

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 282

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In this issue:

Page 1 Editorial	Brother Russell Gregory
Page 3 Exhortation	Brother Edward Turney
Page 7 A Love Story	
Page 9 A Consideration of Mark 13	Brother Ray Gregory
Page 15 Bible Essay No. 7	Brother Leo Dreifuss
Page 19 Bible Essay No. 8	Brother Fred Lea

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4 Verse 6 & 7

Editorial

Dear Friends Brethren and Sisters, Loving greetings in Jesu's Name.

In my last editorial I ended by quoting the words of Jesus from Luke's gospel chapter 21, verses 25 & 26, and I quote this same passage again using a more modern translation:-

“And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.”

This quotation contains some expressions worth noting, for example, the Greek word for “perplexity” means “with no way out” – distress of nations with no way out! This applies to Israel in particular being surrounded as it is by Muslim nations determined to “wipe it off the face of the earth.” and yet the Israeli's are extraordinarily confident that they can cope with all this hate from the Muslims.

“The sea and the waves roaring” is an expression frequently used in the Bible when referring to warring nations; while “the sun, moon and stars” are sometimes used when referring to the nation of Israel.

Israel's homecoming to its own land in May 1948 has not brought it any peace yet their confidence is almost inexplicable. In the six-day war of June 1967 Israel was invaded by Syria, Jordan and Egypt simultaneously, and were backed with arms and troops from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Algeria and others. Israel's initial strategy was to destroy or seriously cripple first the Egyptian air-force and then the Syrian and Jordanian air-forces without which they were unable to give adequate support to their ground forces who were

quickly defeated. In those few days Israel doubled in size by taking the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Golan heights from Syria and Sinai and Gaza from Egypt.

A few weeks after the end of the war Yitzhak Rabin gave his reasons for their success by saying in a speech at the Hebrew University:-

“Our airmen, who struck the enemies' planes so accurately that no one in the world understands how it was done and people seek technological explanations or secret weapons; our armoured troops who beat the enemy even when their equipment was inferior to his; our soldiers in all other branches . . . who overcame our enemies everywhere, despite the latter's superior numbers and fortifications — all these revealed not only coolness and courage in the battle but . . . an understanding that only their personal stand against the greatest dangers would achieve victory for their country and for their families, and that if victory was not theirs the alternative was annihilation.”

Yet there is no acknowledgement of God in their achievements. Their confidence is in their own abilities. I recall reading of some very small miracles in the early days of their existence in 1948 – before they had a chance to organise any sort of resistance let alone purchase armaments and equipment - a teenage boy who threw a hand-grenade at a tank and completely disabled it! The hand grenade lodged under the caterpillar track and caused enough damage for it to come off seconds later. Another instance in which they used a light aircraft to drop soda-siphon bottles which burst on hitting the ground and frightened the soldiers below causing them to panic and flee; and another report of the Arabs being afraid of the dark and would not fight at night. These and many more such stories were reported by Arthur Koestler in his book “Promise and Fulfilment.” Small beginnings, yes, but as their enemies grew in ability the Jews were always one step ahead and now today we see how their technological know-how has grown in all spheres of warfare. We are reminded of the last chapter of the Book of Daniel were we read at verse 4, “But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” No more so than in Israel!

For centuries Israel has suffered like no other nation on earth and has yet survived and kept its identity - even without a country of its own for two thousand years. God forsook them in the reign of Zedekiah who was the last King of Israel and taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon in the year 587 BC. And the reason for this suffering is told in Ezekiel 21:24 - 27, “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Because you have made your iniquity to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your doings your sins appear - because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand. Now to you, O profane, wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose iniquity shall end, thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban, and take off the crown; nothing shall remain the same. Exalt the humble, and humble the exalted. Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, until He comes whose right it is, and I will give it to Him.”

“Whose right it is” this of course, refers to Jesus Christ the King of the Jews. When they crucified Him a New Covenant came into force and the Law of Moses was ended and replaced by Jesus commandments – “Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.” Commandments based on love and good and perfect moral standards.

So what events should we be looking for today. Mathew 24:6 to 8, Jesus said, “Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

How sad to read that “these are the beginning of sorrows.” Naturally we are very concerned but Jesus went on to say “for these things must come to pass.” But why? Because they are God’s judgments. As He has judged Israel for their wickedness and faithlessness in the past, now it is the turn of the world at large – but see that ye be not troubled.

Habakkuk saw a vision and in his prayer in response he said, ”O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ and You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and

cause *me* to see trouble? For plundering and violence *are* before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.” God replied to Habakkuk and said, “Look among the nations and watch. Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful. Their judgment and their dignity proceed from them-selves. Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and more fierce than evening wolves. Their chargers charge ahead; their cavalry comes from afar; they fly as the eagle that hastens to eat. They all come for violence; their faces are set like the east wind, they gather captives like sand. They scoff at kings, and princes are scorned by them. They deride every stronghold, for they heap up earthen mounds and seize it. Then his mind changes, and he transgresses; he commits offense, ascribing this power to his god.” (Habakkuk 1:2 – 17).

You may consider this to refer to the past as it mentions the Chaldeans but I suggest it may have a dual application and refer as well to the present or near future due to the language used, as their cavalry is “swifter than leopards” and “fly as the eagle.” However that may be the last chapter of Daniel’s prophecy tells us of the troubles to come – “At that time (the Archangel) Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every-one who is found written in the book. (Daniel 12:1)

God is very long-suffering but will not always tolerate man’s inhumanity to man and is entitled to judge as He sees fit. This is something we must accept but like Habakkuk we can always pray “O LORD, in wrath remember mercy.” Remember the Lord’s Prayer “Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” That is only fair, - Galatians 6:7 to 10. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men.”

Acts chapter 2 verses 17 to 21, “It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

May the Lord come quickly. With love in Jesus to all our readers, Russell

EXHORTATION

Philippians 2

In perusing the first verse I am struck with the method of instruction pursued by the Apostle. I like the way Paul gives his advice, the way he treats his subject, and seeks to stir up those whom he addresses to a sense of duty. He seldom resorts to open rebuke, but approaches his brethren indirectly, rendering his admonition more forcible; because, presented in this mode it runs little or no risk of giving offence - it escapes the sharp edges of human feelings. His appeals thus combine the two-fold advantage of being less liable to wound the sensitive, while they are more effective in reaching the conscience. They did not fail to produce the convictions he intended them to produce.

See how he proceeds in this chapter; he places several matters before the Philippian saints hypothetically - “If such and such a thing be, then I shall require of you in accordance thus and so.” He did

not adopt this form of speech because he imagined they had any doubt about what he advanced, but by a shrewdness of tactics (if I may use the term) he endeavoured to impress their minds more deeply with the form of his reasoning. "If there be, therefore, any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit; if any bowels and mercies" - there are four things enumerated by the Apostle. Now, who among the believers at Philippi doubted the existence of these four things?

"If there be any consolation in Christ."

The brethren knew there was consolation in Christ in a manner we cannot realise; that was the only consolation they had, in the midst of the persecutions they were called to endure. Their faith and hope were sharpened by the sword, tested, by the rack, and the faggot.

What did they fall back upon as their great sustaining power? Immediately upon the enthusiasm which a knowledge and love of the truth inspired; they thought of Him who bled and died for the same cause. They would resolve the matter in their minds something like this:- "If these great riches in the distance be real, then we can understand all these persecutions and sufferings; there is a meaning in them."

Those who were in the habit of thinking more than others would find their meditations running in this direction:- "Take courage, brethren, these afflictions are of short duration; they are light and trifling; there is a certain weight of glory awaiting us. That is our consolation; our consolation in Christ - in Him who passed through the same tribulation, and who has since ascended into heaven."

Abundance of testimony, furnished by credible witnesses, attests these facts; it is only a question of waiting for the Lord's return.

"If there be any comfort of love."

There is much comfort in love, as we all know from experience, whatever may be the object of it; none are so cold and selfish as to be entire strangers to it, though some are mere susceptible of it than others.

The love now adverted to was attracted towards Christ. And why? Because each could declare He died for me; each one who had believed the Gospel could apply this to himself. He died not only for my neighbour, or my friend, but for me. That was the comfort of love.

"If there be any fellowship of the Spirit."

What does fellowship mean? It means union, oneness, unity. The Spirit is here referred to. What is the signification arising out of this? It is that, through our relation to Christ, our connection with Him, we are lifted up unto fellowship with Him who is the God of the universe.

Ponder the high vocation wherewith we are called. What could tend to exalt man more, or to inspire him with nobler ideas? What more calculated to strengthen him for the conflict of Life? The Philippians could say, "God cannot deny Himself, the Creator of all things, the Eternal, the Supreme, His Word, like a rock, is immovable, and changes not.

"If any bowels and mercies."

This implies tenderness, sympathy, goodwill brotherly kindness, and to cover all, the mantle of charity.

Are these graces manifest? Paul was not speaking with any uncertainty so far as he himself was concerned.

At the time he wrote this he was a prisoner at Rome; he had a chain on one hand, with which he was kept bound to a Roman soldier, for thus were Roman prisoners held in custody.

It was in that condition and from the city, he addressed this epistle,

Had he shewed no bowls of mercies"? Let memory dwell upon his shipwrecks, his stripes, his imminent assassination, his being stoned and taken up for dead; and then this chain with which he is bound.

What a proof of his spirit of self-sacrifice do these things offer!

Now, these sufferings were indisputable; and, alluding to the "conflict" which he had, he exhorts the saints at Philippi in these touching words:-

"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."

"Of one mind" – how strong the advice appears when we consider the close sympathy, the oneness of purpose and feeling, existing between the Apostle and Christ.

Paul says, "He died for me. I bear in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus. I know that bonds and afflictions await me everywhere, but I am ready for the worst extremity, prepared to follow in His steps who suffered so much for me."

Oh! how far removed were this disciple and the Master from anything producing a jar, anything approaching discord, however slight.

How perfect their unity; how warm and mutual their sympathies, and how self-sacrificing they were.

The entreaty of the Apostle is "fulfil ye my joy."

Brethren and sisters, let us try to cherish and display this disposition for a week,

I venture to affirm that in a remarkable degree we shall discover that it will save us from many disagreeable things.

Petty annoyances, malice, wrath; pride will wear a very ugly aspect indeed.

Our duty is to "be like minded, having the same love."

"Let nothing be done through strife and vain glory."

There is nothing about which there has been more strife than about religion; not only strife of words, but clashing of swords.

To destroy heretics, "holy men" (so called) have not scrupled to resort to poison and the dagger - in fact, no atrocities have been too shocking for religious partisans to practise; no means of torture too cruel for their mistaken zeal.

Happily, people have learned somewhat better; neither is there the same opportunity for persecution.

We may descend to a lower scale and examine next this matter of "vain glory."

When we come to the home circle to our own vicinity, whether among friends or not, we find much that tends to embitter and mar all that is sweet and good.

Our neighbour, our brother, or sister, possesses something which another has not, and cannot lawfully obtain; this can cause envy; there is a little rancour, a little uneasiness about it.

To what does all this amount? Surely to this, that such persons would never be satisfied except on the ruin of society itself; their emotions betray the very essence of selfishness, and the more they had the more they would want.

Now, according to the teaching of the apostle, just the opposite should prevail among us. The prosperity of others should be a source of delight to ourselves. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

What happiness this generous disposition would create - to be glad that other people were enriched, and to rejoice in their welfare.

"In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves." This admonition is quite out of harmony with what we too often see manifested. Some walk as though they deemed themselves superior to others.

Some may be particularly open to the charge of vanity, evincing an amount of affection which may not comport with the Christian character, being opposed to its simplicity, sincerity and humility enjoined by the precepts of Christ's teaching..

"Let each esteem others better than himself."

How blessed would be the result were this counsel heeded. It is easy to perceive what great mutual benefits would accrue from the exhibition of such a spirit.

Paul illustrates his exhortation by reference to the example of the Lord.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ."

He was the Son of God; in certain respects equal with God, and far above all men. How does the Apostle enforce this lesson? We should note his words for our practical use. He says, "though Jesus was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, (yet He) made Himself of no reputation." It would read more intelligibly if the last clause was rendered "did not meditate upon usurpation."

A workman knows what it is for another to try to take his place. Look at the greatness of Christ. God tells us to look on Him as on Himself; and yet the Saviour did not walk about Jerusalem boasting 'I am the Christ! - the Sanhedrin a mere figment!'

No; He seldom uttered an expression to call attention to Himself, but ever sought to magnify His Father.

We can readily apply these things to ourselves for in our great Exemplar there was no feeling of jealousy, no kind of usurpation; that was not in the mind of Christ. He did not parade His own powers and merits; on the contrary "He made Himself of no reputation." though our Master He behaved as a servant - not an idle servant, but as one who had a mind to work, a zeal to carry out His mission.

His highest enjoyment seems to have consisted in going about doing good and alleviating human misery.

"He was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is very pleasant to look forward to when He shall be seated on the throne of His Father David and to picture ourselves placed on His right, and on His left, earthy potentates bending down before us; but there is something to be done before then.

We must be better than they, for Christ said, "except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven."

We must not forget the preparatory stage; this would be acting as did the Jews of old who expected their Messiah to come and reign in great glory, but overlooked His previous humiliation, suffering and death.

The appointment of Deity is present discipline and humiliation, that we may be suited for future exaltation. It is true that the prospects of the promised inheritance and of assimilation to the divine nature is calculated to make us think highly of ourselves; still, we must also “think soberly.”

Let the grace of humility temper all our aspirations, even of the glory that awaits us.

Edward Turney.

“There are no such powerful means of disciplining the whole moral man as is found in secret prayer. There we must pray for forgiveness as we forgive those who have offended against us.” – Edward Turney

A Love Story **Or, A Story of Faith**

A Bride for Isaac

“Now Abraham was old, well advanced in age; and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. So Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house, who ruled over all that he had, “Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”

And the servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I take your son back to the land from which you came?” But Abraham said to him, “Beware that you do not take my son back there. The LORD God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land,’ He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. And if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be released from this oath; only do not take my son back there.” So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter. Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, for all his master’s goods *were* in his hand.

And he arose and went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor. And he made his camels kneel down outside the city by a well of water at evening time, the time when women go out to draw water. Then he said, “O LORD God of my master Abraham, please give me success this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, here I stand by the well of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. Now let it be that the young woman to whom I say, ‘Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink’ — *let her be the one* You have appointed for Your servant Isaac. And by this I will know that You have shown kindness to my master.” And it happened, before he had finished speaking, that behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her pitcher on her shoulder. Now the young woman *was* very beautiful to behold, a virgin; no man had known her. And she went down to the well, filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her and said, “Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher.” So she said, “Drink, my lord.” Then she quickly let her pitcher down to her hand, and gave him a drink. And when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw *water* for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.” Then she quickly emptied her pitcher into the trough, ran back to the well to draw *water*, and drew for all his camels. And the man, wondering at her, remained silent so as to know whether the LORD had made his journey prosperous or not. So it was, when the camels had finished drinking, that the man took a golden nose ring weighing half a shekel, and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten *shekels* of gold, and

said, “Whose daughter *are* you? Tell me, please, is there room *in* your father’s house for us to lodge?” So she said to him, “I *am* the daughter of Bethuel, Milcah’s son, whom she bore to Nahor.” Moreover she said to him, “We have both straw and feed enough, and room to lodge.” Then the man bowed down his head and worshiped the LORD. And he said, “Blessed *be* the LORD God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His mercy and His truth toward my master. As for me, being on the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master’s brethren.” So the young woman ran and told her mother’s household these things.

Now Rebekah had a brother whose name *was* Laban, and Laban ran out to the man by the well. So it came to pass, when he saw the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister’s wrists, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, saying, “Thus the man spoke to me,” that he went to the man. And there he stood by the camels at the well. And he said, “Come in, O blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels.”

Then the man came to the house. And he unloaded the camels, and provided straw and feed for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who *were* with him. *Food* was set before him to eat, but he said, “I will not eat until I have told about my errand.” And he said, “Speak on.” So he said, “I *am* Abraham’s servant. The LORD has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great; and He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. And Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and to him he has given all that he has. Now my master made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell; but you shall go to my father’s house and to my family, and take a wife for my son.’ And I said to my master, ‘Perhaps the woman will not follow me.’ But he said to me, ‘The LORD, before whom I walk, will send His angel with you and prosper your way; and you shall take a wife for my son from my family and from my father’s house. You will be clear from this oath when you arrive among my family; for if they will not give *her* to you, then you will be released from my oath.’ “And this day I came to the well and said, ‘O LORD God of my master Abraham, if You will now prosper the way in which I go, behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass that when the virgin comes out to draw water, and I say to her, “Please give me a little water from your pitcher to drink,” and she says to me, “Drink, and I will draw for your camels also,” — let her be the woman whom the LORD has appointed for my master’s son.’ “But before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah, coming out with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down to the well and drew water. And I said to her, ‘Please let me drink.’ And she made haste and let her pitcher down from her shoulder, and said, ‘Drink, and I will give your camels a drink also.’ So I drank, and she gave the camels a drink also. Then I asked her, and said, ‘Whose daughter *are* you?’ And she said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son, whom Milcah bore to him.’ So I put the nose ring on her nose and the bracelets on her wrists. And I bowed my head and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD God of my master Abraham, who had led me in the way of truth to take the daughter of my master’s brother for his son. Now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me. And if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.” Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you either bad or good. Here *is* Rebekah before you; take *her* and go, and let her be your master’s son’s wife, as the LORD has spoken.” And it came to pass, when Abraham’s servant heard their words, that he worshiped the LORD, bowing himself to the earth. Then the servant brought out jewellery of silver, jewellery of gold, and clothing, and gave *them* to Rebekah. He also gave precious things to her brother and to her mother.

And he and the men who *were* with him ate and drank and stayed all night. Then they arose in the morning, and he said, “Send me away to my master.” But her brother and her mother said, “Let the young woman stay with us a few days, at least ten; after that she may go.” And he said to them, “Do not hinder me, since the LORD has prospered my way; send me away so that I may go to my master.” So they said, “We will call the young woman and ask her personally.” Then they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” And she said, “I will go.”

So they sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham’s servant and his men. And they blessed Rebekah and said to her: “Our sister, may you become The mother *of* thousands of ten thousands; and may your descendants possess the gates of those who hate them.” Then Rebekah and her maids arose, and they rode on the camels and followed the man. So the servant took Rebekah and departed.

Now Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he dwelt in the South. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels *were* coming. Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel; for she had said to the servant, “Who *is* this man walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It *is* my master.” So she took a veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done.

Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.

Genesis 24

A Consideration of Mark 13

One of the purposes of prophecy is to help us understand the present and immediate future; to encourage hope and watchfulness.

The Lord Jesus gave this prophecy to warn His disciples of the coming judgment on Jerusalem, and those who were to reject Him, a judgment foretold by the prophet Isaiah, in chapter 61, which our Lord read in the synagogue early in His ministry; Luke 4:17, “And there was delivered to him the book of Isaiah, and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it is written. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me I preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book and gave it to the minister and sat down, and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began to say unto them. This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” But Isaiah’s prophecy continued further with the words, “and the day of vengeance of our God.”

At this time Jesus was calling their attention to the work He had before Him, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” This was not the day of vengeance; the day of vengeance was to come after they had rejected Him, and crucified Him, some forty years later.

Matthew chapter 24 and Luke chapter 21 give parallel accounts with Mark 13 and we see from Matthew’s account particularly that the Lord Jesus had just spent a considerable time in the Temple teaching the people, reproving the scribes and Pharisees, confuting the Sadducees; discussing with the lawyers and answering many questions. And before finally leaving the Temple Jesus had a message for the people of Jerusalem; “Ye shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord.” Here our Lord is looking ahead 2000 years to Israel’s response to Him when He comes again - after their conversion and acceptance of Him.

The rest of His prophecy in chapter 13 fills in some of the events between their time and Israel’s future welcome.

When will Israel say “Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord”? The coming of the Lord will be first for His Bride; those who are and have been faithful to Him and they “will forever be with their Lord,” and secondly, the coming of Messiah to Israel. But this may be in two stages; for the redeemed will “come with singing unto Zion” and then He will meet the elders of Israel on the Mount of Olives. It may be here that Elijah carries out his part in Isaiah’s prophecy in chapter 40 verse 1, where God tells him to comfort His people the people of Israel who have suffered so much - “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to (or, to the hearts of) Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins.” Then in verse 9 we read, “O thou that bringest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength, be not afraid, say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God (or, Elohim).”

This is the time when the Jews “shall look upon him whom they have pierced and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for his only begotten son, and shall be in bitterness for him as one is in bitterness for his first-born.’ (Zechariah 12). We note they do not mourn for themselves, for having seen the destruction of the invaders by God they know that they have been saved by Him; also, having Elijah with them gives them this confidence, and they now look for the coming of their Messiah. They mourn for Him because they are aware that their fathers rejected Him and crucified Him two thousand years earlier.

And yet even these is may not be the time for the people of Jerusalem to cry “Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord.” Another prophet sees a day for such a cry, for in Malachi chapter 3 verse 1 we are told, “Behold I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in, behold he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

This could be the day the Lord Jesus comes with His Bride to the marriage super in His Father's house. These that have delighted in the messenger of the covenant are waiting for Him in joyful anticipation; they are those who have been in the wilderness under Elijah, who has restored all things, having turned the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:6) , to whom God has given a heart of flesh in place of their stony hearts, as we read in Ezekiel 36: 24-26, “I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and I will bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.”

A great occasion like this must be after all of God's judgments have been poured out and the Lord has come to His own. - But we digress.

Mark 13:1, “And as Jesus went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him. Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here, and Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down. And as he sat upon the Mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and John and James and Andrew asked him privately. Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?” If we add the questions in Matthew's and Luke's parallel accounts we also have; “What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world? And what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?”

Jesus begins His answers with a warning - verses 5 and 6, “Take heed, lest any man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” Verse 22 of this same chapter has the same warning but with a reservation; “For false Christs and false prophets shall arise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.” Although Jesus is warning them to take heed and watch for the signs of the time, He does not suggest they could be deceived: it was not possible that the elect could mistake false Christs or false prophets for Himself; these impostors were another sign of the time of the destruction of the temple.

The historian, Josephus, records that in the early years of the Christian Church many did come forward claiming to be the Messiah; among them was Simon Magnus of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 8 verses 9 to 13. We hear no more of this Simon in the Scriptures, but several early historians give detailed accounts of his life and teachings. He apparently withdrew from Christianity and initiated a movement of his own in which Christian and pagan elements were freely and curiously combined. He had a large following in Samaria and also in Rome, where he gained a following in the time of Claudius. Justin Martyr, the historian, says he was worshipped as a god, even as the supreme god, and claimed to have come down from heaven; and one of his titles was "The Great Power of God"! He came to his end, it seems, by allowing himself to be buried alive expecting to be able to rise the third day!

In researching the subject of false teachers and false Christs, there is a surprising amount of material to be found in the Encyclopaedia Britannica; also this material reveals what a large following some of these people had. Verse 7 of Mark 13 gives further signs; “And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.” Some have stated that this prophecy is concerned only with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Romans in AD70, and that our Lord's

warning was for this event. However, verse 26 reads, “and then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.”

There is no evidence that at the destruction of Jerusalem or the temple that Christ was seen.

Although perhaps most of this chapter 13 concerns our Lord's warnings for that generation, it appears He also gave similar warnings for His second advent. Some of the repetition is accounted for if we consider both the Roman invasion of AD70 and the state of the world just before His return.

Verse 8; “For nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.” Both of these verses describe a progressive deterioration in the affairs of men, applicable to the period of upsets in the Roman era - and the time preceding the second coming of our Lord Jesus. A time of trouble leading up to a direct judgment of God, the first on Israel, with a salvation of the elect; and the second, a judgment on the world, with a salvation for the remnant of Israel, and a special salvation for the Redeemed - a resurrection for the dead in Christ and a changing for those who are alive in Christ at His coming. 1 Timothy 4:10 reads; “... the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe” - a “special” salvation - one to eternal life for the faithful, the elect.

Verse 9 is worded in a much more personal way; “Take heed to yourselves (this is for you): for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.” Of the Apostles and disciples we read in the Scriptures of Peter and John being imprisoned several times very early in their ministry; Steven was stoned to death; Paul was stoned and left for dead, but recovered, he was imprisoned, and beaten; Silas was imprisoned, and James put to death, but not only do we have the records in the Acts of the Apostles and Paul's letters, but historians of the time tell of brutal killings and of persecutions of the early Christians. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that Peter and John were called before the High Priest, arraigned before Herod, and later, Paul was brought before Governor Felix, and King Agrippa. All because they spoke of what they knew and believed; they witnessed at great cost to themselves and yet set the cost as nothing. Paul wrote, in Romans 8:18, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

Verse 10; “And the gospel must first be published among all nations.” This is one of those verses, which, if applied to the world of AD 70 only, would be limiting the expression “all nations” to the then known world around the Mediterranean and Europe and the near East. Not very accurate, but it is more understandable if applied to the present time of mass communications.

However, verse 11 keeps our attention fixed on the Lord's message to His disciples: “But when they shall lead you and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Spirit.”

On the day of Pentecost the Apostles received the gift of tongues, they were also given a degree of knowledge and understanding, and the power to heal, together with a perfect memory to recall “all things... whatsoever I have said unto you.” (John 14:26). And we see from the speeches of Steven, John, Peter, and Paul such power that none could withstand them.

Verse 12 tells of the distressing climate among the people - a time of hatred, envy, and jealousy, and in verse 13 we read; “and ye shall be hated of all men for my names sake: but he that shall endure unto the end shall be saved.” We may wonder why the beliefs of the Christian should arouse such hatred. It started with the Scribes and Pharisees, when their learning was challenged; and it was taken up by the priests when their authority was challenged. This is a natural reaction when men have cause to be envious or jealous of a new idea becoming popular, or when long held traditions are undermined by a new refreshing teaching. A threat to the established order will often cause irrational behaviour, and bring about hasty and ill-considered actions.

Jesus challenged the beliefs they had accepted for generations. His new teaching meant they would have to examine every aspect of their lives, their traditions and ceremonies, even their own Scriptures and their

consciences; a formidable task for a people grounded in a history claiming to be a peculiar people favoured by their God.

“He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” Endurance is being faithful in adversity. In Revelation chapter 2, verse 10, we read “to the church at Smyrna Jesus said. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” “Be ye faithful unto death” or be faithful all your life, in other words. This present adversity was to lead to the judgment of God on the people of Jerusalem, but God had sent them a Prophet, Jesus, to enable them to escape with their lives; but if they fell away and neglected His message, if they failed to watch, if they did not endure to the end, they could easily become victims of the Romans.

After this promise Jesus turns to a detailed warning, identifying the threat and giving very detailed instructions in how to make good their escape. Verse 14; “But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not (let him that readeth understand), then let them that be in Judea flee to the mountains: and let him that is on the house top not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take anything out of his house: and let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment.” This is the first answer to the question “When shall these things be?” i.e., the destruction of the temple. Here, perhaps is the only clear clue for them to respond to. But what of the “abomination of desolation”? If it stood in the Holy Place, was it the temple? If so, surely it would be too late to flee. The same would apply if it was the city itself; again, too late. In Luke 21:20 – 22 we read; “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed about with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh,” a clear and unmistakable sign to all believers to act swiftly and flee.

Haste would be required in order to escape before the siege of Jerusalem was secured. The siege began some time before the Feast of the Passover, and many people from all the country had come up for the feast and the population of the city was greatly increased. The streets and the houses would be full of people, and the quickest way to the city gates would be across the roof tops, the houses being close together and of similar height (according to one commentary), and if speed of flight was necessary then this detail of how to flee was very practical.

The destruction of Jerusalem was recorded by the historian Josephus and was probably the worst calamity one could imagine; over one and a half million men, women and children were put to the sword or burnt in their houses - and this in such a small city gives some idea of the horror of that day, a day already preceded by a long siege which had brought famine and disease of disastrous proportions.

This was God's judgment on a rebellious people, a people who had rejected His only begotten Son who had come to the lost sheep of Israel. Their leaders had knowingly crucified the Son of God: we may find this incredible but men will often become irrational when their immediate self-interest is threatened; this is the corruption of power.

The Lord Jesus gave this prophetic warning so that His own people would not suffer with the judgment of the world; they were not to be included in the judgment in any way. Some historians say that no Christians died in Jerusalem that day, also they tell us that many Christians had already fled to Pella, east of Jordan, nearly two years earlier, having not only been able to see but to foresee the signs of the time (even a preoccupation in those days!).

The Christians who fled in the last days of Jerusalem would probably seek refuge in the same place, for it would be common knowledge among such a close community, a closeness brought about by persecution and a common faith. It would not be difficult to imagine how moved they would be as they met together to wonder at so great a deliverance, and how thankful they would be toward their Lord for warning them and how grateful they would be that they had understood, believed and acted.

Verse 20; “And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.” Those days were shortened, not because some may otherwise be left behind, but because God had compassion on their feelings.

He had compassion on their compassion. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked and He knows that we, too, suffer when we see His judgments in the earth. "For the elect's sake" is a generous gesture towards our feelings. Judgment is necessary, but He restrains His judgment for the elect's sake. In a similar way the windows of Noah's ark were too high to see out of. Noah and his family knew what was happening but were spared unnecessary anguish; they did not witness the destruction of the people and were in some degree saved from -the horror of that day. The prophet Malachi expresses similar concern when he said "Lord, in wrath, remember mercy."

Our God is a just God and can only shew His mercy to those who believe in Him. He is most generous towards those who will do His will, and Jesus promised "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine..." The doctrine is the pathway to eternal life.

Verses 21 and 22; "And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, Lo, he is there; believe him not: for false Christs and false prophets shall arise and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect." This second warning emphasises the threat there was to be from impostors and their teachings, and in verse 23, Jesus reminds them that He alone has told them all that they need to know - if it is not of His words, take heed, for it is likely to be false. All that is necessary for their escape has been told them; "Take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things."

From here on in this chapter we have answers to other questions; "When shall all these things be fulfilled? What shall be the sign of thy coming? and of the end of the world?"

Verses 24 to 27; "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and they shall gather his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven."

This prophecy is after the tribulation of those days; two thousand years after. His disciples asked several questions about His coming again, and this is one of only a few of His prophecies giving some details of His Second Advent.

Although at this time the disciples did not understand all that was to happen, they knew that in some way Jesus was to come to glory - even then they had an hope and expectation that it would be soon, and here He had an opportunity to reveal more of the future to them. Jesus knew His words would be recorded and that they would bring comfort to future generations. Here, He looks to the distant time, the time of the end of the age.

Jesus begins with "The sun and the moon darkened" - a decline in the civilized world towards the dark ages, a decline in the purity of the true gospel of salvation; the upset brought about by the ruling power of Rome, and then a continuing deterioration in the affairs of men and a darkness hiding the true gospel through faith, finally ending with the great hope realised; the great day promised from the beginning.

From verse 28 on are some signs of the times to help us understand the present, and hope for the future. "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; when her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near." The fig tree as a symbol of Israel indicates that something is about to take place, a coming into leaf. This is one of the clearest parables ever given to foretell Israel's burgeoning, her regathering, as a sign.

Israel's dispersion began in AD 70 with the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, but all through the ages devout Jews have carried the hope of returning to their land; all to no avail until the end of the last century, when Theodore Herzl, spending all his time and energy, and his fortune for the Zionist movement, managed to convene their first congress at Basel, Switzerland, in 1897 – less than one hundred years ago.. Since that time, not only has Israel made a home in their country, but many dozens of new countries have been born or reborn. In Luke 21:29 we read; "Behold the fig tree and all the trees." We have not only Israel, surely the most spectacular, but all the nations putting forth new growth. Now we know summer is near, even at the doors.

Verse 30; “Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.” Since Israel became a national state in May, 1948 more than one generation has passed, but is a generation an exact period of time? If it was verses 32 and 33 would not be necessary because if we had an exact time period to work to we would know the time of Jesus coming, and would not have to watch! It follows then, we cannot expect to alight on an exact period of time for this prophecy and verse 32 indicates to us the futility of trying to do so. “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not even the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” And so “Take heed, watch and pray for ye know not when the time is,” And why? “For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all. Watch.” An instruction for both events!

If we turn to Matthew's account, chapter 24, verses 37 to 39, we have a more detailed sign for the latter days, “But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” So typical of this present age! How near the time must be. Fifty years ago one could hear a preacher using this prophecy to indicate that things would continue in a normal fashion right up to the end - eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage - describing ordinary everyday life; but how the significance of these words have changed! Eating and drinking in restaurants and public houses has become a way of life for millions, along with entertainment throughout the day and night: eat, drink and be merry.... Marrying and giving in marriage - the words have now a different meaning, one broken marriage can lead to two more, and giving in marriage could be temporary common law associations.

As we come closer to the events prophesied, so our perspective changes; almost like being wise after the event, but how thought-provoking to look back a few years and then realise the rapid progress of time and events. Matthew 24 continues with, not a sign but an event; verse 40, “Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left,” A judgment with salvation by separation; and if we turn to Luke's account (17:37), Jesus is asked, “Where Lord? And he said unto them. Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.” This is a gathering together of those taken away; those who have been separated from the world, who do not come under the judgment of the world and “will be for ever with their Lord.” The “body” is “the Word made flesh;” the Word on which the eagles feed. The elect are seen as eagles in Isaiah 40:31;

“But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

In Luke 21:36 we have our exhortation, “Watch ye therefore, and pray always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” As brethren and sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ we have, through the waters of baptism, put our seal, or acceptance, to a covenant. We have witnessed that we believe that Jesus has redeemed us to our God. He has purchased us out of Adam to Himself, and now we are the children of God. Only we can break this covenant, and it is therefore up to us to maintain it. This is done in many ways; firstly, by belief and understanding, then by obedience (perhaps the most difficult), then by witnessing and bringing forth works mete for repentance.

When Jesus said “Watch and pray” He warned against lassitude and lack of concentration in keeping all things in mind; and of prayer, “Pray ye always that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all those things that are coming in the earth;” when we pray our first thoughts may be that we are not worthy, nevertheless, it is essential in order to maintain our standing with God that we seek His forgiveness, and accept His many merciful kindnesses towards us every day.

To pray to be accounted worthy contains the understanding that the accounting is an essential truth, the word indicating the meaning of being regarded, or looked upon, as worthy - a gift from God; His justification, not our worthiness.

We see here His wonderful love and mercy, not only in forgiveness because we have asked, believing, but a complete taking away of sins, a justification unto righteousness.

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Romans, in chapter 4, verse 21 to chapter 5, verse 2, said “and Abraham being fully persuaded that what God had promised. He was able also to perform, and therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness, now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Brother Ray Gregory

“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?
Micah 6:8

BIBLE ESSAY NO. 7

Understanding The Scriptures

“This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.”

So said Jesus to His disciples. So we see that the privilege of obtaining eternal life depends on knowing God and Christ, and what has been revealed to us by them. The only source to turn to for this information is His word as left on record in the Bible, this was written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit, and so its contents do not consist of ideas of men, but of God’s thoughts. As the Apostle Peter also wrote to the early churches, “Knowing this first that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old times by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Peter 1:20,21).

But for the right understanding of the Scriptures, knowledge of the Old Testament is as important as that of the New. In fact, once we comprehend the link between Old and New Testaments we have much of the clue to the complete understanding of the Word of God. So in this essay we shall briefly survey a few events and prophecies mentioned in the Old Testament and referred to again in the New.

In the first book of the Bible we read, after a short account of the creation, how Adam and Eve sinned, of their attempt to cover themselves with fig-leaves, and of God’s making them animal skins for their covering instead. This teaches, right from the start, an important lesson, which is borne out by later incidents in the Bible and which cannot be impressed too strongly - when man has sinned, God is eager and willing to forgive. But it must be on His terms; what God says, man must do, not what man thinks. But let us pursue the history given in the Book of Genesis a little further. We learn next of Cain and Able. They both brought an offering to God. We are told that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, and that the Lord had not respect to his offering; that Abel brought sheep of his flock and that the Lord had respect to his offering, and we ask, Why?

Before we attempt to answer this question we ought to point out two important principles to be applied always when trying to get any information from the Bible, and to study it properly.

The first is that the Bible is full of cross references. An incident or a prophecy dealt with at one place is referred to again at another - where least expected. We shall find several examples of this as we go on. For now let us point out that this being so, then in order to understand the Bible really completely and thoroughly, it is indispensable to read it right through from beginning to end; not once, but several times.

The second principle is that many things mentioned in Scripture have a two-fold meaning; the obvious one, which appears just from a superficial reading of it, and also a more hidden meaning which is only revealed much later in Scripture and which we can only therefore get to know by reading through the whole of the Bible. For example, we read early on in Genesis of two trees that were in the Garden of Eden; the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life, and we are told that when Adam and Eve sinned they partook of the first, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and as a consequence God withheld from them the Tree of Life by driving them out of the Garden. Now this Tree of Life is mentioned again in the very last chapter of the Bible, the last chapter of the Book of Revelation given by Christ Himself. This last chapter gives a description of the throne of God in the Kingdom finally to be established on earth, and an invitation to anybody willing to avail himself of a place in that Kingdom.

This is what we are told of the Tree of Life, “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the Tree of Life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:1,2). And as a further cross-reference we go back again to the Old Testament where the prophet Ezekiel described a vision very similar to the one just referred to in the Book of Revelation. This is the vision of the Temple in Jerusalem, restored after the return of Christ ^(1 see footnote) which we hope will shortly come to pass. Again we read of waters issuing out of the midst of the Temple of God. These waters are to be endowed with a life-giving force. Again we read of trees at the bank of the river. This is what we are told of these trees, “And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed, it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary, and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and the leaf thereof for medicine.” (Ezekiel 47;12).

So then, from all these dispersed statements we learn this: in the future Kingdom, the throne of God, with the Temple, occupies the centre, and from it issues a river that contains some life-giving force. On its bank there is a tree (several trees, in Ezekiel’s vision; but this is no contradiction, because Ezekiel’s vision refers to a different time), and this tree bears fresh fruit every month and its leaves are connected with the power of healing.

All this information we get by putting all the statements of this life-giving tree together. So here, then, is an example to show the necessity to read the whole Bible, because only then are we in a position to know where to find all that is taught therein on a particular subject. Also, the Book of Revelation from which we took one quotation, is a book full of symbolical language, although not a single symbol used is in any way mysterious; they are all explained in earlier books of the Bible if only we know where to look for them. It is not easy to say whether the tree is one of the many symbols, or whether there will, in fact, be such a tree in the New Jerusalem to be established. One thing is certain, that is that the tree mentioned in Genesis was, at any rate, an actual tree, though no details about it are revealed. And so we see how this tree, mentioned in the Book of Genesis eventually becomes a symbol of eternal life and of healing. Finally, the waters which we have seen to issue from the throne and the Temple of God are tied up with the description of the Garden of Eden in Genesis, where we read that a river went out from Eden to water the Garden, which divided into four, flowing roughly north, south, east and west.

So all these statements, apparently taken at random, dovetail together. They all show one and the same pattern, the centre of which is occupied by the Glory of God, and every time it is mentioned we read of a river, a tree and the idea of eternal life and health connected with it. This, incidentally, shows the Divine inspiration of Scripture, for the writers of all these books lived many centuries apart.

We shall now apply these principles to answer our first question, Why was Cain’s offering of the fruits of the ground rejected, and why was Abel’s offering of the firstling of the flock accepted? Let us look, then, where the matter is mentioned again and we find this about Abel, in the Epistle to the early Hebrew believers, “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts, and by it he being dead yet speaketh” (Hebrews 11:4). From this we see that faith, and the kind of sacrifice brought, both have something to do with it. Note also the clause, “by which faith he obtained witness that he was righteous. God testifying of his gifts.” From this we see how we

must go about to please God, first, faith, then doing what God commands us. Let us now pursue these two subjects separately, Faith and Sacrifice.

Sacrifice. Let us take the second one first. The bringing of animal sacrifices occupies a central part of the Old Testament, not only in the Law of Moses, for it is much older than that. In fact, we can trace it back to the fall of man in Eden, for when God clothed the first pair with skins, some animal must have been slain. Furthermore, all men on record long before Moses, of whom it is recorded that they were approved of God, brought an animal sacrifice at least once. In fact, the promises of blessings which God made to all His righteous servants were confirmed in that God showed, in some visible manner, that He accepted their sacrifice. But all these were animal sacrifices. Sacrifices of the fruits of the field are only exceptional and were commanded in the Law of Moses as thank offerings. But the sacrifice as a means of forgiveness of sin was always an animal offering, and under the Law of Moses, it was a strict commandment that the blood of the animal was to be poured out to the ground. So then, the acceptable sin-offering in the sight of God, is an animal. That was why Abel had offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, and that was why God witnessed that he was righteous. It is vital to realise that these sacrifices and the shedding of their blood were not just ancient customs which somehow at the time of Christ had become out of date. Their meaning is fully revealed in the New Testament and without this revelation we cannot possibly understand the mission of Christ.

First of all then, let us look into the kind of sacrifice, the sacrifice necessary to obtain God's pardon for a sin committed was a lamb without blemish, so the children of Israel were commanded by Moses. And John the Baptist introduced Christ as "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Also in the Book of Revelation we read of the throne of God and the Lamb, which again refers to Christ. So it is evident that these lambs pointed to Christ. His blood was shed when the Roman soldiers pierced His side on Calvary, and although the Roman soldiers did not know it, this was not just something that happened by chance, for this was the way that Christ should reconcile the world to God, and this was the plan of God ever since the first pair sinned: that is, ever since God's forgiveness for sin became necessary. This is why John introduces Him as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, for the whole of Adam's posterity suffered as a consequence of his sin. The writer of Hebrews deals with the meaning of these sacrifices and how they pointed to Christ, in great detail. Space does not permit us to go into it in detail but we must give just one verse from it showing the necessity of the shedding of the blood, part of the Law of Moses. We are told "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22). Cain, who brought of the fruit, cannot possibly have shed blood. One of the first principles in God's dealings with man is that we can obtain His favour only if we come to Him on His terms and that in faith, that if we do our part, the promises which God made for those who love Him He is able and willing to fulfil.

Faith. This brings us now to the second part of the question of the sacrifice of Abel; his faith. For the inspired writer of the letter to the Hebrews leaves us in no doubt that Abel's faith played an essential part, and was just as important a reason for his acceptance as the actual sacrifice itself; in fact, the promises made by God to those who faithfully serve Him and who accept them in faith, is the second important theme, besides the one on sacrifice, running right through the Bible. In a very vague way Christ was intimated to Adam and Eve after they sinned, for God promised them a seed who would bruise the head of the serpent, the cause of the first sin. More promises were made to Abraham. He said to Abraham that in his seed would all nations be blessed, and that his seed would become an innumerable multitude. God made this promise at a time when his wife, Sara, was already old, and He fulfilled it in that Sara, through a miracle, bare him a son in her old age. But Abraham believed God long before this was fulfilled. He knew that with God nothing is impossible, and he believed God when a messenger told him that Sara herself would have a son, though at that time she was at least 90 years of age.

This is an important statement, "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6). Why this statement is so important is revealed in the New Testament, especially in the epistles to the Romans and Galatians. In the latter, Paul repeats this very verse to show that, in his own words, "they which are of faith the same are the children of Abraham." (Galatians 3:6,7). Space permits us to give only a summary of what Paul has to say on this righteousness by faith. Christ is not only the Son of God, but also the Son of Mary, who was a Jewess. Hence this is the Seed of Abraham in whom are all nations to be blessed, and Paul goes on to show that if we show the childlike undoubting faith of Abraham,

not regarding anything God promised as impossible, though not the natural seed of Abraham, are Abraham's seed by adoption, and at the same time, belong to Christ.

Christ, by the way is not only the Seed of Abraham, He is also the Seed promised in Eden, and earlier, we have seen that He is also the Lamb, the offering for sin. So again we see how Old and New Testaments dovetail together, one common thread running through both. We can now get, perhaps, an insight into an observation made earlier in this essay, namely, that on important occasions, God always confirmed His promises by showing visibly that He accepted the sacrifices brought by His servants. The important thing is that both sacrifice and promises are related to Christ; he is the centre of both, and indeed all past history was determined by God with the final object of setting up His Kingdom with His own Son as the King. And not King only but the One who personally undid the harm done when the first pair sinned; for He it is who reconciled the world to God by giving His own life and took our sins upon Himself, who was sinless.

Space does not permit us to deal with the later revelations about Christ by the prophets. Let us just say that in the last books of the Old Testament it is clearly shown that at a time not too distant, God will re-gather His chosen people, Israel, into the Holy Land, and the Kingdom of God is there to be established with the ancient nation of Israel restored, and Christ, the Ruler of Israel, and indeed of all the other nations. This is the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus Christ and His Apostles. So then the connection between the Old and New Testaments, so vital to the understanding of Scripture, is this:

(1) The shedding of blood is absolutely necessary for the remission of sins. The animals so killed were symbols of Christ who came to reconcile the world to God by giving His own life-blood.

(2) The promises of eternal life are to those who serve God in a child-like faith, counting nothing impossible with Him. These promises centre round Christ and the future Kingdom of the faithful ones, who, by that time, will have obtained eternal life, symbolised by the trees of which we spoke earlier. They will gain this life by the resurrection from the dead. They are also regarded as the children of Abraham to whom these promises were first made.

Allow me to close with an appeal to the reader to read the whole Bible; gradually but systematically, preferably a portion daily, according to some plan. There are many printed Bible guides in use, they all have their "for's" and "against's" but any one will serve its purpose as long as it takes you through the whole Bible. Only so is it possible to become acquainted with the Word of God. That many may get this vital knowledge of what God has left on record for those desiring His favour, is the writer's earnest prayer.

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exerciseth loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 9:23,24).

"Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." (Micah 6:6-8).

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Romans 11:33-36).

Leo Dreifuss.

Footnote 1). Many hold the view that the temple of Ezekiel's prophecy was that built at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. E.g. Ezekiel 43:11 cannot be applied to the future Kingdom age.

The Heavenly Things of Hebrews 9:23

What are the Heavenly Things?

The ninth verse of this same chapter gives the clue to the answer to our question. There we read concerning the Tabernacle and its worship, “which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience,” then reading on to the 14th verse we learn that the blood of Christ obtains for us an eternal redemption and purges our conscience, too. The first three verses of the tenth chapter tell us that the law was a shadow of good things to come, and could not make the comers thereunto perfect, as there was a remembrance made of sins every year. Verses 12 to 14 tell us that Jesus “made one sacrifice for sins for ever,” and “perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

From these verses we gather that the ordinances of the Law of Moses with the Tabernacle and its service were symbols, shadows, or figures of that which is referred to in this ninth chapter at verse 23 as “the heavenly things.”

The Tabernacle itself symbolised two states, or orders of priesthoods. The first Tabernacle, or tent, which was the largest, was fitted for the service of the priests; those men who did the service of God, and they were types of all the believers of the Gospel in these days, as Paul says, “Ye are a royal priesthood.” In other words, we are called to serve God in holy places; in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, serving, as it were, in the first Tabernacle, where we find the “Lightstand,” or Candlestick, speaking to us of the Light of God’s Word; the shewbread, speaking to us of the Bread of Life, the Lord Jesus Christ on whose words we feed; and the Altar of Incense, which we are told represents the “prayers of the saints,” or believers. These are the Holy, or Heavenly Places in Christ Jesus.

The second Tabernacle, or “Holy of Holies,” or “Holiest of All,” was the place into which the High Priest alone was allowed to enter, and that only on the Day of Atonement. The High Priest was a type of Christ, the other priests were types of the believers. It is of note that the priests entered the Holy Place daily ministering (see chapter 8, verses 4 and 5). They were never allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies represents heaven itself into which Jesus alone has entered, as the Great High Priest, there to appear in the presence of God for us.

This is a brief statement; let us consider the question more carefully. In these chapters we have both a comparison and a contrast.

We will find the details of the Tabernacle in the 26th chapter of Exodus, which the reader is advised to study. We intend to confine our remarks almost entirely to these chapters in Hebrews, with one or two other quotations to illustrate or confirm our conclusions.

From the three last verses in the sixth chapter to the 30th verse of the tenth chapter, we have three orders of priesthood described to us. Firstly, we have the priest, Melchizedec; secondly, the priests after the order of Aaron; thirdly, the Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ and that of Melchizedec have certain characteristics in common. That of Jesus as being the first and last of its kind is said to be after the order of Melchizedec, who was described as being “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but... abideth a priest continually.”

When trying to understand this description of Melchizedec’s Priesthood, we must remember that, as we are told in Hebrews chapter 6, we have left the first principles of the Truth and are going on to the deeper things of the Spirit of God; going on, as the Apostle says, “unto perfection.”

The main characteristics of the Priesthood of Melchizedec are:

(a) He was the only priest who was also a king. His name is composed of two words - Melci - king; and Sedec - righteous (or righteousness). Therefore “King of Righteousness,” or Righteous King. And we are told, after that, King of Salem, which is King of Peace. So is Jesus - King and Priest.

(b) The words just quoted provide us with the next characteristic. “Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, abideth a priest continually.”

From this we conclude that His Priesthood was without predecessor and without successor, and, therefore is concluded as being still continuing. It is Melchizedec’s Priesthood which is here described, and not Melchizedec himself.

So is the Priesthood of Jesus. Not after the order of Aaron, but after the power of an endless life - abiding a Priest for ever. Thus we have the Priesthood of Jesus typified by Melchizedec.

Now we come to the second order of Priesthoods - the Aaronic. Aaron was chosen as the High Priest and his sons with him as assistant priests (or Common Priests). A clear distinction is made between the High Priest and the priests of the common order. The High Priest had robes of Glory and Beauty over his white robes of Purity and Righteousness; the other priests had only the white robes.

The High Priest went in to the Holy of Holies once a year; they never were allowed to enter that Most Holy Place. They were allowed to minister only in the first Tabernacle.

Herein we have the comparison with Jesus. Aaron was the High Priest; Jesus is the Great High Priest. Aaron wore robes of Glory and Beauty over his white robes; Jesus is clothed with Glory, Honour, and Majesty over His Righteousness. Aaron entered the Holiest of All with the sacrificial blood of animals; Jesus entered heaven itself there to appear in the presence of God for us. Aaron ministered in the Holiest for Israel; Jesus ministers in Heaven for Believers.

Now to the contrasts; Aaron entered the Holiest every year; Jesus once only entered heaven. Aaron died and his son succeeded him; Jesus ever-liveth and has a continual Priesthood. Aaron’s offerings and the Law of Moses were a shadow of good things to come; Jesus and His sacrifice were the good things themselves. The Aaronic sacrifices were repeatedly necessary; that of the Lord Jesus once for all.

Thus we see that the Priesthood of the Lord Jesus far transcends that of Aaron and that of Melchizedec, too. There’s were patterns; His was, and is, the True. The Tabernacle was an earthly building typical of Spiritual, or heavenly things. The Holy of Holies was typical of heaven itself. Aaron alone entered the Holiest Place. No other priest was allowed to pass the veil. Jesus alone has entered heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. We are never allowed to follow Him there. “No man has ascended into heaven,” we are told, and “David is not ascended into heaven.” (John chapter 3 and Acts chapter 2).

Aaron was the High Priest, his sons were common priests of a lower order. Jesus is the High Priest over His house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the truth. We are allowed to serve in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, but not in the very presence of God in the Holiest of All.

The heavenly things are those to which we are now called; not in heaven, but in heaven-like places in Christ Jesus. In the heavenly places to which we are called is the Bread of Heaven, and the Light of the World. Here we are in association with the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and the True Tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. Here on earth we are ministers in the House of the Lord.

These then, are the “heavenly things” to which the Apostle refers in Hebrews chapter 9, and at verse 23. May God grant that we may serve faithfully and receive that great recompense of reward.

Fred Lea