

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 137

July/August 1992

In this Issue:

Page 1	Editorial	Brother Russell Gregory
Page 2	Thoughts on the Book of Joshua	Brother Leo Dreifuss
Page 3	The Gospel in The Scriptures	Brother Phil Parry
Page 7	“Chat Section” Compiled by :	Brother Harold Dawson
Page 8	Comments Relating to the Serpent	Sister Evelyn Linggood
Page 9	Jesus Said.....	No. 22.
Page 10	The Twenty-third Psalm	Selected
Page 15	Further extracts from “The Devil and Hell of the Bible”	Megiddo Mission Church

Editorial

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

On the front cover of our Circular Letters we have the words “For the Honour of God, His Son and His Word,” and it is the hope of your Editor that this is achieved within its pages; for our highest aim in life is to exhibit the wisdom obtained from God - the reflection of the character of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This can only come after discussion and study of the Scriptures; that is, it follows learning, reasoning and understanding; yet we cannot hope to attain these without prayer.

The Circular Letters set out to encourage and support these things, firstly by upholding the truth. We believe we have the scriptural understanding regarding the Atonement, the resurrection and the judgments to come and can see no viable alternatives. Secondly, we all need exhortation in our walk through life and a variety of articles contain such material and some are written expressly for this purpose. Thirdly, as there are some areas of Scripture teaching, not crucial to our salvation, on which we hold differing views, it is helpful to stimulate thought and encourage dialogue which is edifying, and so there appear many articles which are thought provoking and keep our minds alert to the possibility that someone else may have a better understanding than ourselves. And fourthly, articles of general interest are also enclosed in order to give a comprehensive background to the things we hold most precious.

Our grateful thanks and appreciation are due to all who contribute to these articles for without their work there would be no Circular Letter; and here I wish to ask if anyone wishes to see any changes in the above objectives and which would bring greater honour to God, His Son and His Word.

With Sincere Love to all, in the Master’s service,

Russell Gregory.

THOUGHTS ON THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

This book is often regarded just as Jewish history. It is Jewish history and deals with the conquest of the Promised Land by the Israelites under their leader Joshua. But in many respects it is a pattern of the second entry of Israel into their own country under the leadership of Christ when He returns.

So it is profitable for us to consider a few incidents and examine them in conjunction of what we are taught about Israel after the Spirit, and to see what we can learn.

There comes to mind the incident when Achan sinned. When the Lord delivered Jericho into Joshua's hand, the Israelites were commanded to kill everything alive and to destroy everything. But Achan coveted a wedge of gold which he found, took it and hid it under his tent. As a result the Lord was angry with all Israel and they were defeated in their attempt to take the next town, Ai, until Achan was punished.

Now when we read this account there is one little incident which I think is often overlooked. Joshua sent messengers to Ai as he had done with Jericho. These messengers returned and said; "Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few."

After their first success at Jericho, it seems they began to trust in their own strength and to leave God out of it. But as soon as we begin to leave out God in our plans, things begin to go wrong. So it seems there was another reason why the Israelites were defeated, besides Achan's sin; their trust in their own strength.

Not long before this incident Moses had warned them that if they sinned, one of their enemies would put a thousand to flight. He told them that it was not they but the Lord who fought their battles. They should have learned the lesson that numbers do not matter with the Lord, for He is able to save by few, if necessary without human help. Moses' warnings should have been fresh in their minds, for this happened not long after his death, yet to judge from the messengers' talk "Let not all the people go up... for they are but few," it seems they had not learned the lesson.

When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, one of the first things they did was to set up the Tabernacle at Shiloh. Later, when they had settled, the Tabernacle was replaced by the Temple. Thus the Israelites were the first assembly of God. At Christ's return, when the Israelites will be re-settled in Palestine, the new Church of God will be established, and many lessons can be learned from the book of Joshua that apply to the prospective members of that Church. When Achan sinned all Israel suffered defeat. When a member of the Church does wrong, it affects the whole assembly in one way or another. It gives occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully and it casts a stumbling-block into the path of any outsider seeking the way to the Lord. It deprives the Church of its force of Testimony. Just as Israel could not stand before their enemies until Achan was put to death, so in the case of a serious matter of wrong doing, the Church cannot prosper until it puts away that wicked person.

When eventually Israel did overcome the city of Ai, we read that God commanded Joshua to take all the people of war with him, not just two or three thousand as the messengers had advised, Man's counsel does not necessarily fit in with God's plan, and where the Lord's work is involved it is a concern for the whole Church, even those members who have no active part to play, and not merely the concern of a limited number - not a concern of two or three thousand, but a concern of the whole assembly. Without the Lord's consent it won't prosper just as we as individuals can do nothing without Christ. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psalms 127:1).

Another thought that comes to mind concerns Rahab. We know the account of how the harlot Rahab hid the messengers when they spied out Jericho, and because of that she perished not with the others, but dwelt with the Israelites. Now Rahab's name is mentioned in the epistle to the Hebrews among the names of those like Abraham, - Isaac, etc., who were saved by faith. It is an example to show how one act of faith and obedience towards God can cover a multitude of sins. Her motive for doing kindness to those messengers was not merely fear, not merely the desire to be in the right camp to escape punishment.

Had that alone been the case and nothing more than that, then surely she would not have been mentioned with all those who, like Abraham, were justified by faith. We learn from her own words to the messengers that she had faith when she said, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land." She knew - by faith. At that time, which was long before Christ, the only way for a Gentile to be saved was by becoming a Jew and that happened very rarely, yet it happened to Rahab and her name is mentioned twice in the New Testament; in Hebrews 11:31, already quoted, and in the epistle of James chapter 2, verse 25, "...was not Rahab the harlot justified by works...?" Notice the order: first, in the chapter in the epistle to the

Hebrews, which deals with justification by faith; and second, in the chapter of the epistle by James which deals with how faith is made perfect by works.

Rahab thus became one of the first Gentiles to be saved, and from the epistle to the Hebrews, the epistle of James and the book of Joshua we learn the correct way of salvation - through the one act of obedience prompted by faith, her past sins were forgiven, otherwise she would not have been mentioned with faithful Abraham and others. She was justified by faith after she had demonstrated her faith by works. And for us, by faith in the risen Christ coupled with the single act of obedience in submitting to baptism into Him, all our past sins are forgiven - we also are then justified by faith.

Finally, we see that there is no room for boasting before God. The Pharisees made that great mistake of thinking that because they were Abraham's children, and kept the Law of Moses to the letter, they would enter the Kingdom. Christ told them "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you" (Matthew 21:31). Here is an example of one. There is indeed no room for boasting before God. God will save the humble who are willing to trust and obey Him, no matter what their past. Let us close with Paul's exhortation against high-mindedness; Romans 11:17 to 23:-

"And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then. The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded, but fear; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed, lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in; for God is able to graff them in again."

Brother Leo Dreifuss.

THE GOSPEL IN THE SCRIPTURES

While we believe that the Bible is an accurate record of the events God intended for our information, we cannot say that every word printed is the inspired Word of God, but only that which the Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. This applies to both Old and New Testaments for man's enlightenment to the reason for religion and God's offer of salvation and eternal life through His Son Jesus Christ.

Since the sacrificial death of Jesus we have all been born into the Christian Dispensation based on Abraham and the Patriarchs Isaac and Jacob. We dispense therefore with all other cults and denominations as not of God.

To us there is one God and Father of all who are of the One Body and Spirit of Christ Jesus and of that faith and one Baptism which is by Him. For Peter declared "Neither is there salvation in any other..." - Acts 4:12. Paul says, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Romans 8:14, But ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father," "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" - Romans 8:17; again the same theme in Galatians 4:4-7.

What does this teach us? It certainly does not teach the universal Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, but the fact that at some time in history man became estranged from God the Creator, hence the expression used "Adopted sons," but Paul speaks of one who was not adopted, and in fact if we go back to the beginning of man's history in Genesis we read there is a created son of God - Adam by name (meaning red earth) and he was styled a living soul by means of the breath of life animating his body, and if deprived of that breath, would instantly die and become red earth or dust again. We have found this to be medically and scientifically so when after many years the organs of the working body deteriorate and

decay. This happens to all animal life, man has no pre-eminence above a beast as far as nature is concerned, Ecclesiastes 3:16-20, but God created man with greater capacity for intelligence than the beasts, and therefore with greater responsibility under His Law.

The question arises, if Adam were a created son of God why are his descendants in need of adoption through another Son? The information and answer to this question is found in Genesis 2:17 where Adam was prohibited from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil on pain of death which in fact would involve the taking away of his life, causing inability to breathe any more of the breath of life. Can it be put any plainer of one who was created subject to decay and ultimate death if left to himself without any change to a superior nature like that of angels who do not die? And was not this a test of his obedience and faith in order that Adam's free-will might be the means of developing character to fit him eventually for a higher and superior nature like that of the ministering angels? We believe so. If not so, why the Tree of Life?

Briefly, the record is that Eve was deceived and beguiled into eating of the forbidden fruit, and she gave also to her husband and he did eat, this transgression of Law entered into that world, or as it is termed in Scripture, "Sin." Adam and Eve had now sold themselves to that which was in opposition to God, but not only so, but all who were in his loins when he sinned. Thus their position was personified as in bondage to a Master holding over them the sentence of death as the reward or wages for services rendered. "The wages of sin is death," says Paul, Romans 6:20-23.

When Adam sinned, all in his loins could not be termed as actual sinners – they had not been born, and if the sentence of the Law had been carried out, they would not have been born, so that their actual existence depended on Adam and Eve being purchased from sin and alienation from God, and the only way was that the Ransom or Purchasing Price must be found and paid. It is obvious to the reader of Genesis that Adam and Eve were in the position of being legally dead by transgression of Law, this had nothing to do with their physical nature which left to its own course would in any case gradually decay and return to dust if not changed to a spiritual nature, 1 Corinthians 15:45-50. This is the case with all who are of the same physical nature of the first man, but their own legal position has to be dealt with if they are not to remain Sin's servants with no hope of Eternal life and without God in the world.

Enlightenment is necessary and is revealed in the Scriptures of Truth to those who diligently seek for it. This has been so from Adam until now, but all men have not been privileged to see this apparent mystery which has been hid in God from the beginning of the world, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Ephesians 3:1-21.

If the account of Adam and Eve is not clear when we first read in Genesis, then we must consult what Paul has said about it by revelation given to him, and we can have no doubts that in his letter to the Romans, Jesus Christ is linked with Adam's sin and penalty, which Paul says passed upon Adam and all men. Now if this penalty was natural death and return to dust in Adam's case, then it was also the case with all men, how then can grace be said to abound unto many if that many are dead physically? Impossible. The position therefore is a legal one - Adam under legal sentence of inflicted death (or the taking of his life) but the remittance granted by the giving of an equivalent life of a sinless man Jesus Christ, as typically demonstrated in the Sin-Covering obtained by blood-shedding. The Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. Revelation 13:8. "Not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." 1 Peter 1:18-21. Paul speaking to the Ephesian believers praises God for His blessings, and continues, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world... having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will," Ephesians 1:4,5.

I mentioned earlier about men needing adoption, implying that Adam lost by sin his original status as a son of God, and thereby also alienated from God those in his loins, their life also being lost with his so that they of themselves had no claim to natural existence. God Himself provided the means of redemption

and of reconciliation, this was all ordained in His Plan with the earth and man; He is supreme over all, hence the preaching of the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ. The record in Genesis was concerned with this fact by the promise of the seed of the woman obtaining victory for man over the dominion of Sin under which he was concluded. Galatians 3:17-22.

Eternal life in the Kingdom of God is what we believe in, and must be obtained by belief and faith under certain conditions appointed of God. The doctrine that man has an immortal soul is a myth, and cannot be found in Genesis or any other book in the Bible, we have quoted this from 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 but we also have concrete proof in Genesis 2:9 where there is a distinction made between the tree that God caused to grow out of the ground as good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The latter named tree was prohibited to Adam and Eve as we have mentioned before, but they both sinned by eating of it and came under sentence, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," an immortal soul cannot die, but Adam was not immortal, he was a living soul capable of death

Genesis 3:17-22 will prove our contention and something which may have escaped the notice of many readers who in fact may have had the impression that Adam and Eve had been eating of the tree of life. It can be seen that after becoming wise in the knowledge of good and evil "The Lord God said, and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever..." Those two words "take also" imply that they had not eaten of the tree of life previous to eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, otherwise the latter's sentence of inflicted death would be nullified. It is clear therefore that Adam and Eve lost their right to eat of the tree of life as soon as they sinned and may not even have known of its life-giving properties until they had been enlightened to it. The same can be said for all men in need of redemption and the salvation offered by faith in Jesus Christ and Him-crucified, the right to the tree of life is only through Him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

In Genesis Jesus is seen in the types; approach to God through the shedding of blood, the death that came by Adam's sin, seen also in Abel's offering, the eating of the tree of life no longer available but the way to it typified by the Cherubim with flaming sword turning every way to keep it - no climbing through some other way as Jesus expressed it of the sheepfold. We find the lesson of the Cherubim continued in the Mosaic Tabernacle where God spoke from above the Mercy-Seat between the Cherubim of Glory as the place where He would meet and commune with His servants. Why then should not this have been the case with Adam, Abel, Cain, Seth, Enoch, and all who had respect for God's way? It appears from Holy Scripture that a certain sacrifice by blood-shedding and faith was necessary for approach to God in acknowledgement of the alienation and death which had passed upon all men by Adam's sin. This fact was shown to the Israelites every year on what was expressed as The Day of Atonement when the animal types of Jesus were slain, but was literally fulfilled when He was nailed to the tree as the true substance and not the shadow. We have to understand these things in order to understand why Jesus Christ, a man who deserved not to die, should allow Himself to be treated in this manner when He could have called on His Father for twelve legions of angels to deliver Him; for as He said, "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" Matthew 26:53. Also in Matthew 2:28, "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

We have portrayed before us in Scripture, two Federal Heads, Adam and Jesus. Adam the progenitor of the natural human race sold under sin, and Jesus, a new man, and beginning of a spiritual people who have died unto Adamic federally imputed sin, through baptism into His death and risen to newness of life independent of reproduction by the will of man according to the flesh. First that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual. The same applies to the Kingdom of God. This was in operation through God's representatives but He was King of Kings at all times and will be in the future. The first Divinely appointed King and priest we read of is Melchizedec when he met Abraham, and as King of Righteousness and King of Peace, blessed him who had received the promises that in him and his seed would all families of the earth be blessed; Jesus Christ being the central figure in these blessings. Gen: 12:1,2; 13:1; 15:18; Galatians 3:16 & 26-29 We read of Melchizedec bringing forth bread and wine as priest of the Most High God and blessed Abram. This bread and wine seems significant insofar as bread is regarded as the staff of life and wine that which makes joyful the heart of man (a good combination).

Jesus was made a priest after the order of Melchizedec, but he was symbolized in bread and wine. Jesus said of Himself, "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." John 6:32-33. At the Passover feast with His disciples Jesus handed to them the unleavened bread and the wine as symbols of His body and blood the life He was about to offer as the Ransom for many and as the introduction of a new covenant, making an end of the old one and a discontinuation of the Levitical Priesthood. For after His resurrection He became a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec, not after the order of Aaron as some would have us believe, and who must have a veil over their eyes when they read Hebrews chapters 7 and 8, verse 4.

The fact that Jesus said He came down from heaven does not mean He existed in heaven as a person before His birth of Mary, but that His life came direct from God and not through the male channel of descent from Adam, otherwise He too would have needed a redeemer. It must be realised also that on earth Jesus was not a priest but He was the antitypical Lamb of God's provision slain for the people, not for Himself; and He is now a High Priest for His own household, at the right-hand of God until He returns to the earth when the kingdoms of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ and He will reign, and of His Kingdom there will be no end. Daniel 7:13,14; Revelation 11:15.

There were many heathen kings at the time of Abram, then there appeared Judges on the scene after Israel entered the promised land, but God was Supreme King, yet they desired a king like the heathen nations thus rejecting God as reigning over them, 1 Samuel 8:5-10. The Lord gave them Saul, then David, but corruptive practices continued unto the reign of Zedekiah who was wicked and profane so that God said of his kingship over Israel, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more until he come whose right it is, and I will give it him." Ezekiel 21:25-27.

We believe this refers to Jesus in accordance with many prophecies of Scripture including the statement of the Angel Gabriel to Mary in Luke 1:30-33, but some think this right to the throne of Israel is due to Christ's descent from David according to the flesh, but this is not wholly the case. God was always the Supreme Ruler over His covenanted people, and Jesus His only begotten Son was heir of all things, and His right it was, not by descent from David, but from the beginning, because God knew from the beginning that Jesus would maintain His integrity and rights as Son of God.

We believe emphatically in His return as the resurrection and the life to those who look for Him and confess Him before all men as the man who voluntarily gave His natural life in the blood fear all men, but especially those who believe and obey His commandments and principles. We believe that there is to be a resurrection both of the just and of the unjust but not simultaneously, this simultaneous -theory would nullify Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18. We believe that through the Priesthood of Christ our conduct is being followed and judged; for He is able to make intercession on our behalf if we sincerely make the effort to follow His example when on earth. If we sin wilfully after receiving a knowledge of the Truth, and I mean an understanding of the true Gospel of salvation involving the sacrifice of Christ for us and not for Himself, then there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation; this is equal to despising the flesh and blood of Jesus thus counting it as unholy and void of the power of sanctification - a treading under foot of the Son of God and a despising of the Spirit of Grace, for it is the blood of Christ which maketh atonement. He did not sacrifice His character.

We believe God condemned Adam's sin not his flesh. We believe flesh has continued unchanged from creation. We believe the flesh of Jesus was the same physical quality as all other men but that His birth was not generated by the will of man but by the will and power of God overshadowing Mary whose physical flesh was no different from Adam's or Eve's at creation. Scripture will support this belief, but it will not support the Apostate doctrine of defiled flesh and a compulsive bias and inclination to commit sin; Jesus Himself proved the error of this doctrine by His sinless conduct in the very same nature, and thereby He condemned sin.

We believe that by an understanding of the purpose of Christ's death and belief and baptism by immersion into it, we die symbolically unto the Federal sin of Adam, under which God concluded all men, that by the righteousness of one man Jesus Christ, the free gift of Grace might be offered unto all men unto justification of life. We then rise from the water to newness of life in Him, but we are not morally justified

until we have finished our course and have kept the faith. Baptism is useless to those who believe in the physical condemnation of the flesh of Adam and all men, for they rise from the water with that same flesh. Search the Scriptures! How readest thou?

Brother Phil Parry.

“CHAT SECTION”

Compiled by Brother Harold Dawson

In a recent letter Brother Leo Dreifuss writes; “I always enjoy the Chat Section and find it very interesting. I would be pleased if you would ask the following question - it is one of those verses which we read twice yearly in our daily readings and probably gloss over without further thought. It concerns Hebrews 6:18 where we read, “That by two immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation...” But which two immutable things? I can only see one. The section concerned begins at verse 13 and goes on to verse 20. The one immutable thing I see is God’s oath to Abraham, but what is the second? I would like to invite answers, comments and suggestions from anyone, please.”

Our thanks to Brother Leo for sending in the question and my own reply to it is that the two immutable things are,

1) God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:16 where God blesses Abraham with an eternal blessing because Abraham had been prepared to offer up his own beloved son, Isaac, in accordance with the command of God - an incredible thing to ask of Abraham in view of the advanced age of himself and Sarah his wife. But Abraham had faith in God and God knew Abraham’s love of Isaac. God will not ever forget Abraham for his devotion, and the future place in the Kingdom is assured for Abraham and Sarah and the family - and indeed his seed which is Jesus Christ who is heir to all things, together with us who are associated with Him through our own faith and baptism. The first immutable thing therefore, is the certainty of the promise of salvation to those who, Christ-like are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.

2) The second immutable thing is the “status” of Jesus Christ made High Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec, in which hope we have more than comfort but also an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast and which entereth into that within the veil, that is, the Holiest of all, which Jesus did for us; and spent His riches to redeem His brethren, the laying down of His unforfeited life and so paying our debt for us, “for the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and give His life a ransom for many.”

Brother Horace Taylor writes concerning the redemption of Adam and makes the point that surely if Adam was redeemed then all the human race yet inside him would also be redeemed, in other words, universal salvation.

Brother Russell Gregory, in response, asks another question: - Are we perhaps a little careless in our use and understanding of the word ‘redemption’? We say that Adam was redeemed, and then we say that it was Jesus who obtained redemption for him and the whole human race 4000 years on, while Jesus said, “When ye see these things begin to come to pass, look up, lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28), which is still in the future. I think most of us have a clear understanding of this subject but the word ‘redemption’ is used in different ways so may I take this opportunity to ask someone to write an article clarifying these points, please?

Sister Evelyn Linggood writes concerning Brother Taberner’s article which appeared in the last Circular Letter, entitled “A Ransom For All” and asks, “Brother Taberner quotes Hebrews 9:27 but I wonder if one is right in taking this to mean natural death seeing that some will not die but will be alive at Christ’s coming? The context suggests that the death to sin is meant here, like as Christ died this death for us, so it

is appointed that we die symbolically with Him in baptism, for it is after belief' and baptism that we come under Christ's jurisdiction, is it not? and we are judged daily. Himself being our High Priest to intercede in the forgiveness of our sins."

Brother Phil Parry writes concerning the same article (A Ransom for All) to say that "there was just one mistake I noticed in the last C.L. where on page 11 we read, "The Cherubim were placed at the east end of the garden to bar the way to the tree of life, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life and live for ever." The fact was, he was driven out of the garden "lest he take also of the tree of life..." and the Cherubim were to keep the way, not to bar it, in other words, the right to it was no longer physically possible but legally and morally through the medium of the typical sacrifices."

Also Brother Phil adds a further note to what was said in the last C/L. regarding Adam being placed under another covenant, "In regard to God making another covenant with Adam after he sinned, it is obvious that if 'death by sin' passed on, or was imputed to all men, then God must have made some covenant with Adam and all men, or they would not have lived to be under that imputation and to be recipients of His Grace through Christ Jesus. See Romans 4:4-8.

Sincerely your brother, Harold Dawson

Comments Relating to

THE SERPENT in Genesis 3

The role played by the serpent recorded in the above Scripture has always been a subject for speculation; was it literal or allegorical? There are difficulties with either of these two extremes in harmonising with other Scripture.

If the literal view is taken we are faced with the unlikely phenomena of 'a beast of the field' (verse 1) with apparent equal intelligence in conversation with the woman, but even if this were so, verse 6 intimates that the human pair were together at the time, so why did it not address them both? We know that the lower animals have varying degrees of intelligence and some are able to mimic various spoken words but they are normally "dumb" and devoid of the reasoning power invested in God's highest creation - man, they are not moral responsible creatures. Paul's reference in 2 Corinthians 11:3 lends no real credence to the literal view of the case because "subtlety" is not limited to speech, it is a characteristic which can be manifested in action and ways, which is only possible in the case of dumb creatures, nevertheless the presence of a literal serpent cannot be ruled out if any sense is to be made out of Eve's excuse "the serpent beguiled," etc., could she not have been deceived by what she saw the serpent do? It is quite common in countries where snakes abound to see them in trees where they have a vantage point in catching their prey. It is quite likely that our first parents had been tempted by the forbidden fruit before the fateful day, because, to the natural mind that which is prohibited appears more attractive and arouses the curiosity more than that which is allowed I therefore submit as a possible explanation that the serpent was in the tree 'touching it' (verse 3) and probably eating of the fruit, and the woman, noticing that no harm came to it by so doing, might she not have been emboldened to do likewise?, the seeming conversation with the beast was nothing more than the reasoning of her tempted mind, it would have been as though the serpent had said "thou shalt not surely die" etc., although its part in the event was entirely passive; it was doing only that which came naturally to its kind, no outside tempter was necessary to cause the first sin.

The testimony of the Apostle James was as true then as now (James 1:13-15). Enticement comes in various ways - by what we see, hear, feel, etc. We do not take the conversation between the devil (or Satan) and Christ in the wilderness temptation to be literal so why in the case of Eve?, it was evidently auto-suggestion in both cases, though some may still favour the idea of a speaking serpent on the grounds that God caused Balaam's ass to speak (Numbers 22), but that was most certainly a miracle for the sole purpose

of preventing the madness of the Prophet “who had been hired to curse Israel?” The only record in the Old Testament Scripture and confirmed in the New Testament (2 Peter 2:15,16) of a dumb creature speaking in man’s voice.

1 Timothy 2:14 states that “Adam was not deceived (presumably by the serpent) but the woman being deceived was in the transgression,” a possible reason why Eve was deceived could be her failure to take into account that the “Tree” forbidden on pain of death, applied only to them as morally responsible and not other creatures, so it follows that the subsequent curse on the serpent recorded in Genesis 3:14 must be understood in a figurative sense only, as the following verse is predictive and concerns mankind, not a literal serpent and its seed obviously.

To sum up then we may say that because the literal serpent was involved (however unwittingly) in the temptation and fall of man. God made it to be symbolic of sin and death. The Enemy destined to be finally destroyed.

Sister Evelyn Linggood.

Jesus said...

No. 22.

“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father will ye do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” - John 8:44.

We believe that the devil is a personification of man’s will when opposed to God’s; and Revelation 12:9 tells us the devil is “that old serpent... which deceiveth the whole world,” and by putting the word “serpent” in place of “devil” in the above saying perhaps we can see Jesus is referring to the temptation in Eden.

When Jesus said the devil “was a murderer from the beginning” He was not referring to Cain who slew Able, as is sometimes thought; if that were the case Jesus would have used the Greek word “*phoneus*,” which is “homicide,” but He used the word “*anthropoktonos*,” which is “man-slayer.” As an example we see in Romans 7:11 Paul wrote, “For sin, taking occasion by commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.” The Greek word for “slew” is “*apokteino*” and is of the same derivation as the word used by Jesus when He expressed similar reasoning in John 8:44.

In the Garden of Eden Eve challenged God’s authority and convinced herself she wouldn’t die and that she, too, would be wise like the angels. There was nothing wrong with her desires - it is our hope also - but it was her attempt to do things her own way which was wrong. Indeed temptation itself is not wrong for God gave us free-will so that we can be tempted; it is the only way by which we build character. It was the action of going against God’s command that was and is sin; in this case it was the eating of the tree of which Adam and Eve had been told they must eat of “lest ye die” that was wrong. So when Adam joined Eve in eating of it they now both faced the sentence of death – “in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”.

However, God in His love and mercy provided a way of covering over their sin in the slaying of an animal in their stead. It was the first time blood had been shed in the forgiveness of sin and it was the first atonement.

But some will say that Adam and Eve began to die in the day of eating and their eventual death was the result. This cannot be the case for there are about a dozen places in the scriptures where the same expression – dying thou shalt die - is used and in every case it is seen to be a putting to death as a direct result of breaking a commandment and which never refers to dying a natural death such as is brought about by aging and neither can it ever mean accidental death.

In Genesis 1:31 we read that all God made was very good, whereas in Genesis 3:1 we read that the serpent was more subtle, or crafty than any beast which the Lord made; so we ask who then did make the serpent? Some modern translations have made this to read that God made the serpent to be the most subtle of the beasts, but we feel this is not what was meant in the first place. We see the answer is that man made the 'serpent' for when God created Adam and Eve He gave them choice - to do either God's will and live, or to do their own and die. When they chose to do their own will in opposition to God's they "made" or became the creature which was not of God's making. Perhaps we should more accurately say they made or developed characters which were not of God's making, for it is our characters that God wishes us to build in His likeness and with His help and guidance. My reasoning here is that if we do God's will we develop characters which are of God's making, but if we go against God's will then we develop characters of our own making. Our definition of the serpent (or the devil) being that it is a personification of man's will when opposed to God's will.

To those who accept the covenant offered by God for the times in which they live it has always been a matter of having faith in God and doing His will. They, the faithful, seek God and learn of Him and His ways. This is their meat and drink. Jesus confirmed this when He said "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God" (Luke 4:4). But to those outside of God's covenants it was and is a matter of "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life;" for that is all the food they will ever have - food from the dust of the ground, "for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19). All who have only this food to eat cannot live beyond this present natural life.

For those in covenant with God, they "shall not live by bread alone (not food from the dust of the ground only), but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God (spiritual food) (Matthew 4:4). So it is that in the mercy and love of God He made it possible for those who repent and seek to do His will, to have life "more abundantly," that is eternally.

THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM

Psalm 23 is undoubtedly the best known, it has been used throughout Christendom in many of its services, services of celebration, funerals, weddings, feast days, coronations, confirmations and baptisms. For nearly three thousand years it has been enjoyed by people with a feeling for prose and poetry, for it contains many sentiments that raise the heart to feelings for higher things; it brings before us peace, hope, consolation and a yearning for better things to come, and its universal appeal brings to many the opportunity of seeing the blessings God is offering to those who see Him as their Shepherd.

There is nothing in this Psalm to indicate for what occasion it may have been written, there is no historical reference, no suggestion of a time or circumstance in the life of David, no telling whether it was written during adversity or prosperity; and such hope as it expresses could be made by a pious heart in any circumstance. Such is its wide appeal.

The Psalm, in six verses, contains at least ten separate symbols or pictures:

A Shepherd, green pastures, still waters, paths of righteousness, a shadowy valley, rod and staff, a laden table, a cup, an anointed head, and a house. One commentator tells us it reveals seven aspects of God, or as he put it, seven names of Jehovah, which show Him as Provider, Protector, Guide, Saviour and Rewarder of the faithful.

Some have suggested this Psalm was written in David's later years, looking back and seeing the care God had shown him during his very varied life, for the over-riding theme is God's watchful care and provision.

The phrase “I shall not want” embraces all that follows, the Shepherd providing for all his needs both materially and spiritually. David wrote in Psalm 34, “O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him,” and “They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.”

Through the gospel message we are enabled to take this Psalm to ourselves, for we have God’s Son for our Shepherd, and in His prayer Jesus said, “I pray for them, for them which Thou hast given me; for they are thine, all mine are thine, and thine are mine.” (John 17:9,10).

So now that all things are in Him and through Him we have become His sheep for He has redeemed us, we belong to Him because He bought us. He purchased us with His blood.

Jesus said “I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep,” and He promised “How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him;” “Ask and it shall be given you, for everyone that asketh receiveth.” Then, if the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

With the promise that all our temporal needs would be met, Jesus turns our attention to our greater needs when he said, “Seek not ye what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink neither be of doubtful mind... your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:29-32). This is a promise to those who feed upon the Word; this is the pasture in which He “maketh” us “to lie down,” green pastures of tender grass. The sheep do not only feed there, they rest and are refreshed there; they are at peace and they enjoy the recreation of meditation and repose. Their food is pleasant, sweet and satisfying.

In many of his Psalms David refers to his pleasure in meditating upon the Word of God. “I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live, I will sing praise to my God while I have my being, my meditation of him will be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord.” (Psalm 104:33,34). “I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect unto thy ways; I will delight myself in thy statutes.” (Psalm 1 19:15,16). “I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands. I stretch forth my hands unto thee:” (Psalm 143:5,6). The godly “delight in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water...” These passages only hint at the wealth of food provided for the sheep, the Word of God has treasures beyond our imagining and food beyond our expectations.

The importance and necessity of a knowledge of the Word was given to Moses and quoted by Jesus in His hour of temptation, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,” (Matthew 4:4) and Jesus of course, had other meat as well, which was unique to Him. He said “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:3). God’s work began in Eden when He saved Adam from death and put him on probation through faith, and Jesus finished this work when God laid on Him the iniquity of us all and Jesus said “It is finished.” (John 19:30). This had been God’s work and now that Jesus had become the Shepherd of the sheep. He could continue to lead the faithful. We read, “He leadeth me beside still waters.” Water, as we all know, is essential to all material life, but it is also used to express the dependence we have on God’s provision for things of the spirit, sometimes refined to as living waters, or waters of life, only available from God through Jesus.

Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee. Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him and he would have given thee living water” for “whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John 4:10 & 14).

The other water in Scripture is the water of Baptism, here referred to in verse 3 (Psalm 23), “He restoreth my soul,” literally ‘He causes my life to return. It may suggest a revival or renewal, after despair, after being downcast with cares and troubles; but surely in the context of this Psalm it refers to the true renewal of life, of being born again unto newness of life through the waters of baptism where the paths of righteousness begin.

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his names sake.” The right paths, the right ways, the paths that lead to God Himself. He does not suffer us to stray on to the path which would lead to shame;

He leads by the way of righteousness in the way of life itself. These paths are opportunities we have to show whose we are by acts of love; where we show His love by showing love to others, by obeying the law of Christ, that is, "bearing one another's burdens" as He bore ours.

This promise of opportunities is made for "His name's sake" that His name may be honoured by all that we do. It is for the sake of Him who died for us, that His work should not be in vain and that ultimately the whole earth should be filled with God's Glory; He leads the meek and the willing: Psalm 25:9, "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies." Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

In John's gospel record (10:4) we read how Jesus saw His sheep: "And when He putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice." And verse 27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish... My Father which gave them me is greater than all and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." These promises of guidance follow the restoring of life at baptism; it is now for the sheep to listen to the voice or words of Jesus and follow where He leads - to the free gift of righteousness and eternal life.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

The thought follows on from the previous verse that the paths may prove dark and gloomy, in fact may be dismal or threatening, but to have no fear, for God is with him and will guide him through. But if applicable to death itself, this for the sheep is only the shadow of death, not the substance. Jesus shewed His disciples what death was when He allowed Lazarus to die; He also allowed His disciples to misunderstand His words when he said, "Lazarus sleepeth." They thought Lazarus was getting well again and there was no need to concern themselves, but Jesus had to tell them plainly "Lazarus is dead."

Jesus made this opportunity to show His and His Father's view of the death of those to be raised. They slept, they did not die. In the sight of God they were remembered for resurrection; they are the faithful mentioned in Malachi 3:16 "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

On many occasions Jesus said plainly that those who believe on Him should never die and He said also they should not taste death. This death of the faithful is not the death for sin, but sleep in Jesus - our life may only be interrupted by "sleep in him," and as Paul tells us, some will not even sleep; they will be changed in the twinkling of an eye.

Some of the sayings of Jesus prove difficult for some to accept at their face value, e.g. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my sayings, he shall never see death," and because He said this the Jews said, "Now we know that thou hast a devil." This may be a hard saying to some, and on another occasion some of His disciples left Him because of hard sayings. John 6:52, "The Jews strove among themselves saying. How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" and many of His disciples murmured at it and "- From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (John 6:66). These hard sayings of Jesus troubled many who heard Him and they lost patience because they were not seeking or looking for the truth, otherwise they would have waited for Jesus to enlighten them in due time, as did the faithful twelve who, though they did not understand, were nevertheless eager to stay with Him to hear more and when Jesus asked them if they too, would leave Him, Peter replied "Lord to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life (verse 68), and though they did not know or understand how Jesus was to accomplish this, they knew from the Scriptures that all that God had promised would be revealed by His anointed Son.

If any of the sayings of Jesus are hard to reconcile with some of our understanding of other Scripture we must be patient; we must not be tempted to avoid His plain statements nor qualify them to the detriment of their stated meaning; we must wait patiently for deeper truth to appear as we grow in understanding and

appreciation, as Peter tells us, we must “grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18). We must be patient and wait for deeper truths to appear as we grow in knowledge, faith and understanding. We must not only hope to grow in grace and understanding, we must seek it diligently, not to reconcile different aspects of truth by qualifying them saying, Yes, it is true because it was said by Jesus and then to remove the plain statement with a complicated explanation of what we think He meant. We have over the years, heard attempts to explain apparent difficult statements by those who feel it necessary to bring forward an explanation at any cost, often removing most of the obvious plain truth, in an effort to make their understanding appear complete and comprehensive, and we are left with little of value. So let the words of Jesus stand as true whether we understand them or not. In this way we may keep the door open to deeper understanding, deeper faith, and a deeper love for God, for Jesus our Saviour, and a deeper love for our brethren and sisters who are the only people we can share with in these matters - the only ones with whom we can share our walk before God.

The object of our pursuit of truth is to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent. (John 17:3). The growth and development of our knowledge and understanding is essential to our appreciation, and our appreciation is the basis of our ability to find in ourselves a capacity to love God. This, the first commandment can only be achieved if it is our principal aim and ambition.

“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Some see correction and chastisement in these symbols and we know that the Lord “chastiseth every son whom he receiveth.” (Hebrews 12:5). Some commentators see the rod as a defence against attacks on the sheep; David, in defending his sheep, slew wild animals among which we are told was a lion and a bear, but the staff would serve an entirely different purpose. Its principal use was in preventing sheep going their own way, particularly when being brought to the door of the fold for their own safety overnight. There is a story that the shepherds of Israel at the heat of the day would rest in the shade of a rock or tree but leave their cloak draped over their staff which they had stuck in the ground, so that the sheep would see it there and keep it in sight as they grazed or rested. The shepherd leaving his garment as a witness to his presence, though he was unseen. Our Shepherd has left us a visible witness to His presence in the bread which we partake in memory of Him. The bread which represents His body which He gave for us - the price He paid to release us from sin. “Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you.” (Luke 22:19).

Jesus comforted His disciples on several occasions, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me... Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:1 & 27).

Just before His crucifixion, when He knew He would do what He had resolved to do, He said, “These things I have spoken unto you, that ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer (sometimes rendered ‘of good comfort’), I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33). By overcoming the world Jesus had through over three years, kept His resolve to fulfil God’s work and His role as the Lamb of God, and at the end of these years of trial and suffering He knew that He had but a short time to go before He would accomplish all that God had asked of Him and that He would remain steadfast to the end. This is what He was promising the disciples but at that time they did not understand all that He had to do, but He told them all He could to comfort them because He knew they would be in great distress when He went to the Cross at Calvary.

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

All the good things which God has provided do not diminish because of adversity; however besieged we may be by circumstances or the actions of others not seeking our good, and perhaps even our ill. God’s provision is more likely to increase, I indeed adversity may help us to be directed back to God and seek His ever present help. Jesus said “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven.” (Matthew 5:11,12). God’s provision and bounty makes light of any adversity. His enemies fade into the background as he counts his blessings in times of trouble.

“Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over,”

These two phrases show the extravagance of God's blessings; the pouring of oil over his head unto fatness and the overflowing of his cup show God's abundant favour, or grace and blessings, prosperity and joy - a stage further from the previous verse - now to an ecstasy of joy, and if understood from the spiritual point of view, David could see all that his greater Son would do and all that it would mean to him. Peter wrote of Jesus, "Jesus whom having not seen, ye love, in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." 1 Peter 1:8 - "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

In Psalm 16 David wrote "In thy presence is fullness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore," and the last sentence of Psalm 23 "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever," also in several of the Psalms he wrote of the house of the Lord. Psalm 65 "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causeth to approach unto thee that he may dwell in thy courts." Psalm 84, "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee. Jesus said "Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me; in my Father's house are many dwelling places, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there may ye be also." (John 14:2).

This ultimate expectation of David's concludes his picture of the blessings of God to be given to the faithful. His Psalm is for the sheep, it is their statement of faith, it does not begin with a proposition or any qualifying statement, it states plainly "The Lord is my Shepherd." Only the sheep therefore can make it their own and of course only the Shepherd can provide all its blessings; only the man born to be King could become, by the grace and provision of God, the Shepherd of the sheep.

When Jesus was born He was born heir to all things, born to be king, and when He was baptised by John, God anointed Him to be the Lamb to take away the sin of the world, and just over three years later, years of preparation. He laid down His life for His sheep and became the Great Shepherd of the sheep, now with all power, to put into effect all the promises of God.

Among many of His parables showing the work He had to do for His Father is one which shows the principles of redemption - Matthew 13, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man findeth, he hideth and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field."

The field is the world, the treasure is those that fear God, the man is Jesus, and His going away was the grave where he gave all that He had, the price He paid was His life. It was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame. "He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied." (Isaiah 53:11).

When looking back over this Psalm we see no mention of judgment or condemnation, the wicked and evil doers are not in this picture at all and there is a very good reason for it; these sheep, with their Shepherd are redeemed, therefore there is now no condemnation, for they are in Him. Jesus said "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word (my sheep hear my voice), and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life; and shall not come into condemnation (judgment) but is passed from death into life." (John 5:24).

This unspeakable gift is of the love of God in giving us the free gift of righteousness brought to us by the blood and sacrifice of Jesus our Redeemer "who has redeemed us from all unrighteousness." For us to feel that these blessings and promises have any part or place for us we must know that we cannot be worthy of such love, and among the requirements of those who would lay hold on the promises of God is a daunting list which would affect our behaviour and character, both of which we must control and cultivate with humility and with contrite hearts, repenting or turning again whenever we find we are going in the wrong direction, or our actions would displease our heavenly Father, and when we have done all we can, we can turn to Him for forgiveness, knowing that for Jesus' sake He will forgive, if we have forgiven others.

Many Scriptures like the twenty-third Psalm should draw us irresistibly towards God's care and provision, but we need a large share of Hope and Faith and a knowledge of His Word, and the appreciation of His love to find in ourselves the wonder and love so essential to our walk before Him. Only by understanding the true nature of His love can we offer perfect praise.

What can we give but a loving and contrite heart bent on serving Him, and bringing before Him our gratitude and our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving?

A thought from the letter to the Colossians: "To fulfil the word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to his saints; to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the gentiles: which is, Christ in you, the hope of Glory."

And to conclude, from Hebrews 13: "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep; through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will; working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight; through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Selected.

Further Extracts from

THE DEVIL AND HELL OF THE BIBLE

Chapter Nine

WHAT IS HELL?

Does the Bible teach that God has prepared a burning, fiery hell for the punishment of evildoers? Is there a place of torment where the wicked shall suffer eternally? If not, what does the Bible tell us about hell?

These questions have troubled serious thinking people. The problem concerns each of us directly, for if there is such a place as hell and if God condemns wicked men and women to its miseries, there is always the possibility that some of us may go there.

Before we accept a tradition, let us investigate thoroughly all that the Bible teaches on the subject.

First, the Almighty invites us to reason: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 1:18). So let us reason: Would a loving God of mercy and justice and truth torture men and women through all eternity for what evil they could commit in a short threescore years and ten? Would such a doctrine be reasonable?

What sacrilege to claim that our loving, kind, heavenly Father would consign even the meanest creatures of His creation to such a fate! Could a worse lie be told on a merciful, just Father? Can you believe this savage doctrine? No! for it is not reasonable; and it is not scriptural. God does not ask us to believe anything so cruel. By carefully weighing all the Bible has to say on the subject we find that nowhere does it teach eternal torment.

Yet many evangelists and zealous religious teachers have said that the wicked will be consigned to the most excruciating torments where they will shriek in eternal agony in a sweltering ocean of blackness, fire and horrible confusion.

But no! No such hell has any part in the plan of God. What is God's plan for punishing the unfaithful servants? He witnesses in Deuteronomy 30:19: He has set before men "life and death," not eternal life either in misery or happiness. His offer is simple: Obey and live, disobey and die (Deuteronomy 11:26,27).

Jesus says of the broad road that it leads to destruction, not eternal torment (Matthew 7:13). He also specifies the duration of that punishment: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:45). They shall not live on and on in agony, but shall be destroyed for ever.

The word "hell," used frequently throughout the Bible, is translated from the Hebrew word 'sheol,' and the Greek word 'hades,' neither of which are defined as meaning a place of torment, but simply death, the grave, destruction, annihilation. Paul says that the "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

Why Believe in Hell?

Through the centuries many religious-minded people have thought it necessary to believe in hell, either because they thought that the Bible teaches it or because it was God's way, they felt, of persuading men and women to repent of their sins and fear and obey Him. How else could they be constrained to subject themselves to the law of God? How else could they be compelled to recognize their need, to repent and reform their lives?

"The Doctrinal Teaching of the Church," by Quentin de Le Bedoyers, explains the basic Roman Catholic belief in hell:

Hell was prepared for the devil and his companions. The fact that some of us may go there does not mean that it was God's wish that we should do so. In fact, his wish is that everyone should be saved... The souls in hell are those who have preferred to reject his outstretched hand and have crucified Christ again....

There have been many people who have been denying the reality of hell, since they feel that a good and merciful God could not inflict such a torment on his creatures. Others have held for the same reason that it will not last forever, and that one day even the wicked will be joined to God. But though we might prefer to believe this, we have the authority of Christ himself for its existence, and it is to continue into eternity. We cannot deny the doctrine without saying that Jesus was a liar or that he was mistaken.

They feel that anything less than eternal hellfire would mean that sinners would eventually end in the realm of happiness and thus sin would triumph over God. The fear of hell removed, sin would abound because sinners would know that eventually they would succeed in getting the best of two worlds.

Jonathan Edwards, eighteenth century American evangelist, preached hell vividly and convincingly:

"The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider over a fire, is dreadfully provoked; his wrath toward you burns like fire. It is nothing but his hand that keeps you from falling into the fire every moment. O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: you hang by a slender thread with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have nothing you have ever done to induce God to spare you one moment..."

It is everlasting wrath. It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. When you look forward, you will see a boundless duration before you, and you will despair of ever having any deliverance."

But this is the doctrine of men, not the teaching of the Bible.

Souls Not Immortal.

Why do people believe in Hell? Because they believe that God created every man's "soul" immortal, and that therefore that soul must live on eternally somewhere, either in happiness (heaven) or misery (hell). But this theory is only a delusion, though it has turned many away from God. It is a pagan doctrine, taught by Socrates, elaborated by Plato, and wholly unscriptural.

The apostle Paul foretold that a time would come when men would not "endure sound doctrine," but after their own lusts should "heap to themselves teachers having itching ears," and they would turn away their ears from the "truth," and should turn to "fables" (2 Timothy 4:3,4) . The idea of souls going immediately to "heaven" or "hell" at death is among these fables.

The Bible does not teach the immortality of the soul. The phrase "immortal soul" or its equivalent does not occur once in Holy Writ. The apostle Paul declares that Christ brought "life and immortality to light through .he gospel" (1 Timothy 1:10) - not that we possess it by birth. He says also that immortality is for those "who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Romans 2:7).

The soul can die: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). "He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence" (Psalm 78:50).

The soul can be destroyed: "And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet [Christ], shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:23).

The soul is the entire person. No man possesses a soul, a spirit or a personality separate from the body that can leave the body at death. Man does not possess a soul, he is a soul. As we quoted before, "Every soul, which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed..." A soul is a living being, a creature, not a separate entity apart from the creature.

All hope of life beyond death hinges upon the resurrection of the body (1 Thessalonians 4:13; Job 14:14,15; Psalm 49:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:12-20).

In the interim between death and the resurrection man knows absolutely nothing; "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten... Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10).

Death is a state of total unconsciousness. "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in -the grave who shall give thee thanks?" (Psalm 6:5). "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psalm 115:17).

There is no consciousness in death - how, then, can hell be eternal torment if the wicked shall "die," "be destroyed," "perish"?

Furthermore, the Bible stresses the need of a resurrection - "if there be no resurrection of the dead... then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain" (1 Corinthians 15:13,14). If the person is consigned at death either to heaven or hell, what need for the resurrection? What confusion! But God is not the author -of such confusion. Whether faithful or unfaithful, all shall sleep in the grave until they are resurrected, judged and rewarded.

Chapter Ten.

HELL DEFINED

The Bible speaks frequently of hell. But what does the term mean, as used by the sacred writers?

The word “hell” as used in the Bible has no meaning such as has been attached to it by people who are ignorant of the glorious truths of divine revelation. The original word has no affinity with its modern use. Sheol, the Hebrew word translated “hell,” and hades and Gehenna, the Greek words for “hell,” have not a single definition of eternal torment in either the Hebrew or the Greek, as the words are employed and understood at the time they were used.

What are the definitions of hades? In Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon we read: “A subterranean place full of thick darkness. A hollow and subterranean place... The nether world, the grave, death, making unseen, annihilating, destroying, dark, gloomy.” “Hell” is a proper term for the place of the dead, a place concealed from view.

As the seventeenth century English translators understood the English language, the word “hell” was an appropriate translation for sheol. It meant simply to conceal, to hide, to cover; hence it was properly descriptive of any concealed, hidden, or covered place. When they thought of hell they thought of the pit, the grave. The torment theory has been added to the original meaning of that word

The prophet Job made the subject plain when he told us that he was going to wait in the grave [sheol] for his reward. “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me in secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come” (Job 14:13,14). And where did Job say he would wait? “If I wait, the grave [sheol] is mine house. I have made my bed in the darkness... They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust” (Job 17:13,16). He said he would wait in the grave, “when our rest together is in the dust” not in the flames of hellfire.

Job expected to wait in the grave until the day when Christ should come and resurrect him and bring him before the Judgment Seat with all the servants of God. He said plainly again that the grave [sheol] is the house in which he would wait - not only he, but all who die: “For I know that thou wilt bring me to death and to the house appointed for the living” (Job 30:23). This house to which Job was going is the house appointed for all living - how then could it possibly refer to a fiery hell?

In Psalm 9:17 the word sheol is translated hell: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.” Sheol here means the grave, destruction. The wicked, all who forget God, will be turned into sheol, cast down to destruction. Having never by patient continuance in well doing sought for glory and honour and immortality; they will not be worthy of being ransomed from the grave.

The thought is translated plainly in Psalm 31:17: “Let me not be ashamed, O Lord; for I have called upon thee; let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave [sheol].” They will not be shrieking in agony but will be silent, knowing nothing.

In Psalm 55:15 sheol is again translated hell: “Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell [sheol]: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.” God’s judgment is not a long lingering torture, but the wicked are to go down quick into hell, to destruction, to the grave. (The translators understood that sheol meant the grave, and in this instance they wrote in the margin: “or the grave”).

This same word sheol is translated hell in Ezekiel 32:27: “And they [Meshach, Tubal and her multitude] shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell [sheol] with their weapons of war: and they have laid their swords under their heads.” These people would lie down in hell - if the popular theory of a place of torture were true - with their swords under their heads! But no, the reference here was to the Eastern mode of burial, in which a pit or cave was used, the bodies of the dead being deposited in niches in the wall. As a mark of military honour, soldiers were buried with their swords under their heads. Sheol merely referred to their burying place the grave.

The equivalent of sheol in Hebrew is hades in Greek, and it also meant the grave Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55 makes this very plain. Speaking of the resurrection, when this mortal shall put on immortality and gain the victory over death and the grave, he explains: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave [hades],

where is thy victory?” Here the translators rendered hades “grave” as it should be; if they had translated the word “grave” in every case, how much easier it would have been to arrive at the knowledge of the truth!

What Leads Men to Repentance?

Fear of eternal torment or hell fire?

No, positively not. Nowhere does the Bible teach that the fear of hellfire causes men and women to turn from evil. On the contrary the apostle Paul states clearly: “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not” knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Romans 2:4). Not fear of eternal torture but the love of His goodness leads men to repent and serve Him. God offers an everlasting and abundant life as an inducement for men and women to faithfully serve Him and turn from evil.

The prophet Hosea declares the plan of God: “I will ransom them from the power of the grave [sheol]; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave [sheol], I will be thy destruction” (Hosea 13:14). The great enemy, death, the dark, gloomy grave, is to be destroyed! For “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). It is this inspiring sun-lit picture of eternal felicity which impels men to repent.

Chapter Eleven.

IF THERE BE NO LITERAL HELL

If there be no literal hell, what about certain Bible texts which speak so plainly of “hell”? How are we to understand?

In this chapter we shall discuss some of these questions.

What did Jesus mean when He said, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).?

Jesus’ meaning here was. Fear not them that can take away your temporal life, but fear him who can destroy eternally. The narrative in Luke’s gospel is a little more explicit: “And I say unto you my friends. Be not afraid of them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you. Fear him” (Luke 12:4,5). Jesus was saying that martyrdom holds no terrors; only God’s judgments need be feared. Stephen’s stoning was an example of this.

In Jesus’ statement, “Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell,” He was not supporting the theory of eternal torment in a literal lake of fire. The word here translated “hell” is the Greek word Gehenna, meaning “valley of Hinnom.” It was a ravine to the west and south of Jerusalem. It is occasionally referred to in the Old Testament as the site at which certain Israelites during the monarchy worshipped Molech by making their children “pass through the fire.” Josiah polluted the valley with the bones of men to put a stop to this pagan practice (2 Kings 23:10-14). But it was revived under Jehoiachin; and Jeremiah prophesied that one day the valley would be known as the “valley of slaughter” (Jeremiah 7:30-32).

A medieval Jewish commentator on the Psalms says that Gehenna was used as a garbage dump for Jerusalem, and that a fire burned there constantly. In the days of Jesus, to order a man to be buried in Gehenna was the most ignominious sentence that the council of the Jews could inflict.

‘The word Gehenna, translated “hell” in both Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:5 is a proper name and should not have been translated at all, any more than Jerusalem, Jericho, or Bethlehem. A number of the newer versions leave it untranslated. The RSV uses “hell” in the text of Luke 12:5, and in a footnote gives, “Greek, Gehenna.”

Why does Isaiah 33:14 speak of “everlasting burnings” if there is no literal Hell? The text reads as follows: “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? The context shows that the prophet is referring to the time of God’s judgments. Verses 12 and 13 read in the Moffatt Bible: “Nations shall burn to ashes, like thorn bushes cut and kindled; till lands afar hear all that I have done, and the near lands own my might.” Then follows verse 14: “In Sion sinful men are terrified, the impious are seized with shuddering, crying, Oh who can live with such a devouring fire? Who can live on, with such a lasting Flame?” This “flame” burns to ashes – a symbol of annihilation, not torment.

The definition of “fire,” as given by the Hebrew Lexicon is: “A symbol of destruction, whether of men or things, so that to be destroyed by war is said to be destroyed by fire: figuratively used of the judgments of God.”

“Everlasting burnings” has no connotation of eternal torment. Jude 7 advises that Sodom and Gomorrah are “set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” The fire was not eternal in the sense that the cities of the plain still burn, but eternal in that it was destruction from which there was no recovery. So the “everlasting burnings” of God’s coming judgments will utterly destroy evil workers. It will be an “everlasting destruction” from which they will have no second chance to repent (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

If there is no literal hellfire, what is “the lake which burns with fire,” or “the lake of fire and brimstone”?

Fire destroys! The term “lake of fire” was used as a symbol of total destruction as the wording in Revelation 21:8 states: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death,” the judicial death, the “wages of sin” (Romans 6:23). The “lake which burneth with fire and brimstone” is merely a figure of “the second death,” final or complete destruction.

Whatever symbols the Lord uses to illustrate the principal teaching of His word must be interpreted in harmony with the fundamental truth of that Word. Whether symbolic or non-symbolic, all must harmonize to express one divine truth. The whole of the book of Revelation being largely symbolic, the “lake of fire” is also a symbol of complete destruction. The reading of Revelation 20:14,15 is enlightening. Death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. According to the popular conception hell is the lake of fire; hence it was cast into itself. To say “Death and hell” is another way of saying “death and the grave,” and “the lake of fire” symbolises total destruction. In short, death itself is to be totally eliminated. The forecast is: “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying.”

What is the meaning of the unquenchable fire in Matthew 3:12?

The text reads: “Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” Will Jesus use literal fire to punish the wicked?

Is it a literal fan that Jesus has in His hand to separate the wheat from the chaff? Almost any man would answer that it is not. Is Jesus separating literal wheat from literal chaff, and gathering into a literal granary? Of course not! The wheat represents the righteous; the chaff, the wicked. Either the language is all symbolic, or it is all literal. We should keep in mind the principle expounded by Paul: “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

In understanding Matthew 3:12, it would be no more sensible to conclude that Jesus was gathering literal wheat than to claim that literal fire will consume the chaff. Fire is used in this text to symbolise the destruction of the wicked. As we have seen, “fire” is figuratively used of the judgments of God, so that “to be destroyed by war is said to be destroyed by fire.” The fan of Christ’s judgment will separate the wheat

from the chaff, faithful from unfaithful. The faithful will be gathered into His Kingdom, and the chaff, the unfaithful, will be destroyed with fire “unquenchable” - destroyed for ever (Psalm 101:8; 92:7).

What is the smoke of their torment that will “ascend for ever and ever”?

Believers in eternal torment often refer to Revelation 14:11: “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.” Also Revelation 20:10: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

The word translated “for ever and ever” is the same in each verse: ‘*aion*.’ The first definition is “one’s lifetime.” That is, the punishment of the wicked cannot endure beyond their lifetime. And this is in accord with Jesus’ words concerning the torment of the unfaithful: “And there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (Luke 13:28). Here is a punishment which they shall experience as long as they live - but no longer, for the dead “know not anything” (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Another definition of *aion* is: “A space of time clearly defined” - such a space of time could not go on indefinitely.

We might observe another point (Revelation 14:10): “They shall be tormented... in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb,” If the torment of the unfaithful is in a literal hell, how could it be in “the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb”? If the wicked now suffer in hell, how can they be in the presence of the Lamb, Christ, who is now in heaven at His Father’s right-hand?

No, the torment of the unfaithful will be the acute recognition of what they have lost: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you your-selves thrust out.” (Luke 13:28). This will be torment, and it will be “in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.” For “whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).

Revelation 14:11 says also that “they have no rest day nor night.” But night itself is to terminate. Revelation 21, depicting the new heaven and earth, reveals that “there shall be no night there.” Hence, the torment day and night could not continue after night itself has terminated.

Another point disproving the theory of eternal torment is revealed in Revelation 21:4: “And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” In that age there shall be no more pain - how then could there be eternal torment for the wicked? We read also that “every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth” shall praise “the Lamb for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:13). Would living beings suffering torment forever in some subterranean hell praise the Lamb even for a moment?

How merciful, how just a God we serve! Truly a God of love and mercy who does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men (Lamentations 3:33). Those who will not serve Him He will simply put out of existence; they will not have to suffer eternally.

Megiddo Church