

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular letter No. 245

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Editorial

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends,

Loving greetings. The reality of Jesus of Nazareth and all we learn about him from the Bible is a colossal embarrassment to the Catholic Church. As He appears in the Gospels His whole life, His whole attitude is a permanent reproach to everything the Roman Catholic Church has spun around itself, and invented for itself over 2,000 years. Can anyone aware of the works and words of Jesus, believe the Vatican and all its manifestations were what Jesus saw Himself as coming to Earth to achieve?

The Jesus we know from the New Testament is sharply different from the Christ it would have suited the Catholic Church to invent. So this real man has been cunningly, persistently and quietly nudged away from the centre of the picture to the margins of the frame; and at the centre is placed the real Virgin Mary now called the mythical Mother of God, and the Church has commanded the laity to approach the Almighty through the mediation of its own constructed figure. It would be difficult to think of an idea more alien to Bible teaching. Nothing, absolutely nothing in the Gospels so much as suggests, let alone authorizes such a repugnant idea.

The Pope has the effrontery to call himself the representative of Jesus on earth. Blasphemy! Would Jesus have several palaces, the man who had nowhere to lay his head? The Pope has a city, his own army and riches beyond counting, in poor countries where the Catholic Church really holds power, there are statues encrusted with precious jewels while the people are poorly fed and have no shoes. Jesus had no time for ritual, hats and robes and finery, palaces and Popemobiles. And He didn't just ignore man-made hierarchies of spiritual authority of His own day, but set His face against career structures in things spiritual... and who would today, not just be bemused by popes and cardinals, bishops and archbishops, forms of address, but would rail against them with the fine anger He shewed the money-changers in the temple.

Jesus tells us to cast off fear and superstition, to turn away from wealth and status and authority, to turn away from rules and rituals, such as those rife in his day as insisted upon by the High Priests and Pharisees. But the Roman Catholic Church is steeped in ritual and superstition and above all it is obsessed with power. Power over its followers.

The confessional is an excellent way to learn what everyone is doing, and when it is deemed unacceptable, the other Catholic obsession can be called into play - money. The deeply disagreeable invention of purgatory, the supposed half-way house between either heaven or hell as the final destination, can be avoided if you pay enough to by-pass it. For many years Catholics were forbidden to read the Bible, I do not know if this is still the case in some places. But the services were in Latin for the same reason, that the congregations were too dim to perceive any truths themselves and must rely on the priest to direct them.

All these are truly unpleasant concepts to grown up men and women. And women in particular are of little value or account in the R.C. Church.

Perhaps quite the worst legacy that the Roman Church has bequeathed to all its adherents and indeed to believers of most denominations, is the doctrine of Original Sin. This shameful invention by Augustine, one of the Catholic founding fathers, is an illusion which has most pitifully and disgracefully not only lowered the standard of Christianity, but destroyed its influence and disgraced its character. Once the precept that human nature is inescapably tainted and fallen, nothing else that follows can be right.

The Catholic Church is on the defensive now for reasons well documented, and it whimpers for tolerance from its critics: a tolerance it never extended to dissent or question when it had power to crush them. The Pope is an enemy of truth and enemy of Jesus and one day it will be known and the shabby pretence will end.

“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for the earth is mine.”

Love to all. Helen Brady.

SARAH

We know little of the early life of Sarah, but piecing together various hints from Genesis we picture the family of Terah in happy surroundings, living in Ur of the Chaldees, a city which the monuments tell us had reached a high level of civilization.

Terah had three sons who would be educated according to the custom of the period. The various guesses as to their relative ages need not concern us now. Trouble came into the home with the loss of his first wife, mother of the three boys, but we have no hint of the date. We know Terah married again, and when Abram was ten years old his little half-sister was born, and we know that between these two there sprang up a loving devotion which was to last well over a century, that is - throughout Sarah's lifetime. On Sarah's side, as seen from the first time we meet her until the end, her genuine devotion to her husband was a shining example to all who knew her, and for generations still to come.

When Sarah was growing up another tragedy came into the family, Terah's son Haran, was taken from them, leaving a son (Lot) and two daughters, to mourn the loss of a father. Lot was taken into Terah's household, and we picture Sarah doing her best for the lad, so much so that later on, when one of life's great decisions had to be faced, he went out into a strange land with Abram and Sarah, rather than remain in the family home with Nahor.

One of Lot's sisters - Iscah - has been confused with Sarah, some commentators regarding it merely as two forms of spelling, but we remember Abram said distinctly “She is my sister, she is the daughter of my Father but not the daughter of my mother.” The other sister, Milcah, married her uncle Nahor, and from this union eventually sprang Rebekah.

Sarah was about 65 and Abram 75 years old when they left Haran for the journey to Canaan. It was the second time the home camp had been uprooted and Sarah, who was no longer young, might have been excused had she raised objections to travelling to an unknown country. But Abram had heard a Voice calling and Sarah would not oppose him, she would remain by his side whatever the future might have in store for them.

The place of these two in the Divine Plan was one of great privilege and responsibility. The first man, made in the image of God, had failed to maintain that image, his elder son was a murderer, but the younger son, Seth, began a line of God-fearing men lasting with more or less fidelity until Abram. Human nature did not attain the Divine ideal, therefore God intervened, selected a suitable couple and by a miracle founded a nation to be trained for His Service and to show forth His Glory. The strong faith and willing obedience of Abram were characteristics required in this nation. Sarah, the helpmeet, and later, the mother, had an important task to perform.

In Genesis 12:5 we find Abram and Sarah with Lot “and the souls they had gotten in Haran...”. Does this suggest that many were found willing to believe and worship Abram's God, therefore preferring to travel

with the party rather than remain among the idols in Haran? If this is so, Sarah would no doubt have a great deal to do with winning the loyalty of these nameless folk. The first lady in the camp, even if not herself a teacher, would set the example of giving a friendly reception to those who learned from Abram.

Eventually they came to Shechem and here was the promise renewed; no longer “A land that I will show thee” but “Unto thy seed will I give this land.” As an act of worship an altar was built, and in after days, when tents had been removed, this later remained a witness to the fact that here was a place which had been used for worship.

The next halt was near Bethel, and here again an altar was built, and this one served as a landmark to be visited later. It would be a severe test of faith when food supplies in Canaan ran short and it became necessary to take refuge in Egypt. Why had God promised them a land which could not supply their needs? Their faith did not fail, rather was it strengthened to meet more severe tests which were to follow.

We learn here that Sarah, though growing old, was still beautiful, for Abram feared that Pharaoh would desire her and might even murder her husband in order to gratify his wish. It was therefore agreed that she should be known as Abram’s sister. It must have been alarming for Sarah to be separated from her husband and taken into Pharaoh’s palace among strangers. She who had been living a life of freedom in the open country, sheltered only by a tent, would find life within four walls rather restricted and uncomfortable. The Lord who had called these two for a special purpose was watching over them and allowed Pharaoh to do them no harm. He blessed them, and Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver and gold.

Returning from Egypt, Abram first visited Bethel, with its altar and its memories of earlier communion with God; here, following a further act of worship, he was able to deal generously with Lot whose servants had disputed with Abram’s servants over the pastures and wells. Abram generously offered Lot a choice of land, promising to lead his own flocks in another direction. The two families parted and the Divine promise was renewed, with additions. He was bidden to “walk -through the land, in the length of it and in the breadth of it.” Did he take Sarah and the whole encampment for this journey? We are not told, but it would be quite likely, rather than divide his household.

Three times had Abram received a Divine promise:- Genesis 12:7, “Unto thy seed will I give this land.” Genesis 13:16, “I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth” and Genesis 15:5, “Tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; so shall thy seed be.”

There were approximately eight years between the first and the last of these promises, yet nothing more had happened. Sarah, growing impatient, suggested Hagar as a substitute, in accordance with a custom of the times. Later, in a fit of jealousy, she treated her maid so unkindly that Hagar left home. We must not judge Sarah too harshly for this, she was only human, and must have longed for a child of her own. Her faith was very sorely tried by the long delay, and a very natural reaction was envy of the more fortunate handmaid. The words of the Angel to Hagar show an understanding kindness, she was promised a numerous seed, and was bidden “Return to thy mistress and submit thyself under her hands.” Hagar obeyed the Divine Messenger and stayed with Sarah until the time came when God bade Abraham send her away permanently.

In Genesis 17 we read the Lord made a solemn covenant; and Abram’s name was changed to Abraham, meaning Father of a Multitude. The promise was clearly given: “I will make thee exceeding fruitful. I will give unto thee and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” The name of Sarai was also changed, and a clear promise given that she should be a Mother of Nations. Abraham’s natural rejoinder was a plea for Ishmael, but he was assured that the special blessings were for Sarah’s son, and the boy’s name was announced.

This interview seems to have been with Abraham alone. Later, the Lord appeared to him again with a special message for Sarah. Abraham’s hospitality shows itself in the details he arranged for the comfort of his three visitors. He came to Sarah - “Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal - make cakes upon the hearth.” Servants would be at hand if required, but Sarah took responsibility of providing a meal worthy of the guests. Sarah overheard the mention of her son, and we can understand the laughter the idea caused in both, not necessarily of doubt, for there was a humorous side to the prospect; a little child in their home seemed so far outside possibility; there was definitely joy, for a long-standing desire was to be fulfilled. Abraham had found God faithful and could not seriously doubt His word. Sarah, somewhat nervously, denied having laughed, feeling uncertain how the Messenger would treat her. Hebrews 11 tells us that Sarah

was given this child because she judged Him faithful who had promised.” The boy was called by a name meaning ‘laughter’, thus perpetuating the joy of his parents.

Sarah guarded her son so jealously that again she sent her maid away, this time permanently for “the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.” We can almost hear the note of pride with which she spoke the words “my son”. Reading through the narrative in Genesis 22 we wonder if Sarah ever knew of the call to sacrifice Isaac. It would have been much harder for Abraham if he had to win her consent; it is possible she was not told of the command which so baffled her husband. Abraham still believed the Divine promise “In Isaac thy seed shall be called,” and though he could not see how this would be accomplished he told the servants “I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you.” Hebrews 11:19 suggests the thought that the God who had given him Isaac could as easily raise him from the dead. A ram was substituted, but not until Isaac had suffered himself to be bound and laid on the altar, a symbol of dedication to God.

In Galatians 4 Paul speaks of Hagar as a bondwoman, and her son as “born after the flesh.” This he likens to the Sinai covenant, which covenant answereth to Jerusalem which now is and is in bondage with her children. We, who by faith and belief in Jesus have become children of promise as Isaac was, have entered into the New Covenant and are children of the Jerusalem which is above and is free.

Safety, guidance and rich reward were promised by the Sinai covenant, but the people saw very differently. Thunder, lightning, the Voice of a trumpet, the smoking mountain and the warning to keep at a safe distance, all combined to alarm them, and they cried out in fear to Moses “Speak thou with us and we will hear, let not God speak with us lest we die.”

Successive generations set aside the law in favour of their own ideas, as Adam had done in Eden; blessings were forfeited until the people forgot the possibility of Divine rewards. The Rabbis added their interpretations and prohibitions till New Testament times and the law was hidden under such a mass of tradition that it became a burden.

With this in mind, Paul contrasts Ishmael, the son of bondage, with Isaac, the son of the free woman, and shows how Christ has made His servants free. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”

Hagar, the bondwoman,- and her son belong to this life, the brightest spot being shown in the meaning of the boy’s name “The man whom God hears.” But Isaac, directly given by God, and in symbol, dedicated on the altar to God, represents those who are born from above, and whose lives are consecrated to the Lord who has redeemed them.

Sarah, the free woman and her son are used to show the liberty of the Gospel, whose adherents are no more servants, but sons. The Gospel is wider than nation or race, and all who will may come to the Saviour, with whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, but all are one.

Ishmael goes down to history as Father of a great nation because he is Abram’s son. God was with the lad and assured Hagar that her son should dwell in the midst of his brethren, even though his hand should be against every man, and every man’s hand against him.

Isaac goes down to history as Father of the nation to whom God said “I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine” and again “Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen” “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall shew forth my praise.” (Isaiah 43)

To-day we see Jews and Arabs still living near each other, with deep-rooted enmity separating their thoughts and habits. We know that neither will be able to overcome the other, for none but the Prince of Peace will be able to bring them together in harmony.

Sister Mona Dawes.

PROOF OF THE GENUINENESS OF THE SCRIPTURES

The manuscripts are innumerable. They belong to all ages and are very ancient. They have been kept for centuries in distant parts of the world, under the custody of opposing sects and in circumstances that made extensive or important alterations impossible.

The possessors of these M.S.S. deemed them of the highest value, and professed to live under the influence of the truths contained in them. Copyists preserved them with the utmost reverence, counting every letter of every book and registering every title of the law.

How remarkable, how decisive as an evidence of Divine care that while all the libraries of Europe and the world containing copies of the Sacred Scriptures have been examined, all ancient versions extant compared, the M.S.S. of all countries from the 3rd to the 16th century collated the commentaries of the Fathers again and again investigated, nothing has been discovered, not even a single general reading which can set aside an important passage hitherto received as genuine.

This negative conclusion that our Bible does not essentially differ from the Bible of the Primitive Church is indeed ample recompense for all the labour and time which has been devoted to these pursuits.”

Origin unknown.

DEFIANCE and REPENTANCE.

When thinking of defiance two people who grossly defied God come to mind. Balaam and Pharaoh. Let us first look at Balaam. His fault was that the prospect of fame and monetary gain made him “bent on getting his own way, whether it was God’s will or not. He was so determined on that futile mission trying to curse the Children of Israel that God had to intervene forcibly. We know what happened. His ass saw the angel of God. But when trying to save Balaam “by turning out of the angel’s way, Balaam thought the ass was stubborn and smote her. This happened three times until Balaam eventually himself saw the angel. Now to be honest with ourselves, when we badly want something, not necessarily money or material possessions do we always ask ourselves whether our wishes are in accordance with the will of God as recorded for us in the Bible? Do we always pray to God before taking any important decisions in our lives and ask whether it is His will? And if our wishes do not materialize, being unfulfilled, do we gracefully accept it as God’s will, realizing that there is a reason for it which we may only discover years later, perhaps only after the resurrection.

Now the case of Pharaoh. He broke his promise to let the Children of Israel go free nine times. But the ninth time proved once too often. God was very patient with him, considering how he defied Moses and Aaron. And Pharaoh mistook God’s patience for slackness, assuming God did not, after all, mean what He said. He mistook God for one who just made empty threats. Now none of us openly defies God to this pattern. But we all have our weaknesses in one direction or another. We all sin in many ways, then regret it and ask God for forgiveness. And we sincerely mean it at the time. But unfortunately we often commit the same sin again. I often ask myself how we are trying God’s patience when we do the same wrong repeatedly. But let us never be guilty of Pharaoh’s mistake of misinterpreting God’s patience for weakness. It could easily be done, not intentionally like Pharaoh, but unconsciously, because the punishment does not always immediately follow the misdeed. Think of a child who does something he shouldn’t. Father threatens punishment “Don’t do this again, or else...” But some are more patient and easy going than others and allow the wrong to go through a few times, though threatening repeatedly. The child then thinks he is getting away with it, mistaking fathers patience for sheer bluff, very much like Pharaoh’s attitude towards God, though in a much smaller way and not really intending direct defiance. But if he is a caring father heeding Solomon’s proverbs about a loving father chastening his son betimes, the time will come when the child will do it once too often only to discover that father meant what he said after all. He will then discover the hard and painful way the difference “between patience and slackness of keeping promises. And we when we sin and the evil consequences do not appear immediately, do not let us think we got away with it. Sin is sin. But God in His mercy and through the intercession of our High Priest forgives the repentant sinner. Let us never slacken in our efforts to do “better next time. It is easily done when we apparently and only apparently, we do not

experience any evil consequences. But let us be conscious of God's mercies, undeserved on our part, & beware of avoiding Pharaoh's mistake of taking unfair advantage of it.

I now want to turn to the very opposite: sincere repentance. Here again there are two examples: David and Paul. The former committed adultery and then tried to cover it up. But in doing so, he committed another sin, murder. No matter how much he tried to hide it God did not let him do so. He eventually confessed to God, and his prayer of repentance is recorded in Psalm 51. Trying to cover wrong doing by rulers and people in authority has, is, and will be until the return of the Lord, a common feature. We have an example of it in I Samuel chapter 15 when Saul failed to carry out God's command to destroy utterly the Amalekites and all their possessions. And he had to admit it. But he tried his utmost to persuade Samuel to come with him just this once so that the people should not find out. Of course it became known eventually that God had rejected Saul and appointed David in his place.

How different from the case of Paul. Paul, unlike David, did not transgress the law. He was guilty of a misguided zeal in persecuting the Christians. But one outstanding feature in his character is his open admission in public, both in front of the Jewish teachers and in front of the Roman authorities, that he was wrong. Just think of it: a teacher of some fame, an authority on the law of Jewish tradition, held in high esteem by Gamaliel, a religious leader at that time, admitting his error in public, unashamedly. Not what we find of leaders and statesmen of our day, is it? What can we learn from this? Let us for a moment not look on doctrinal matters of his epistles, but just at the repentant Paul. Of course Paul's repentance was brought about suddenly through God's intervention. Our own conversion did not come about as drastically as this. For most of us it came about through reading literature, or a friend showing us the way of truth. But like Paul we all had to admit some time in our lives that the faith we were brought up in, or the faith we embraced later in our lives was wrong.

Not necessarily in public, "but nevertheless to some close friends, and it took some courage. But with all our faults, we can at least say that we let God lead us and were not defiant like Pharaoh & Balaam. We resolved at the time of our conversion to serve God to the utmost of our ability. Let us continue in this path. If we have failed, as we all do at times, let us renew our resolve. It is never too late. God is patient and merciful.

Only let us not fall into Pharaoh's way and take unfair advantage of it. Then we shall find that God will never leave or forsake us.

Bro. Leo. Dreifuss.

"Signs Of Our Times"

Dear Lovers of Truth,

For many months the writer has considered forwarding the information contained in this edition. "Signs Of Our Times" is based on noting world events and suggesting passages where they may be foretold in the prophets of Holy Writ. The vast majority of the events considered concern the Holy Land - God's Land - and His people, Israel.

Since 1993 the prophecy known as "the seventy weeks prophecy" contained in Daniel ch.9:24-28 has surfaced in our considerations. Over those seventeen years some of our most supportive readers have passed away. New readers have joined us who, like the former, have a burning hope that soon our Lord Jesus will come. Consequently repetition is necessary.

The present world events confirm that the Return of Christ is imminent. Especially is this true of the struggle taking place at the present time to find a peaceful coexistence of Jews and Arabs in Israel and the Middle East.

It is always dangerous to name dates, (we have been wrong before), however the time periods are Scriptural and the historical events quoted can be verified on the computer. All but the last are history now

and if the dates assigned to them are correct, then the last date suggested will be somewhere near the climax of “the Battle of Armageddon”, or some other event to which the angelic declaration “blessed is he” who witnesses that event (whatever it is) can be attributed. Your comments, favourable or otherwise, will be welcome.

May God bless and keep you. Your brother in Christ, Art

“Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”
Amos 3:7

Signs of our Times

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“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet” - Psalm 119:105

“For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect.” - Mark 13:22

MORE PEACE TALKS AT YOM KIPPUR

The choice of crucial “peace talks” occurring at the time of the Jewish feast, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) keeps recurring. We feel that this can hardly be mere chance or coincidence. Each time they have failed.

You will recall that President Clinton brought together PA leader Yassar Arafat with Israeli Prime Minister Rabin on the 13th September 1993. On Yom Kippur 2000 the then Israeli Prime Ministering/ Sharon went up onto the Temple Mount and caused a riot in which over 150 died and Second Alaksa Intifada erupted. Is this significant?

We believe it is. It fits with Daniel’s visions. Let us look first at Daniel 9:

DANIEL 9:24, “Seventy weeks (‘sevens’) are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint me most Holy. 25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. 26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary, and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be floured upon the desolator.”

The division of the 69 weeks into periods of 7 + 62 years is accounted for by the fact that the first 7 heptads (49 years during which the restoration of Jerusalem was completed) terminated with the close of the age of the prophets. Forty nine (49) years from BC 445 brings us to the date of Malachi’s prophecy, BC 397. Another 62 heptads brings us to the crucifixion of Christ around the 14th March, AD33. This is the most notable event in the history of the world and the pivot around which all prophecy revolves. It is the springboard from which the future history of the world evolved.

THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AD70

“.. .the people of the leader [Heb. ‘Nagidi that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.”

So who were the people who destroyed the city of Jerusalem? It was always the Romans who were blamed, but is this correct? According to Josephus, the Jewish historian of that time, the Arabs greatly outnumbered the Romans and Titus recognised their hatred of Jews.

JOSEPHUS: WARS OF THE JEWS Chapter IV Page 504 - “ But as to Titus, he sailed over from Achaia to Alexandria and that sooner than the winter season did usually permit; so he took with him those forces he was sent for and marching with great expedition, he came suddenly to Ptolemais and there finding his father, together with the two legions; the fifth and tenth, which were the most eminent legions of all, he joined them to that fifteenth legion which was with his father eighteen cohorts followed these legions; there came also five cohorts from Cesarea with one troop of horsemen, and five other troops of horsemen from Syria. Now these ten cohorts had severally a thousand footmen, but the other thirteen cohorts had no more than six hundred footmen apiece with a hundred and twenty horsemen. There were also a considerable number of auxiliaries gat together that came from me longs Antiochus and Agrippa, and Sohernus; each of them contributing one thousand foot -men that were archers, and a thousand horsemen. Malchus also, the king of Arabia, sent a thousand horsemen, besides five thousand footmen, the greatest part of whom were archers; so that the whole army, including the auxiliaries sent by the kings, as well horsemen as footmen, when all were united together, amounted to sixty thousand, besides the servants, who, as they followed in vast numbers, so because they had been trained up in war with the rest, ought not to be distinguished from the fighting men; for as they were in their masters’ service in times of peace, so, did they undergo the like dangers with them in times of war, insomuch that they were inferior to none, either in skill or in strength, only they were subject to their masters - Also~. Josephus: Wars of the Jews: Chapter XDL Page 569.

DANIEL’S PROPHECIES OF THE LAST DAYS

As with all Daniel’s prophecies, there is a gap in between the time the prophecy relates to and “the last days.” In chapter 2 the image we spoke of reaches the end of the last world empire, Rome, then deals with the condition of the world prior to the coming of Christ. In chapter 8 the prophecy deals with the kingdom of Persia (depicted as a ram) being overthrown by Greece (the he-goat). Then follows the last days prophecy when a hater of Israel will arise from one of these kingdoms to stand against Christ. The description fits well with Ahmadinejad of Iran.

THE LEADER THAT SHALL COME

Let us return to chapter 9. There is a gap (or hiatus) also in this “70 weeks prophecy.” The commencement of the 70th week required a latter day leader (nagid) who will sign a treaty with Israel.

The writer is convinced that this is the Peace Treaty signed by Rabin and Arafat on Yom Kippur, 13th September 1993 to last for seven years!

Daniel 9:27, And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week (of years): and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.”

Thus began the final week [“seven”] in Daniel’s 70 weeks prophecy. The last week of years was to commence with the signing of a treaty or “covenant” for one week. The treaty was to be broken “in the midst of the week.” This was done when the then Prime Minister of Israel, Benyamin Netanyahu signed the order to annex an area outside Jerusalem. This was 25th February, 1997. On the 18th March, 1997 the Israelis began road works on Har Hama; a hill on the outskirts of Jerusalem. [Remember, the prophecy concerned “thy people” and “thy holy city.”] (The Hale-Bopp comet was seen over Israel).

This breaking of the treaty occurred on the feast of Purim 18th March, 1997. It brought to an end the period of sacrificing “land for peace” on the part of Israel.

On the 13th September, 1999 the then Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Barak, actually RE-signed the treaty with Yassar Arafat for one year, at the end of which Arafat announced that he intended to set up his Palestinian State. However, when the 13th September, 2000 (end of seven years) arrived, Yassar Arafat said that the time was not opportune for the establishment of the Palestinian State.

On Yom Kippur, 29th September, 2000 Ariel Sharon went up to the Temple Mount and a revolt by the Palestinians necessitated intervention by the Israeli police. The reason that nothing of significance occurred on the 13th September, 2000 was that an extra month is inserted in the Jewish Calendar to bring it into line with the seasons every four years or so. The year 2000 was the year in which that was done. Consequently the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) fell in on the 29th September of that year - the day the Al Aqsa Intifada began.

Since that time the “desolations” prophesied in Daniel 9:27 have continued. Both Jews and Arabs have lost hundreds of their citizens; and Anti-Semitism has resumed world-wide as it did before World War 2.

THE TIME OF THE END

Note that there are no other time periods given to Daniel until chapter 12:1-4, where he is told,

“And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. 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.”

Then Daniel records the conversations of the angels who are revealing these visions to him -

DANIEL 12:6 (NKJV):- “And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, “How long shall the fulfilment of these wonders be?” 7. Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.”

The phrase “a time, times and half a time” is 3 & 1/2 years (as translated by Moffatt and others) or 1260 days, which is significant. Calculating 1260 days from the end of the 70 weeks prophecy (29th September, 2000) we come to 12th March, 2004 when Ariel Sharon announced his Policy of withdrawing from Gaza and enlarging Jerusalem. This unilateral withdrawal was “a sign of good faith” toward the Palestinians who were expected to reciprocate with cessation of the ‘Al Aksa intifada.’ Instead a referendum placed Hamas in control of Gaza, with the result that more intensive barrages of rockets were fired into Israel. The policy divided the Israeli people. Many supported the Israelis displaced from Gaza and outlying settlements in the West Bank who were forcibly resettled in Israel proper. Ariel Sharon had a severe stroke and has remained in a coma since.

THE SECOND PERIOD -1290 DAYS

DANIEL 12:9, “And he said. Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. 10 Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. 11 And from the time that the daily [sacrifice] shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate setup, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days.

Note also that the word “sacrifice” is not in the original. The idea is that a witness which has always been there is corrupted. The Arabs have endeavoured to change history, denying that Israel ever possessed the Temple Mount and they are attempting to rid the area of any artefacts that prove otherwise. Thus the “perpetual” testimony to the fact that Yahweh placed His Name there is constantly under threat from those descendants of Esau, the one the LORD hated. [See Malachi 1:2-3; Romans 9:13].

When we consider the time period mentioned by the angel consisting of 1290 days which began on 12th March, 2004, it brings us to 23rd October 2007.

During that period, not only did Israel lose its settlements in Gaza and Sharon as Prime Minister, but the Hezbollah fought Israel over control of the Lebanon border and considered their resistance a psychological victory.

Repercussions in Israel over the result of the conflict seem to support that conclusion. During this period “the power of the holy people has been shattered”

THE THIRD PERIOD -1335 DAYS

DANIEL 12:12 (NKJV) “Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.”

Benjamin Netanyahu has been reinstated as Prime Minister of Israel (31/3/2009) during this period. If our calculations are correct (or somewhere near correct) this 1335 days' time period may expire somewhere near 11th June, 2011. According to the Jewish Calendar, the Feast of Pentecost falls on June 08, 2011 (6th of Sivan, 5771).

Another extraordinary fact is that Martin A. Armstrong, in his article on recurrent cycles - published as "It's Just Time" in which he uses Chinese and Mayan Calendars as well as other sources - concludes that a very significant catastrophic event will result from all those recurring cycles merging to a common cataclysmic climax on June 13,2011.

What awaits at that time is conjecture. We wait in faith and "look up - your redemption draweth nigh."
"Even so. Come, Lord Jesus."
Your Brother in Christ, Arthur Wright.

* * * * *

Dear lovers of Truth,

Last night the Sky over Brisbane was crystal clear. There above us was the crescent moon with Venus shining brilliantly. What stopped me in my stride as I walked home was the position of Venus. It was in juxtaposition to the moon! Not as close as is depicted in the flags of those Islamic nations that feature it as their national emblem, but close enough to recognise its significance on such a night. It was the 11th September when the people of Manhattan, New York were mourning the loss of nearly 3000 folk in the twin towers bombing. When Muslims all over the world were being aroused into anger by the threat of burning the Koran. When Israel and the Palestinians are locked in peace talks - and when Yom Kippur approaches.

The reason I noted this event in the heavens is not because I am superstitious, but because of the purpose God proclaimed in Genesis 1:14 "And God said, Let there be light in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years."

I fully expect that Revelation 9:13-21 will soon begin.

Your brother in Christ Jesus, Arthur Wright

COMMENTS RELATING TO THE SERPENT in Genesis chapter 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 relative scriptures. 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 1 Corinthians 11:5 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 actions 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 me" 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 tree before that 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 5) and probably eating of its 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 reasonings of her tempted mind - it would be as though the serpent had said 'thou shall not surely die' etc., although its part in the event was entirely passive, it was only doing 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 (chap. 1 verse 15-15), 'enticement' comes in various ways - by what we see, hear, feel, etc. We do not take the 'conversation' between the Devil (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) 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 (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.

Correspondence and Comments relating to John Launchbury's book

“Change us, not God”

Further to our review of 'Change us, not God' by John Launchbury published in our last two Circular Letters, I have now received two emails from Brother Fred C.B. In the first of these he writes:-

“Whilst I have read and pondered the view that you have put forward, I am not all that sure that you have adequately resolved the arguments that Launchbury outlined. Take for example your response to 'Challenge No 3' as expressed on page 11 of CL 244.

You say that John's reasoning needs checking out and rightfully so, but in following your line of thought, I immediately run into difficulties.

The argument runs... “Bob owes John five bucks and John demands payment. Alice pays John the five bucks. So now Bob doesn't owe it to John but he still owes it to Alice. How simple?”

To my way of thinking, this line of reasoning has overlooked the fact that what Alice did, using Launchbury's illustration, is gift (give) the amount to Bob, not advance it as a loan requiring repayment. This changes the equation significantly.

Following this, you proceed to recast the example by changing the names, putting it this way.....”Adam owes God his life. Along comes Jesus and says, 'I will pay the debt of life that Adam owes; I will lay down my life in place of Adam's; please let Adam live.' Again, very simple. And that is what happened.”

In looking at it this way, it seems to me that we are still left with the very problem that Launchbury has endeavoured to highlight. That is, if Jesus paid what was owed by Adam, then God has nothing left to forgive. And, to my simple way of thinking, this appears to remain a very valid point.

One of the aspects of atonement explanation that I have a great deal of trouble getting my head around is that which relates to what is termed 'natural life' and 'spiritual life'. Examining the Garden of Eden scenario, I keep asking what was at stake when Adam and Eve were warned against eating from that certain tree? Was it a question of their 'natural life' or something much greater than this, their very existence. Existence which depended on maintaining a direct link/ connection/relationship with God.

I gain the impression that when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree they actually died spiritually. They cut the link that would have enabled them to enjoy unending existence. Permanent and unbroken fellowship with God. By eating from the tree, they fell into the category that Jesus evidently recognised when he said, "let the dead bury the dead". (Matthew 8:22). Those, who whilst being alive in the flesh, were in effect spiritually dead; dead in trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1). The condition that Adam and Eve placed themselves in, and all else who have chosen to imitate their bad example; there being no exception apart from Christ.

Looking at the picture this way, I am left with the impression that the understanding that Launchbury has endeavoured to convey, tends to offer a view point that is more harmonious in many respects than that embraced by the substitutionary stand point. However, in saying this, school is still out as far as I am concerned, as I see much food for thought, without attempting to address any other comments that you have made.

Having no wish to make this a lengthy note or unduly labour the issues, perhaps you would like to comment on what I have tried to convey so far, brief and all as it may seem. Incidentally, I fully agree with what you have said in your email in respect to the need for Baptism as a prerequisite to entering into a right and proper relationship with the Father.

kindest regards in the faith and hope which we share through Christ Jesus our Lord. Fred C. B."

In reply to the points Brother Fred has outlined above I wrote :

"First I wish to thank you for your email regarding my response to John Launchbury's book ... I am sure the points you raise will interest others ...

I did make one mistake when I wrote "Adam owes God his life..." I have made this mistake before and should not have made it again but at least it gives me the opportunity once more to show that Adam owed his life to the Law of Sin and Death and not to God. I think this is an important distinction for it highlights the supreme, unbounded Love of God and of Jesus (as I hope we shall see later). Yes, God is the Lawmaker and it is the Law that requires satisfaction. When a Ruler or Government of any country makes a law for governing the people those who infringe the law do not pay the Ruler or the Parliament, or the Judge who oversees the case. Yet the demands of the law have to be met.

In the case of Adam it was God who, temporarily, provided the satisfaction when He clothed Adam and Eve with animals skins, and it was animal sacrifices that again, temporarily satisfied the requirements of the Law in Israel, and since the crucifixion it is Jesus, whom again God provided, who has satisfied the Law of Sin and Death. So God, who made the Law, also provided the solution by which His Law was satisfied. What King, Government or Judge would do such a thing? Yet God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for us. And then we have Galatians 3:13 which tells us that Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law. How? By being made a curse for us. How can anyone take away the teaching of substitution from this verse?

With Love in Jesus to you and yours. Russell."

I then received a second email in which Brother Fred writes:-

"Hello Russell, Greetings and thank you for responding to my note ... I hear your further remarks, which you feel validate the substitution view, but I am not all that sure they make it an open and shut case. The more I have thought about this question, since being prompted to do so by Launchbury's book, the more I see problems with the substitution arguments. Particularly since reflecting on what I read in Hosea 6:6 "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." If God says He requires mercy rather than sacrifice, why would He turn around and require the sacrifice of His son in order to settle an account on behalf of another? That hardly equates with mercy in my book.

The substitution view point seems to be predicated on the argument that the demands of law must be met no matter what. To put it crudely, it seems to be indicating that God requires His 'pound of flesh' regardless, because justice/law reigns supreme, above mercy and forgiveness. It implies that God has to be paid off, or Justice/law must get its dues, before mercy or forgiveness can be considered, but this flies in the face of the very idea of mercy and forgiveness.

I have two sons, and there is no way known that I could let one of them die the most horrible and excruciating death known, even if happy and willing to do so, so that a sinner could go free. I would free the sinner, even though he/she may deserve to die, cancel out all knowledge of past wrongs and give him/her a chance to make good/repent, so long as he/she showed contrition and sought mercy. I ask myself, why are we saying that God acts otherwise? Why does God have to be paid off? Are we saying that judgment/law must rate higher than mercy? That mercy/forgiveness can't be shown until the debt has been paid? I can't get my mind around this idea

We have a case in Indonesia as this very point in time. There are two drug offenders under the sentence of death. Indonesian law says drug offenders must die, but they are pleading for mercy. Apparently during then already 5 years in jail, they have shown exemplary behaviour and have expressed a strong sorrow for their wrong doing, and seek a chance to make a better life. Indonesia have been known to refuse mercy before in 'the case of drug offenders. They are hard liners, and added to this is the fact that they would not even countenance the idea of letting someone else step in and die, instead of the offenders. In their eyes, that would not be justice.

Yet, we say that this is what God does. He accepts payment for another person's wrong doings, by allowing an innocent person to put his head on the block instead. How can we call this justice?

Since I have been re-examining my thinking about the substitution understanding, I have held up until this time, the more I am beginning to think that the idea has been responsible for making me read a lot of Scriptures the wrong way. A bit like it is when one holds a Trinitarian view point about God, there just seem to be a lot of Scriptures that favour the understanding, but it is not until you dig a bit deeper, can it be seen that they do not necessarily imply what one tends to think. It is really hard to get a viewpoint out of your head, once it has been planted there, more so if held for a long time.

Incidentally, I saw a definition of Grace on the Internet yesterday that made me shudder. This was it: 'God's Riches At Christ's Expense'. This was saying to me, that God robs Peter to pay poor. How can this be a put forward as a definition of God's grace? How can beating up on your son, to pay someone else's expense, be equated with grace? No doubt you will be able to add some further thoughts that may well help reconcile my difficulties, if they are in fact reconcilable.

My main questions are why do the demands of the laws have to be satisfied, as you say? Why cannot mercy and forgiveness be exercised instead? Are you saying that justice rates higher than mercy?"

In Response: -

In consideration of the above correspondence with Brother Fred C.B., I now add the following observations:-

In my Review of "Change us, not God", I wrote in Page 11 of our last C.L. in response to the authors argument regarding substitution, that "Bob owes John five bucks and John demands payment. Alice pays John the five bucks. So now Bob doesn't owe it to John but he still owes it to Alice. How simple?" But to this brother Fred wrote,

"To my way of thinking, this line of reasoning has overlooked the fact that what Alice did, using Launchbury's illustration, is gift (give) the amount to Bob, not advance it as a loan requiring repayment. This changes the equation significantly.

But I don't think it does change the equation. In changing the names to show how they are applied in Scripture we don't find Jesus, who paid Adam's debt, asking to be repaid. Nevertheless there is a sense in which we owe our lives to Jesus for without His sacrifice we would never have lived. In the words of Edward Turney (1873), "I am sorry to have to say this but it really is perverse nonsense to say that if a debt is paid for us then it is not forgiven. The opposite is true. Jesus forgives us because He has paid the debt we owed so that we no longer owe it. If Jesus had not paid our debt then He could not forgive us."

But Brother Fred continues, "in looking at it this way, it seems to me that we are still left with the very problem that Launchbury has endeavoured to highlight. That is, if Jesus paid what was owed by Adam, then God has nothing left to forgive. And, to my simple way of thinking, this appears to remain a very valid point.

True! God has nothing left to forgive. And isn't that the point. In the Garden God provided the animal sacrifice to provisionally cover the debt and then, on Calvary, provided His Son to pay the debt in full. But that death only covered Adam's forfeited life so that he could continue to live his natural life. It was the manner of Jesus' death that was the payment - the judicial death which the Law of Sin and Death required. Once the payment was paid in full on Calvary then there was no debt owing. This was the one death which allowed Adam and Eve to continue their lives. This was when mankind was redeemed - this redemption of mankind took place on the cross. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" as John the Baptist pronounced at Jesus' baptism. This "Sin of the world" was the one sin of Adam and not the sins, plural, of the world. It was the start of the new covenant just as in Exodus we read of the start of the old covenant when Moses sprinkled the blood of the heifer on the altar, on the book of the covenant, and then on all the people who had promised to abide by all that was in the covenant. (Exodus 24:7,8). Likewise Jesus established the new covenant for the people of God. For those who accept the new covenant, their sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. Those who refuse to accept the new covenant the law of sin and death still applies and they will suffer the second death. So we read in Romans 8:1,2, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death".

There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, and we find that the shedding of Jesus' blood is the only efficacious means by which anyone is, or ever has been, forgiven. John 5:22, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son."

Brother Fred further writes, "I gain the impression that when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree they actually died spiritually. They cut the link that would have enabled them to enjoy unending existence. Permanent and unbroken fellowship with God. By eating from the tree they fell into the category that Jesus evidently recognised when he said, "let the dead bury the dead" (Matthew 8:22). Those who whilst being alive in the flesh, were in effect spiritually dead; dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

I am sure you are right about Adam losing his spiritual life when he transgressed the commandment. There are two words in the Greek, psuche and zoe which are used in the New Testament and they indicate which life is being spoken of. Psuche is our natural life we receive from our parents which has been handed down to us from Adam, and zoe is used to indicate our spiritual life which leads to eternal life.

(This distinction is followed closely in the New Testament but when we turn to the Old Testament it does not seem so clear and we do find some anomalies).

Nevertheless, we find that when God breathed life into Adam he became a living soul and in the Septuagint (Greek) version we find the words used for 'living soul' are 'psuche zoe' 'natural life spiritual life'. Yet nowhere in Scripture do we find that we are born with zoe or spirit life but only our natural or psuche life which is passed down to us from our fathers from the time of Adam. Jesus however did not have His natural life passed down from Adam but from His Father. Hence the only reason for the virgin birth. And Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life (zoe), and that they might have it more abundantly" - this is the zoe or Spirit life along with our natural life at this time but the promise is for more abundant spirit life in the resurrection.

It is my personal view that we receive zoe life at our baptism - when we are "born again"; I have yet to find a scripture which states this but it seems fairly obvious to me that it must be so.

In Brother Fred's second letter he writes: -

".. I hear your further remarks, which you feel validate the substitution view, but I am not all that sure they make it an open and shut case. The more I have thought about this question, since being prompted to do so by Launchbury's book, the more I see problems with the substitution arguments. Particularly since reflecting on what I read in Hosea 6:6 "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." If God says He requires mercy rather than sacrifice, why would He turn around and require the sacrifice of His son in order to settle an account on behalf of another? That hardly equates with mercy in my book."

So let's look at the context of Hosea 6:6. We find that God is relating the state of man in relationship to His covenant; man is not doing as he should yet God is faithful to His word. It is not what man can do to put matters right with God, no amount of sacrifices can possibly do that, but God yet shows mercy and loving kindness to any who will come to Him in faith. So it comes down to what God can and has done for

man. He didn't want useless sacrifices but penitent hearts. They should have been performed together but such was no longer the case. But God also knew what He would do; He would provide the one and only sacrifice that was efficacious for all time.

Brother Fred continues, "The substitution view point seems to be predicated on the argument that the demands of law must be met no matter what. To put it crudely, it seems to be indicating that God requires His 'pound of flesh' regardless, because justice/law reigns supreme, above mercy and forgiveness."

"It implies that God has to be paid off, or Justice/law must get its dues, before mercy or forgiveness can be considered, but this flies in the face of the very idea of mercy and forgiveness."

But this is to suggest that God's Law of Sin and Death was unjust in the first place. However, God did not make the Law of Sin and Death and then break it! There would be no point in that. And to continue with your illustration - God does not require the 'pound of flesh' - "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given" - His own Son - for us!

In my response above I said I had made a mistake in saying that 'Adam owed his life to God when in fact I should have said he owed it to the Law, not to God'. That Law still stands and will do so until "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). We have only one enemy and that is 'death'. This is the enemy which Jesus has redeemed us from. Jesus did not come to save us from dying our natural death but from dying the second death - the judicial death that will be suffered by those who have rejected Him.

It is not a matter of God having to be paid off before mercy and forgiveness can be considered but that mercy and forgiveness are considered first and therefore God exercises mercy and forgiveness because of the law - He pays what the law requires!!! If God and Jesus were not one in their extraordinary love for us there would be no salvation. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever should believe on Him should be saved" and "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" and "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you". These and other passages of Scripture show how God and Jesus are one in thought and purpose, both showing loving kindness and mercy to us who were in bondage to sin and concluded under sin, and therefore without hope.

Brother Fred writes, "I have two sons, and there is no way known that I could let one of them die the most horrible and excruciating death known, even if happy and willing to do so, so that a sinner could go free. I would free the sinner, even though he/she may deserve to die, cancel out all knowledge of past wrongs and give him/her a chance to make good/repent, so long as he/she showed contrition and sought mercy. I ask myself, why are we saying that God acts otherwise? Why does God have to be paid off? Are we saying that judgment/law must rate higher than mercy? That mercy/forgiveness can't be shown until the debt has been paid? I can't get my mind around this idea."

I am thankful you would not consider letting one of your sons be put to death in place of someone else. It would be utterly pointless and could not save anyone beyond this present life. So the comparison with what Jesus has done for us does not stand. Jesus did no such thing as give His life merely to save Adam so that he could live this life only. He died so that His friends, those who come to Him in faith, could have eternal life - as He prayed, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:24-26)

Brother Fred writes: "Yet, we say that this is what God does. He accepts payment for another person's wrong doings, by allowing an innocent person to put his head on the block instead. How can we call this justice?"

Again you have ignored the fact that God provided the payment for Adam's wrong doing, and of course Jesus death was not justice - it was the greatest injustice ever perpetrated by mankind, yet God allowed Jesus to go through with it for our sakes. That's PERFECT LOVE, both of God and of His Son. "I and my Father are One" (John 10:30). How is it that Jesus could say "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"? He knew He was establishing the New Covenant that would save all who would come to Him. This is totally outside anything in John Launchbury's treatise on "Change us, not God". The reason for baptism is to bring us into this covenant relationship with God through the shed blood

of Jesus; to place us in a position where our sins can be forgiven; so that we can come before our heavenly Father in Jesus' righteousness.

Brother Fred: - "Incidentally, I saw a definition of Grace on the Internet yesterday that made me shudder. This was it: 'God's Riches At Christ's Expense'. This was saying to me, that God robs Peter to pay poor. How can this be a put forward as a definition of God's grace? How can beating up on your son, to pay someone else's expense, be equated with grace? . . . No doubt you will be able to add some further thoughts that may well help reconcile my difficulties, if they are in fact reconcilable."

God's Riches At Christ's Expense! No! Absolutely not." Grace is by God's goodness and loving kindness and in which Jesus generously shared. But, Fred, you also put forward the thought of God beating up His own Son to pay someone else's expense and that's equally horrible. We must start with God's Love, see Love in all God does and end with God's Love.

Further comment

In the first part of my review of "Change us, not God" I wrote of how the writer, John Launchbury shows a contrast between the sacrifices under the Law of Moses with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in as much as all the sacrifices for sin under the Law were commanded by God and were carried out as He instructed as acts of righteousness; yet the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was carried out by sinful and unrighteous men who had refused to do God's will and whom He destroyed for their wickedness (Matthew 21:41). Those carrying out the sacrifices under the Law of Moses were doing God's will, whereas those who crucified Jesus were cruel murderers who despised the Son of God. He therefore concludes that the sacrifices under the law were not types of the sacrifice of Christ.

But however John sees it there is still the need to see the purpose of the crucifixion - why Jesus sacrificed His own life in offering Himself to be the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, to take away the sin of the world.

The need and purpose of the crucifixion was to establish a better and lasting covenant between God and the faithful.

The Old Covenant was established by God with Israel as we read in Exodus 24:3-8, "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words."

This covenant with Israel was established in which all those in covenant relationship with God could receive forgiveness - forgiveness which leads to eternal life for all those whose heart is right with Him.

The New Covenant was established through the shedding of the blood of Jesus as we read in Matthew 26:28, "For this is my blood of the new testament (covenant), which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The reason for this new covenant is given in Hebrews 7:19, "For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God ... 22. By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament (covenant)." Only those who chose to accept this covenant with God through Jesus shed blood, by baptism into His death, have the opportunity of forgiveness which leads to eternal life.

We read in Matthew 20:28, "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." The life Jesus gave was the life in the blood by which we are redeemed.

In 1 John 1:7 we read, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

In 1 Peter 3:21 we read, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

And Hebrews 8:6,7, “But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.”

And Hebrews 13: 11,12, “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.”

With verses like these it is impossible to say that Jesus crucifixion is only to show us how we ought to live and behave as He did and that by doing so God will grant us eternal life.

When God created Adam and Eve He gave them freewill. This required that God should provide them with a law, for without law there could be no test of their free will, whether they would obey or not. This also required there should be reward and punishment. The moment Adam was given freewill, the sacrifice of Jesus was inevitable. There was no other way.

I find it impossible to agree with Brother John Launchbury’s views as he places all the emphasis on salvation by works and this cannot be in harmony with the gospel which states, “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:5-10).

We must consider and appreciate just what God has done for us through Jesus and not on what we can do for ourselves, for we can do nothing for ourselves apart from having faith.

Our good works should be our hearts thankful response to the Love of God and of Jesus in all they have done for us. I do not diminish good works, but they do not of themselves lead to eternal life. We must appreciate the covenant we are under and why it is necessary.

Brother Russell Gregory.

WORDS.

Many words in the Scriptures are used to convey different things, either direct or by inference, such a word is FIRE. It is brought to our notice early in Genesis chapter 5 and continues to come before us on numerous occasions until the 20th chapter of the Revelation. Fire can represent:- warmth; trial; acceptance; rejection; warning; preservation; destruction. If we look at and consider the context in which the word appears we shall soon realize under which heading or purpose the word is used. Let us look at just a few instances. Adam having disobeyed God’s word was cast out of the Garden of Eden. We read in verses 25 & 24 of Genesis chapter 5:

“Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life”.

Here fire is used as a means shall I say to prevent Adam and Eve from entering again the garden for their own material comfort. But all was not lost. They had been cast out by God but were not kept out for all time. God had provided the means of reconciliation for them whereby their sin was covered by sacrifice, the lamb provided by God seen in its fullness in Jesus Christ.

Then we look next at v. 9 of the 20th chapter of Revelation where we read:

“And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them”.

Here we are brought to the time in history when those nations who would not accept what may appear the political side of the Kingdom of God but gathered together in battle to resist, they had encompassed the saints and the beloved city but fire brought their destruction.

Another example of fire is brought before us as a softening element in Genesis 4:22, wherein we have Tubal-cain mentioned as an artificer in brass and iron which required the use of fire to make it pliable to be able to work the metals to the required shape. This reminds us how the fire of tribulation softens and fits us for God's use in His purpose. See Acts 14:22.

We next look at fire in association with blood sacrifice and the result as seen in Genesis 8. After the flood waters were assuaged Noah, when back on dry land took of every clean beast and fowl and offered a burnt (fire) offering on the altar he had built. A thank offering. God's acceptance and pleasure is recorded in the words:- "The Lord smelted a sweet savour."

We now turn to the time of Abraham during whose life we have many examples of the use of fire recorded. God had made promises to Abraham, which on the face of them seemed could not be fulfilled. Father of a mighty nation Abraham was to be in number as the stars of heaven and the sand upon the sea shore, yet in Genesis chapter 16 we read "Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children." This being so Abraham naturally asked whereby shall I know this thing will take place (in no way do we think Abraham doubted the word of God). Full details as given by God are seen in Genesis 15:8-11, and at verse 17 we read:"

"And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking (fire) furnace, and a burning lamp (fire) passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram..."

In this instance, Abraham received God's assurance by what we may regard as confirmation by yet another aspect of fire. Now we pass on to the time of Sodom and Gomorrah where Abraham saw another demonstration of fire; this time it was judgment and destruction. The cry of Sodom & Gomorrah was great and their sin is very grievous says God... the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire out of heaven, later Abraham looked... and he saw as the smoke of a furnace.

Let us now move forward some 200 years or more to the time of the birth of Moses which was the time when Pharaoh's instructions to the midwives if the birth was a male child, ye shall kill him. When his mother saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. Very early in his life fire had played a part, when his mother could no longer hide him we are told in Exodus 2:5 "...she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and pitch and put the child therein..." the latter material required preparation and softening by a process which needs the use of fire.

Many years later, while in the household of Pharaoh's daughter Moses went out unto his brethren and looked on their burdens; and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren and Moses killed the Egyptian. When he found the event had come to the knowledge of Pharaoh and that Pharaoh sought to slay him he fled to Midian, where he kept the flock of his father in law Jethro.

A great work lay before Moses, in the solitude of the wilderness he would ponder on many things. Fires in such surroundings would be a common occurrence and taken for granted. Yet it was a fire which was to bestir Moses. A bush on fire yet it was not consumed, this was so unusual that Moses said "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt." Here we see fire used by God to draw Moses to the initial stages of his great work for God on behalf of the Hebrews whom he was to lead from the Egyptian bondage. Such was the work that it would require him to return to Egypt, surely this would be the last place Moses would wish to return to in view of past events. But the purpose of God is sure and steadfast and brooks no excuses for man's non-compliance. In the third and fourth chapters of Exodus Moses was told by God, "I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt." Moses reply (or rather an excuse) was "I am not eloquent... I am slow of speech," but God sent Aaron along with him saying "I will be with thy mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what ye shall do. So Moses returned to Egypt and stood before Pharaoh, saying:- "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go..." Before Israel were to go the power of the God of Israel was seen and felt by the Egyptians, as seen in the plagues, in one of which we see fire was an element - Exodus 9:25,24, "And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven: and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and the fire ran along upon the ground... So there was hail and fire mingled with the hail very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land..."

Next we come to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt followed by the journey through the wilderness. Having been told by Pharaoh:- “Rise up, and get you forth from among my people... And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste...” Israel left in haste, the Egyptians followed them no doubt having realized their position without the slave labour force who they felt sure would be trapped by the Red Sea. But not so. In Genesis 14:15 we read:-

“And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you today: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more for ever”.

The deliverance which the children of Israel were about to experience, the like has never been seen since. It was to involve fire. Under normal conditions fire produces smoke which slowly passes into the atmosphere, fire smoulders dies and returns to the earth, and is then forgotten about. But we are about to see a marvellous work by the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel. The full details are to be read in verses 19 and 20 of this 14th chapter of Exodus. The angel which came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel took up a fresh position, so far the angel stood before Israel and gave them light to enable them to complete the journey through the Red Sea, considering their numbers and the fact that they were either on foot, man and beast even though wagons may have played a part in their transport we feel it must have taken them a full 24 hours, day and night; but now the angel worked a marvellous work, from being a pillar of fire before Israel it was removed to behind them and to the Egyptians it appeared as cloud so that neither came near to each other. We must now note that freed from the Egyptian hosts from following them, fire was still to be part of their experiences, whether kings, prophets, priests or the massed congregation as they journeyed through the wilderness toward the Promised Land. When they were brought into the Promised Land and appeared settled fire still comes before us, being used to show forth many of the varied representations listed earlier. As Israel journeyed under Moses examples are many which portray in various forms, God. Remember Deuteronomy 4:24 “For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God” and when Moses asked of God as in Exodus 33:18, “...I beseech thee, show me thy glory”, but the reply of God is seen in verse 20 “...Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live.” Such is the consuming glory of God. Moses when he later returned from the Mount Sinai after his visit to hear and receive the commandments on stone, the skin of his face shone we are told in Exodus 34:29, such must have been the intensity of the glory of God, although no doubt it was shaded from Moses while he was in the mount. Before Moses was called up to the top of the mount, Israel were fearful for again we are told “mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire.”

During their journey everything was ordered both in daily life and in the tabernacle worship. If any went out of line they were punished as we see in the case of Nadab and Abihu of the sons of Aaron for they “offered strange fire before the Lord. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” We have further instances of destructive fire as seen in II Kings chapter 1 where Ahaziah enquired of Baalzebub the god of Ekron as to whether he would recover. But his messengers were rebuffed by Elijah who said ‘is it not because there is not a God in Israel that they went to the god of Ekron?’ Two companies of 50 with their captain were destroyed by fire, as evidence that the prophet was of God. The 3rd. captain no doubt realized the folly of Ahaziah in going to Ekron and not to the God of Israel in the first place, saved him and his men from fires destructive element.

In the next chapter of 2 Kings we have the departing of Elijah from earth along with the request of Elisha who asked for a double portion of thy spirit. Seen in chapter 2, yet again fire played an important part. Elisha knew Elijah was about to be parted from him. Verse 11 of the chapter records, “And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, and parted them asunder.” Here we have as it were confirmation of Elisha as a prophet of the Lord to continue the work of God.

Before the times of the Kings and Judges we have such instances of that of Achan’s trespass which was punished by stoning and fire as seen in Joshua 7:24 & 25. While in Judges 6:14-25 we have another example of fire being used to show Gideon there was work before him: to save Israel. “Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites” verse 14. Like Moses when he was given a commission to bring out the Israelites from Egypt asked for signs, so Gideon asked for a sign that the man before him (the angel) was sent from God. The details of evidence as to what was about to take place are given in verse 21 of this 6th chapter of Judges, which when Gideon saw, then he realized he was an angel of

the Lord, for "...the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand.....and there rose up fire out of the rock..."

Another incident involving fire as a decisive factor comes before us in I Kings chapter 18. Many of the children of Israel had gone astray and worshipped Baal; the time being during the reign of Ahab who was a Baal worshipper. This incident is well known to all and recorded in verses 21-39. The followers of Baal cried out "O Baal hear us" but there was no voice, nor any that answered. But Elijah cried out "Hear me O Lord... the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice"; when the people saw it they cried out, "The Lord, He is the God." This incident was indeed a grand climax to the recorded miracles of God by the hand of Elijah.

We now turn to the prophet Jeremiah 25:29 where we read, "Is not my word like as a fire saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Yes the word of the Lord through Moses in the wilderness caused water to gush from the rock so that Israel could drink.. Returning to an earlier chapter in Jeremiah we read that Jeremiah said (20:9), "I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." He could not keep quiet any more than could Isaiah when he had to reprove Israel as in the first verse of chapter 58 "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet." Like many worthies of old, in both the new and old Testaments we in our day are enthused with a burning (fire) passion when the word of God is called in question or misrepresented, especially on such subjects as the Atonement whereby man's Salvation is seen to be in jeopardy as the result of false doctrine being propagated. It is then that today the fire of God's word eats us up. Again the words of Ezekiel come to mind "thou shall hear the word at my mouth and warn them from me." Ezekiel 33:7. Now we turn to the New Testament and we see the word fire can represent the same varied use according to its association with other words. James in his epistle at chapter 5 equates the tongue with fire, where we are shown such extremes:

- v. 5 "...how great a matter a little fire kindleth;"
- v. 6 "And the tongue is a fire... so is the tongue among our members".
- v. 8 "But the tongue can no man tame... it is full of deadly poison".
- v. 9 "Therewith bless we God... therewith curse we men"

But now let us look on the brighter side. The Scribes and the Pharisees with their associates who prided themselves in the fact they were the literal descendants of Abraham, for some reason came along to John the Baptist just as to why we are not told but John reminds them that his was only a baptism of water for repentance, but there was a greater baptism to be had from one greater than he, for John told them "I indeed baptise you with water... he that cometh after me is mightier than I... he shall baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matthew 3:7 & 11). Now we turn to the Acts of the Apostles where we see a literal fulfilment of John's words concerning Jesus; who by now had been Himself baptised with the fire of tribulation and the Holy Spirit having risen from the grave with Spirit Life. In Acts 1 when Jesus was assembled with His disciples as in 5:4:-

"And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water: but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence."

In the very next chapter this prophecy was fulfilled as we see in verses 1 to 4. Surely this is one of the great instances in the Scriptures where we have the Holy Spirit bestowed upon men and confirmed by the witness of God using fire as His approval.

Last we come to the Revelation in which we have John's vision of Christ in Glory. Chapter 1 v 14 "His head... His hair, as snow... His eyes as a flame of fire." In the message to the church in Thyatira, again is repeated the same "The Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire." And yet again in 19:12. Soon after the creation man had caused God to repent that he had made man because of the thoughts of men's hearts were evil continually. The flood was the method God used to wipe out the wicked. But never again will God use a flood. Fire is to be the final destruction of men who will not have God's Son to rule over them.

God's final judgments upon the wicked are seen in Revelation, as in 8:7, 9:17,16:8, 18:8, and 20:9".

Bro. Harvey Linggood.