. This plate was only two fingers wide, and reached from temple to temple. Between this plate and the mitre the high-priest is by some supposed to have worn his phylacteries. But this cannot be regarded as by any means a settled point. According to the distinct ceremony of the Talmud, neither priests, Levites, nor the “stationary men” wore phylacteries during their actual service in the Temple. This is a strong point urged by modern Karaite Jews against the traditions of the Rabbis. Can it be, that the wearing of Phylacteries at the time of Christ was not a universally acknowledged obligation/ but rather the badge of a party? This would give additional force to the words in which Christ inveighed against those who made broad their Phylacteries.

The Ziz

According to Josephus, the original Ziz of Aaron still existed in his time, and was carried with other spoils to Rome. There R. Eliezer saw it in the reign of Hadrian. Thence we can trace it, with considerable probability, through many vicissitudes, to the time of Belisaurus, and to Byzantium. From there it was taken by order of the emperor to Jerusalem. What became of it afterwards is unknown; possibly it may still be in existence. It only require to be added that the priest’s garments, when soiled, were not washed, but used as

wicks for the lamps in the Temple; those of the high-priest were hid away. The high-priest wore “a fresh suit of linen vestments” each time on the Day of Atonement.

The Fourteen Courses

The priesthood ministering in the Temple were arranged into “ordinary” priests and various officials. Of the latter there were, besides the high-priest, the “Sagan,” or suffragan priest; two “Katholikin,” or chief treasurers and overseers; seven “Ammarcalin,” who were subordinate to the Katholikin, and had chief charge of all the gates; and three “Gizbarin,” or under-treasurers. These fourteen officers, ranking in the order mentioned, formed the standing “council of the Temple,” which regulated everything connected with the affairs and services of the sanctuary. Its members were also called “the elders of the priests,” or “the counsellors.” This judicatory, which ordinarily did not busy itself with criminal questions, apparently took a leading part in the condemnation of Jesus. But, on the other hand, it is well to remember that they were not all of one mind, since Joseph of Arimathea, belonged to their number - the title by which he is designated in Mark 15:43 being exactly the same word as that applied in the Talmud to the members of this priestly council.

Their Duties

It is difficult to specify the exact duties of each of these classes of officials. The “Sagan” (or “Segen,” or “Segan”) would officiate for the high-priest, when from any cause he was incapacitated; he would act generally as his assistant, and take the oversight of all the priests, whence he is called in Scripture “second priest” (2 Kings 25:18; Jeremiah 52:24), and in Talmudic writings “the Sagan of the priests.” A “Chananjah” is mentioned in the Talmud as a Sagan, but whether or not he was the “Annas” of the New Testament must be left undecided. The two Katholikin were to the Sagan what he was to the high-priest, though their chief duty seems to have been about the treasure of the Temple. Similarly, the seven Ammarcalin were assistants of the Katholikin, though they had special charge of the gates, the holy vessels, and the holy vestments; and again the three (or else seven), “Gizbarin” assistants of the Ammarcalin. The title “Gizbar” occurs so early as Ezra 1:8; but its exact meaning seems to have been already unknown when the LXX translated that book. They appear to have had charge of all dedicated and consecrated things, of the Temple tribute, of the redemption money, etc., and to have decided all questions connected with such matters.

Lower Officials

Next in rank to these officials were the “heads of each course” on duty for a week, and then the “heads of families” of every course. After them followed fifteen overseers, viz. “the overseer concerning the times” who summoned priests and people to their respective duties; the overseer for shutting the doors (under the direction, of course, of the Ammarcalin), the overseer of the guards, or captain of the Temple, the overseer of the singers and those who blew the trumpets; the overseer of the cymbals; the overseer of the lots, which were drawn every morning; the overseer of the birds, who had to provide the turtle-doves and pigeons for those who brought such offerings; the overseer of the seals, who dispensed the four counterfoils for the various meat-offerings suited for the different sacrifices; the overseer of the drink-offerings, for a similar purpose to the above; the overseer of the sick; or the Temple physician; the overseer of the water, who had charge of the water-supply and the drainage; the overseer for making the shewbread; for preparing the incense; for making the veils; and for providing the priestly garments. All these officers had, of course, subordinates, whom they chose and employed, either for the day or permanently; and it was their duty to see to all the arrangements connected with their respective departments. Thus, not to speak of instructors, examiners of sacrifices, and a great variety of artificers, there must have been sufficient employment in the Temple for a very large number of persons.

Sources of support for the Priests

We must not close without enumerating the twenty-four sources whence, according to the Talmud, the priests derived their support. Of these ten were only available while in the Temple itself, four in Jerusalem, and the remaining ten throughout the Holy Land. Those which might only be used in the Temple itself were the priest’s part of the sin-offering; that of the trespass-offering for a known, and for a doubtful trespass;

public peace-offerings; the Leper's log of oil; the two Pentecostal loaves; the shewbread; what was left of meat-offerings, and the omer, at the Passover. The four which might be used in Jerusalem were the firstlings of beasts, the Bicurim [the unprepared, or natural product of the soil, such as corn, fruits, etc.], the portion from the thank-offering (Leviticus 7:12; 22:29,30), and from the Nazarite's goat, and the skins of the holy sacrifices. Of the ten which might be used throughout the land, five could be given at will to any priest, viz. the tithe of the tithe, the heave-offering of the dough (Numbers 15:20; Romans 11:16), the first of the fleece and the priest's due of meat (Deuteronomy 18:3). The other five, it was thought, should be given to the priests of the special course on duty for the week, viz. the redemption-money for a first-born son, that of an ass, the "sanctified field of possession," (Leviticus 27:16), what had been "devoted," and such possession of "a stranger" or proselyte as, having been stolen, was restored to the priests after the death of the person robbed, with a fifth part additional. Finally, to an unlettered priest it was only lawful to give the following from among the various dues: things "devoted," the first-born of cattle, the redemption of a son, that of an ass, the priest's due (Deuteronomy 18:3), the first of the wool, the "oil of burning," the ten things which were to be used in the Temple itself, and the Bicurim. On the other hand, the high-priest had the right to take what portion of the offerings he chose, and one half of the shewbread every Sabbath also belonged to him.

Thus elaborated in every particular was the system which regulated the admission, the services, and the privileges of the officiating priesthood. Yet it has all vanished, not leaving behind it in the synagogue even a single trace of its complicated and perfect arrangements. These "old things are passed away," because they were only "a shadow of good things to come." But "the substance is of Christ," and "He abideth an High-Priest for ever."

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