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Editorial

Dear Friends, Sisters and Brothers,

A lesson we learn from the Book of Jonah covers those religious bodies who believe they alone are God's people, but God's concern is for all people. Whoever wrote the Book of Jonah had his knowledge from the prophet who had such a searching experience. No one could have made a confession like Jonah's unless they had first repented; is Jonah likely to tell a friend all that is here recorded unless he had repented from the heart? And through his repentance Jonah was able to reveal all that was in his heart and that he had learnt the lesson which God intended he should – that He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy. It appears at the outset that he thought he could flee from the presence of the Lord, but his later actions and his vow when in the belly of the great fish, reveal a change of conviction which came over him, for from the fish's belly he prayed to Yahweh and later recognised that God had heard his prayer and was indeed a merciful and gracious God to him also.

Once we appreciate that Jonah did sincerely repent, then the message of the book of Jonah shines out with a clear light illuminating several important facts. Jonah's message not only came to the people of Nineveh in his day, but it eventually came to his own nation, for from it his own nation was able to learn of God's concern for all who repent. We too may learn God's message to the proud and His grace toward the humble of whatever nation they may be.

The book of Jonah contains a wonderful revelation of the character of God; bringing glory to The Creator of the universe. One of the insightful lessons we derive from the book penetrates many religious bodies. How often do we not see pride in various denominations, thinking they only are God's people. God's concern is universal. Pride in ones own understanding frequently leads to a false sense of security, a security which will not endure. To glory in knowing and fearing God is fundamental. The knowledge that Jonah needed to learn was a knowledge of the ways of God rather than a knowledge of his own origin or descent from God's chosen race. God was teaching Jonah what life eternal was; through knowing and fearing God. He needed to redirect his aim in relation to the things in which he gloried. Pride does appear to be among his failings, but by the time he had learnt what God was teaching him then he became able to glory in knowing and fearing God.

At first Jonah was more concerned about his prestige as a prophet than the destiny of the Ninevites. But God brought him to see the importance of loving-kindness and why He should show it to those who repented. God often chooses to show that His strength can be made perfect through weakness.

Many will yet be surprised when they come to the Lord, saying, "Lord, Lord, open unto us", and they are not received by Him. Their confidence is in their works rather than in His mercy. God's work with Jonah was arduous, but he became pliable and we could expect to see him numbered among the humble and the contrite who tremble at God's word. The story of Jonah is his confession of faith written for our learning.

Jesus said, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. 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. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last." (Luke 13:24 to 30).

Love to all, Russell Gregory.

IN THE BULLRUSHES.

"And behold, the babe wept." Exodus 2:6.

Someone wrote, "I don't know why we keep so much of our sympathy for the grown-up people. I do not see how we get the Lord's ways and thoughts so completely twisted round in our own practice. We laugh at the glittering eyes of the little ones, and say scornfully 'children's tears'. Or we hold up our hands and cry 'what a nuisance'! But here the tears of one baby are put on record for how many thousand years? To be sure it was the child Moses. No doubt because of the Egyptian policy for the destruction of the male children.

In Exodus 2:1-2 we read, "And there went a man of the house of Levi and took to wife, a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived and bare a son; and when she saw him, that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months". In the Acts 7:20, Moses was called, by Stephen, when remonstrating and reasoning with those who were about to murder him, "exceeding fair" - that is, beautiful before God.

And the Apostle, in alluding to the same event in the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:23), ascribes the hiding of Moses to faith. His mother Jochebed desired to hide him from the assaults of Pharaoh.

The sorrows of others a child cannot fathom, the sins of the world they cannot see; and for what may lie in the interminably long future that stretches before the eyes of a child, they can have no fear. And yet if anything breaks your heart in city streets, it is the children; if there is anything pitiful, anywhere, it's a child's sorrowful lips. One writer said, "apart from self-will, they have a world of their own, saying, "Give them the freedom of righteous laws, enforced with calm self-control, and tender patience, foster their sense of character, respect their rights of property; be at least as mindful of their nervous fears, as of your own. Every child has rights, precious, inalienable. The right to have the simple truth spoken, and that alone. Respect their love for their pets and toys; in their minds they are as themselves for care, and their feelings to them, a grown-up world and real."

“And the babe wept.” The daughter of Pharaoh walked along by the river’s side saw the ark among the flags, and sent her maid to fetch it. “And when she had opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the babe wept” (Exodus 2:5,6). Poor little representative of a great nation’s cast out by power, saved by faith; and one day to be the man with whom the Highest would speak face to face as a man talketh with his friend. No doubt that angels had kept watch there, all the morning. Moses said of himself that he was not eloquent but he certainly knew when and how to talk that day.

Pharaoh’s daughter had a heart, and instead of indignant royal eyes and deeply offended royal ears, there came instead a stir in the royal breast. She had compassion on him and she said, “This is one of the Hebrew’s children.” (Exodus 2:6).

Yet “every son that is born, ye shall cast into the river” (Exodus 1:22). Jochebed’s faith, extended not only to hiding the child three months, but the cradle prepared for the child, also place of hiding, and Miriam keeping guard. You can well conceive what was the terror of the sentinel sister; but still alert with her heart in her mouth, but the quietest of sensible question on her lips; taking her cue from the royal lady’s last words, “This is one of the Hebrew’s children”, then said his sister unto Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for thee?” (Exodus 2:6-7). “And Pharaoh’s daughter said, Go; and the maid went and called the child’s mother,” (v.8). Quietly, until fairly behind the rushes, then away, on the wings of the wind. For hours perhaps she had bravely stood at her post, watching, watching to see what would be done. You can fancy her breathless rush into Amram’s cottage; now Jochebed darted away in feverish haste, in iron self-control, no time for tears then. I think she stood before Pharaoh’s daughter with hands folded on her breast, dry-eyed and speechless. Daring not a word, venturing not more than a glance, if so much, toward her “goodly child”. And Pharaoh’s daughter said unto her, “take the child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages, and the woman took the child, and nursed it.” (Exodus 2:9). If they held a praise meeting that night it would be a fitting thing, for those who were not afraid of the King’s commandment. (Hebrews 11:23).

“The child grew and she brought him unto Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son.” (Exodus 2:10). The Egyptian lady gave the Hebrew babe a Hebrew name; and she called his name Moses, from the Hebrew verb ‘Mashah’ which means ‘to draw out’. “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.” (Acts 7:22). God had also said to his mother, ‘Nurse him for Me.’ And she, full of faith so taught him, so we read, “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect, unto the recompense of the reward.” Hebrews 11:24,25.

Miriam is brought before us, as the observer and care-taker of the Ark in the bulrushes with the babe Moses, the goodly, the proper child. After the suggestion of an Hebrew nurse when “Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child’s mother.” “The maid” – “*ha almah*” in the original language, implying one of marriageable age.

Let us travel forward to the salvation of Israel, and the destruction of Pharaoh, and his host, at the Red sea. (Exodus 15:1), “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea.” “But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea.” (Verses 20, 21), “And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her, with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea”.

In Micah 6:4 God mentions, among benefits conferred on Israel, “I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Their ages 80, 83, and 92. Yet she led the women. V.9, “the enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them”. V.2, “The Lord is my strength and song, and, He is become my salvation. He is my GOD, and I will prepare Him an habitation my father’s GOD, and I will exalt Him”. V.6, “Thy right-hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; thy right-hand O Lord, hath

dashed in pieces the enemy”. V.7, “And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee; Thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. V.11, “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” V.13, “Thou in thy mercy, hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed. Thou hast guided them in thy strength, unto thy holy habitation.”

Brother James Hembling.

Continuing our discussion regarding John Launchbury’s book, “Change us, not God” we received another Email from Brother Fred C. B. dated 14th October 2010:

Hello Brother Russell, Greetings from yonder land. CL 245 is to hand; as of yesterday, and I can see that you have evidently been burning the ‘mid-night oil’ given the extent of further thought that you devoted to the ‘Change Us, not God’ article, prompted by my added queries.

Haven’t had time to properly digest all your comments, but I can see that you have given me much to ‘chew’ on, so to speak. One of your remarks did strike me as rather strange, and my wife Robin, unsolicited by me, did likewise. You stated that, “The moment Adam was given freewill, the sacrifice of Jesus was inevitable. There was no other way.”

If ‘freewill’ leads to such inevitable outcome, then how can it be termed ‘freewill’? Surely ‘freewill’ is not loaded with a bias that causes someone to choose other than what is right, which is implied by your comment. If so, then how can it be termed ‘freewill’? Surely Adam could have just as easily chosen to do the ‘right’ rather than the ‘wrong’ thing?

I have often pondered what would have happened if Adam had of made the right choice, and left Eve to suffer the consequences of her poor choice, on her own. Of course, such is somewhat idle thought, as we have no way of really knowing, but one cannot but help wonder at times.

The question of the origin of Angels often rises in mind, when trying to muse on such possibilities. Questions like whether or not Angels were not the product/outcome of a prior creative exercise by God. An exercise or project if you like, which resulted in a race of people, who from the outset, chose to do the ‘right thing’ and were subsequently promoted to ‘glory’ in keeping with the adage, that I think John Thomas expressed, “approbation only follows probation”. There is something in what Jesus said about those in the resurrection, being likened unto Angels, that gives this line of thinking a nudge at times.

Anyway, this is probably nothing more than a side track, and not very helpful in truly resolving the matter under consideration.

The subject of the Atonement does tend to leave me with the thoughts that I have previously expressed, following comment about the discussion that took place on Facebook. At that time, I conveyed my thoughts as, “I checked into that Facebook link yesterday evening and read through every item that had been posted under the Substitution thread. My, what a plethora of thoughts and understandings it reveals. I am fast coming to the conclusion that once you try to turn the reason why Christ died into theology, it opens up Pandora’s Box. I am a fairly simple thinker and don’t go much on some of the profound lines of thought that have been discussed. To my way of reading/thinking, the reason Christ died was because He loved His Father and He loved us. That love lead Him into a head on conflict with SIN, manifest in those who rose against Him, and SIN killed Him, because he would not fight against SIN the way the rest of mankind has and does. Christ is the one who shows greater love than man, because the greatest love that man can show is to lay down life for friends, but Christ laid down His life for enemies. How incredible is that? We need to learn from His attitude and example and do like wise. We must stop living in the ‘flesh’ and put to death our

affections and desires and be lead of the Spirit, just like He did. Then we too might be prepared to happily die, even for enemies, that others might live. This is what the sacrifice of Christ is all about to me. It is about showing us how to die to self and live for others. All the other arguments about why He died or had to die seem to miss the point to my way of thinking. The lessons to be drawn from the sacrifices under Mosaic Law were surely meant to impress on everyone the need to sacrifice our lives, in order to live unto God effectively. It was all about “not my will, but yours be done”. Sin can only be dealt with by covering it with Lamb like behaviour.”

Must conclude for now. Perhaps I will write again, when I have cogitated on your further thoughts at length?

In the faith and hope which we share through Christ Jesus our Lord, Fred C.B.

By way of reply: -

Dear Brother Fed, Thank you for your further correspondence regarding John Launchbury’s book “Change us, not God”. You are right to challenge my statement where I said, “The moment Adam was given free-will, the sacrifice of Jesus was inevitable”. I should have qualified this statement for as it stands I am sure it is not true because in the passage concerning the Good Shepherd the Lord showed that He was not compelled to give His life as a Ransom for (Gk. *anti* = instead of) many (Matthew 20:28), but did so voluntarily. The facts are given us by Jesus Himself - “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). Surely there can be no doubt that here Jesus was referring to Himself, and that if He chose He could enter heaven alone and avoid the crucifixion. He confirmed this when He said, “Thinkest thou not that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). But how then would the scripture be fulfilled that He lay down His life for us? So my statement should have read, “The moment Adam was given free-will, the sacrifice of Jesus was inevitable - if He was to save us from our sins.” Jesus had the free-will to choose, which is the point you made. However, without the crucifixion there is no salvation. I have enlarged on this in the short article that follows entitled “The Importance of The Virgin Birth.”

I agree with you when you say that “the reason Christ died was because He loved His Father and He loved us. That love lead Him into a head on conflict with SIN, manifest in those who rose against Him, and SIN killed Him, because he would not fight against SIN the way the rest of mankind has and does. Christ is the one who shows greater love than man, because the greatest love that man can show is to lay down life for friends.” This brings to mind the occasion we read of in John 13:34-35 when Jesus said “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” And yes, “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). But Jesus didn’t die for those who choose to be His enemies. But yes, we should follow Jesus example and show love to all as He did because we have no way of knowing who will come to repentance.

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The Importance of The ‘Virgin Birth’

We know that Jesus was the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary and we must never overlook the significance of this matter. It is a known and accepted biological fact that life is passed from father to child and having God as His Father means that Jesus’ life was not passed down from Adam but direct from God. Mary was a descendant of Adam and this ensured that Jesus was “made like unto His brethren” (Hebrews 2:17) but the “life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11) and as the foetus makes its own blood which never mingles with the mother’s blood, there was no possibility of the life in Mary’s blood being passed down to Jesus. So we can say with assurance that neither Jesus’ life nor His blood came from Mary.

Let us now compare and contrast these two Sons of God from scripture:

Adam received his life from God at his creation.
Jesus received His life from God by begetting.

Adam transgressed God's commandment and served Sin as a master.
Jesus always did His Father's will and never served Sin.

Adam by sinning was in bondage to Sin.
Jesus was never in bondage to sin.

Adam, through transgression, became alienated from God.
Jesus was never alienated from His Father.

Adam's descendants are all concluded under sin.
Jesus was not concluded under sin.

We see then that Adam once had the same standing as Jesus inasmuch as he too, was a Son of God, but he lost that position through transgression of God's law. He forfeited his life and became a servant of Sin – as Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters.” (Matthew 6:24) and as Paul explains, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). ‘Sin’ is personified as a ‘master’ or a ‘King’ reigning over his servants - and servants receive wages; “the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23).

The First Sin.

The one sin of Adam meant that his life was forfeit, or under sentence of death, and he should have died in the day he transgressed God's commandment. But God in His mercy, provisionally covered over that first sin when the animal was sacrificed in Eden allowing Adam to continue his life under new circumstances outside of the Garden of Eden. It is surely obvious that had Adam died in the day of his transgression we would never have lived. The life Adam then passed down to his descendants was a life under sentence of death, or as Paul expresses it, “concluded under sin” (Galatians 3:22). Our life then, is as Adam's life - under forfeit to Sin as a master.

We see from this that Jesus, because of the virgin birth, had an unforfeited life, a life not in bondage to Sin, not concluded under sin, in fact, a free life.

Herein lies the importance of the virgin birth.

Freedom From Sin

This freedom Jesus has promised to the faithful. John 8:34-36, “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” Free as the sons of God by adoption, no longer servants of sin. This is the work of God in Jesus – to give this freedom to the faithful that they may abide with Jesus for ever. Freedom from condemnation as Paul tells us in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.”

So the one sin of Adam brought all into subjection, concluded under sin - not as a punishment for something we did; not as a curse for something Adam did, but for the purpose of a blessing in God's plan of redemption and salvation in Jesus Christ, “that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” (Galatians 3:22).

The purpose then, of the Virgin Birth was to produce a man who was personally free and uncondemned and therefore in a position to offer himself as a sacrifice. All we have considered here are legal matters consequent upon the Law of Sin and Death (Roman 8:2), from which we have been freed.

Unless Jesus had received His life direct from His Father He could not offer it back to His Father to “take away the sin of the world” as John the Baptist said at His baptism. (John 1:29). Nor “give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28), as Jesus said of Himself.

But Jesus was rejected as the Son of God by the Jews in authority in His day, refusing to be enlightened as to their position. Jesus said, “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men prefer darkness,” and again, “Except I had come and spoken unto them they had not had sin”, showing that enlightenment brings responsibility. But when we become enlightened and responsible we find that what God requires initially is not strict obedience to a legal code, as the Jews thought and sought to their sorrow to observe, but faith in the promises made to the fathers. When we learn what these are and what faith involves, we find that we are under the law of (the) sin and (the) death and ready to perish. If anyone then thinks he can obtain forgiveness and salvation by good works he is doomed to failure.

If Jesus had not been the Son of God there would have been no salvation for us.

If Jesus had not lived a life of perfect obedience before His sacrifice there would have been no salvation for us.

If Jesus had not given Himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God there would have been no salvation for us.

If Jesus had not risen from the dead to be our Mediator and High Priest at God’s Right Hand there would have been no salvation for us.

Jesus means of birth, His manner of life, His willing sacrifice in place of Adam, His resurrection by His Father, are all essential steps ensuring salvation for the faithful.

Brother Russell Gregory.

JEREMIAH 7:22.

“For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: but this thing I commanded them saying. Obey my voice and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people.”

This verse is used by those who oppose themselves and principles, in conjunction with Hebrews 10, “In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure,” to prove that God had no pleasure in the sacrifices, which, we say, were types of the Great Sacrifice of Christ.

We know many leading lights in the commentary world who formulate ideas that men made sacrifices on their own to appease the wrath of an offended Deity, anything they cannot see by the eye of faith they regard as doubtful, saying it is not recorded. They say this verse is a proof of harmony with their short-sighted view. Well, the verse does seem to mean what they say when they do not see the wood for the trees.

Now, where are the words recorded? The 19th chapter of Exodus tell us: - “The third month when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai, and there Israel camped before the mount... Now therefore if ye will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then shall ye be a peculiar treasure unto me.”

We know that the Ten Commandments do not contain anything about sacrifices, but the prime object as we understand it today is, Love the Lord God with all thine heart, and then if we love we will do His commandments. While this one commandment covers all it in no way omits any of the others; therefore if God did not give the commandment then He did contradict Himself. A slaying was commanded of Abraham; and Abel offered; Noah also, and the Lord smelled a sweet savour. The Passover was

commanded, the slaying being for the consecration of the priest, etc., which was a sweet savour if obeyed from the heart; if not obeyed it was a stench in His nostrils.

Has God as great a delight in burnt offerings and sacrifice as He has in the obeying of His voice?

That obedience is better than sacrifice is obvious from the incident in Eden, for if Adam had been obedient there would have been no need for sacrifices, therefore from Adam's standpoint his disobedience spoke a bad omen. The sacrifice of God was prompted solely by Love, for He so loved the world that He gave. The difference between those two ideas is seen thus:-

Referring to animals slain in sacrifice, they in sacrifice died the innocent victims for transgressors. Free from the penalty passed upon Adam, and free from the transgressions of the law, they as the type of the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, signified the taking away sin by shedding the blood of one to come, similarly situated.

Sacrificial death, though occasioned by the fall, was not caused by the fall. The cause of sacrificial death was LOVE, not sin. Had God not intervened to save, the sentence of death that was brought about by sin would have been irrevocable. No soul could have escaped its grasp.

It was God who caused, or originated, sacrificial death, as the basis of His plan of salvation; and though it may be aptly said that God caused the other death, yet in the one case we may have it against His will, and in the other, according to his will; for God was never willing that any man should perish.

Therefore, had there been no sacrificial death, there could have been no resurrection from the dead and so, the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead is one fact to prove that He did not die under the penalty of Adam."

Brother W.D.Jardine.

Further comments:

This picture can be visualised by all who want a demonstration. To Adam the death of the animal must have been a clear lesson, a lesson that is beautifully explained by Andrew Wilson in his article, "Eden to Gethsemane".

There is the revelation as contained in the Law of Moses, when hands were placed on the animal's head and their sins symbolically transferred to the animal, and as the wages for sin was death, the animal was then slain to confess to the fundamental principle that without the shedding of blood there is no remission.

Then in the realisation of the love of God in providing the Lamb, people saw that God so loved them that He was not willing that any should perish.

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord?" (Romans 11:33).

"Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath sent forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness... that He might be just, and the Justifier of him that believed, in Jesus." (Romans 3:24,25).

Oh, behold, therefore the goodness and the severity of God.

So type and antitype agree; without spot or blemish, and clean according to the law - Jesus was as a lamb without spot or blemish and legally free from the condemnation.

We are told that to do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination - how much more so is it when it is with a wicked mind (Proverbs 21); this was the general way of Israel. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? Bring no more vain oblations... incense is an abomination unto me... I will not hear you. Learn to do well. If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat the good of the land, but if ye refuse and rebel ye shall be devoured." (Isaiah 1).

"To what purpose cometh these to me with incense from Sheba, and sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet (or pleasing to me - K.V.) (Jeremiah 6).

"I hate, I despise your feasts and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies, though you offer me burnt offerings I will not accept them, neither will I regard the peace offerings of your beasts, take thou away from me the noise of thy song! For I will not hear it" (Amos 5:21, Hosea 8:13).

"I desire mercy, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings (Hosea 6:6).

Here is the key to the sacrifice of Jesus – obedience, and obedience will make all sacrifices pleasing to God.

Be ye therefore followers (imitators) of God as dear children, and walk in love, even as Christ also hath loved us and hath given Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour. For thou desirest not sacrifice; I would give it. Thou delightest not in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit... then shalt thou be pleased with burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then shall they offer Bulls upon my altar." (Psalm 51:16 to end).

The foregoing is plain to all who are able to understand that if we obey all will be right; but if anyone consistently refuse to do that which is right then God will choose their delusion.

"I the Lord will answer him... according to the multitude of his idols; I the Lord will set my face against man; I the Lord have deceived that prophet" (Ezekiel 14, Isaiah 66:1-5).

Because they despised God He despised them.

"Moreover, also I gave them statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live... Go ye, serve ye every one his idol." (Ezekiel 20: 25, 39). Surely the sweet Psalmist of Israel was inspired when he wrote, "The Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity." (Psalm 125:5, Romans 1:25).

That this is the case in Jeremiah chapter 7 anyone can now see, even the 'blind' biblical commentators in their uninspired prefaces to it are aware.

Take Dr Adam Clarke:

"The iniquities of Judah are so great in the sight of God that the prophet is commanded not to intercede for the people, the more especially as they persist in provoking God by their idolatrous practices (vv. 16-20). The Jewish sacrifices, if not accomplished with obedience to moral law, are of no avail (21-24).

"Notwithstanding the numerous messages of mercy from the time of the exodus, the people revolted more and more, and have added to their other sins this horrible evil, the setting up of their abominations in the Temple of Jehovah, or, in other words, they have encumbered the Mosaic economy, which shadowed forth the glorious truths of Christianity with the heterogeneous admixture of idolatrous, impure and cruel rites of heathenism: consequently, the whole land shall become desolate. (25-34).

We have from time to time emphasised the need for discrimination; if we took more heed of this we would be saved from having many false ideas. For instance, the term "leaven" is generally understood to be analogous to evil; "unleavened" sincerity and truth, no leaven was to be offered with the sacrifices, yet, it may be noted, leavened bread was to be offered with sacrifices.

Then there is the matter of Circumcision; this was introduced to Abraham as a sign of his righteousness by faith - since that introduction how many who are circumcised will benefit from it?

In its stead baptism was introduced; we all agree that this symbolised circumcision of heart, faith, and love.

All the ordinances were nailed by Jesus to His cross, and the law was a schoolmaster for the purpose of bringing us by faith unto Christ, for now as ever the just shall live by faith that has come in the person of Christ - we are no more in bondage but in the liberty wherewith He has freed us, "and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." (2 Corinthians 3:17).

"Ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh.

Brother F. J. Pearce.

A Consideration of Mark 13

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

The Lord Jesus gave this prophecy recorded in Mark 13 to warn His disciples of the coming judgment on Jerusalem, and those who were to reject Him, a judgment foretold by the prophet Isaiah, in chapter 61, which our Lord read in the synagogue early in His ministry; Luke 4:17, "And there was delivered to him the book of Isaiah, and when he had opened the book, he found the place where it is written. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me I preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captive, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of I Lord. And he closed the book and gave it to the minister and sat down, and the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began to say unto them. This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." But Isaiah's prophecy continued further - "and the day of vengeance of our God."

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

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

The rest of His prophecy in chapter 13 fills in some of the events between their time and Israel's future welcome. When will Israel say "Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord"? The coming of the Lord will be first for the faithful, His Bride "who will forever be with their Lord," and secondly the coming of Messiah to Israel. This may be in two stages; the first when accompanied by the redeemed who "come with singing unto Zion" and here He will meet the elders of Israel on the Mount of Olives. Isaiah's prophecy chapter 40 verse 1; "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to (or, to the hearts of) Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Then in verse 9; "O thou that bringest good tidings to Zion, get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up thy voice with strength, be not afraid, say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God (or, Elohim)."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In researching the subject of false teachers and false Christs, there is a surprising amount of material to be found in the Encyclopaedia Britannica; also this material reveals what a large following some of these people had.

Verse 7 of Mark 13 gives further signs; “And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall not be yet.” Some have stated that this

prophecy is concerned only with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and that our Lord's warning was for this event. However, verse 26 reads, "and then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To pray to be accounted worthy contains the understanding that the accounting is an essential truth, the word indicating the meaning of being regarded, or looked upon, as worthy - a gift from God; His justification, not our worthiness. We see here His wonderful love and mercy, not only in forgiveness because we have asked, believing, but a complete taking away of sins; a justification unto righteousness.

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

Brother Ray Gregory.

From The Jerusalem Post, 5th November 2010

And may God help us

It has been reported that:

*“Elizabeth Phillips, Ph.D., a visiting scholar in the Department of Religion at Ashland University, and is a tutor in Theology and Ethics and interim administrator of Pastoral Studies at Westcott House, speaking on the role of **Christian Zionism** in supporting and expanding settlements in the Occupied Territories.*

“Christian Zionism is the belief that the return of Jews to the Holy Land is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Zionists believe that the Jews returning to the Holy Land is a prelude to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Issues surrounding the expansion of Jewish settlements into the Occupied Territories have been a major stumbling block in the negotiations. Christian Zionists believe that with the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948 God was fulfilling a vision of how aspects of time prophecies were meant to come together.”

Dr. Craig Hovey, assistant professor of Christian theology and ethics at Ashland University, said, “(Dr Phillips’) research took her not only to the West Bank, but to some of the churches in the U.S., where she interviewed people and asked about their support of Israel. Here you have American churches that are supporting Israel in doing what many see as being the most offensive thing they can do, which is continuing to build settlements on the West Bank.” Hovey continued, “And then you have American Christians who are giving money to support this. And so the question is, why would they do this? They have particular theological convictions that Israel must come back into its own as part of the plan for the end times to be fulfilled.”

Dr Hovey’s dissertation was, it seems, “on knowledge, witness, and truth-telling.” That is an interesting lead-in but first; let’s clarify a bit about the speaker.

Dr. Phillips, I’ve learned, is involved in The Scriptural/Contextual Ethics Consultation project at the American Academy of Religion - AAR which:

“Integrates study of scriptural teachings in their social/ethical context with critical study of present social/ethical contexts. We seek insights from ethical disciplines for self-critical awareness of assumptions that influence scriptural interpretation, and insights from biblical disciplines for self-critical awareness in ethics.”

Two interesting members of the board of directors of the AAR are Judith Plaskow and Rebecca Sachs Norris. Continuum will be publishing Dr. Phillips’ book, *Political Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* in August 2011.

By the way, Ashland seems to be a hotbed of pro-Palestinian activity.

In September, they had a presentation on “The Israeli - Palestinian Conflict: A Struggle for a Homeland” by Dr. John Byron, associate professor of New Testament and Greek at the Ashland Theology Seminary. Byron provided “an historical framework for understanding the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The

conflict is often presented as a struggle between competing ideologies and religions...Israelis and Palestinians represent two groups who live in a land that has experienced some form of occupation for more than 2,000 years." Byron asserts that "this is a very complex situation that has evolved over the last 100 years rather than on the validity of each group's claim".

And there was another program with a new documentary film on nonviolent peacemakers in Israel and Palestinian, "Little Town of Bethlehem," which was shown on Sept. 22.

I wonder what they are thinking over that Melkite statement of Butros.

But returning to Christian Zionism, and there's a whole site combating it, it would seem to be quite a problem for liberals. The issue has been around for a while. Here's a recent book on the subject.

What is apparent is that there are Christians who view the reconstitution of the Jewish homeland as outside their religious conception and that appear to be trying to build a new framework for an old animosity. They do so by focusing on a supposed evil being done to the Arabs of the former Palestine Mandate territory, a land, a holy land, that they previously wrested from the Jews, and thereby prevented any earlier return and then killed, pillaged and attempted to ethnically cleanse those Jews from their homes, some of which they resided in for centuries as in Hebron, Gaza and Shechem (Nablus)!

I sincerely cannot fathom the sympathy for terrorists, the ignoring of brutal societal behavior and the political fanaticism of those groups that these anti-Christian Zionism academics and clergymen support. Is their revulsion of Judaism and Jews so irrational to cause this pattern of thought and activity? What moral code can they claim for their version of Christianity that leads them to collaborate with a movement, Palestinianism that exists but to negate Jewish historical, religious, cultural and legal rights?

I am in touch with many Christians who would not agree nor recognize the theology, libertarian or otherwise, that these other Christians promote but one thing for sure, it is not Biblical nor Christian.

There are many groups involved in promoting this corrupted interpretation such as Rediscovering Palestine, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), and it has been academically reviewed and researched. The most recent position statement was the Kairos Document.

Here is an example of their rhetoric from the *Sabeel journal*: "*The lack of peace in the state of Israel is due to a predominantly religious definition of the land as well as of the state of Israel itself... The Jewish nation as an ethnic entity existing since biblical times in uninterrupted continuity is a myth...*"

In early 2011, in Bethlehem, the city of King David's birth, Sabeel will be holding a conference and its theme will focus on "Empire" which they call "one of the most cutting edge issues in today's world, and one that touches on both religion and politics" and the organizers further explain: "*Since 1967, the Palestinians have become conscious of their life under a hegemonic American empire with Israel as an essential extension strategically located in the heart of the Middle East.*"

What is truly exciting has been the growing awareness amongst biblical scholars and theologians of this reality. Their work has inspired the work of Sabeel and alerted us to the dangers and threats of empire and challenged us to look at it in light of the Kingdom of God."

This is not theology. This is not Christianity. This is not religion. As Shelly Neese pointed out – "*According to Naim Ateek, founder of the Sabeel Center, the Torah was seen as a "Zionist text" and became "repugnant" to Palestinians. Palestinian Christians needed a new theology that would in Ateek's words "liberate God from the Old Testament."*"

So, we have Christian Arabs seeking to negate a religion which gave birth, in a sense, to their own religion while promoting a nationalism which has taken religious fanaticism to its extreme, including the murdering of Christians.

God help us!

Editor: Jesus said, “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity (i.e. “with no way out” or “with no solution”); the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. - Luke 21

On the lighter side...

Rummaging through some papers for a certain letter, Brother Cliff York came across this amusing piece...

From:-

Jordan Management Consultants, Jerusalem.

Branches in:- Jericho, Ashdod, Capernaum.

To:- Joshua ben Joseph.

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the 12 men you have picked for management positions in your new organisation. All have now taken our range of tests. We have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. The profiles of all tests are included and you will want to study each of them carefully.

As part of our service and for your guidance, we make general comments. It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background education and also lacking vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise that you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept, and we recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and with proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty.

Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would lead to undermining morale. And we feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Business Bureau. Both James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus have definite radical leanings and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

There is however one candidate who shows great potential.

He is a man of ability, resourcefulness and he meets people well. He has a keen business mind and has contacts in all the right places. He is highly motivated, and out of all your candidates he is the only one to have a university education.

We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right hand man.

We wish you every success in your new venture,

Sincerely Yours,

Jordan Management Consultancy.”

Brother Cliff asks. *“I wonder how WE might have rated the 12 Jesus chose as potential “sales people” for the “New Covenant Insurance Policy”?*

And remember... the same man who chose Peter... chose you and me also!”

Thank you Cliff.

CONTROVERSY

Controversy ought truly be called the breath of life to the truth as we know it. Without controversy we should not have the truth in the measure we now have, and without continuing controversy we shall not progress and learn further truths,

Never in history has there been a more controversial figure than Jesus Christ. If His message and teachings had not been the powerful force they were, striking at the very roots of men’s beliefs, they would not have changed lives and endured down the centuries as they have done. Through the years since Christ first told men of God’s purpose with them and how to conduct themselves, those who have endeavoured to follow him, have found little peace. Inward peace yes, and a peace that passes understanding, but seldom outward peace. Many died for what they believed and after much bodily and mental suffering. Jesus warned His followers to expect it, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.”

We must therefore accept controversy and not expect our lives to be punctuated with gentle exhortation and generally a haven of peace once we have joined ourselves to Christ. Rather the opposite I think for whoever we mix with these days, people who profess something or nothing, our families or old Christadelphian associates, one is often called upon to defend and speak up about one’s convictions - and as people are today both religious and non-religious, mostly the latter, that inevitably means expressing a controversial opinion. It’s never been more controversial than now to say, all men are equal, or love your neighbour, or turn the other cheek, or love your enemies. Such commandments were never easy or a recipe for peaceful co-existence and they still are not, as anyone who has tried to practice or preach them well knows. A man like Martin Luther King tried to change men’s hearts with the same message and so change a whole people’s state and condition in a “civilised” country and he died for it - yet another controversial figure. Nothing is more certain to bring one into conflict with other people than to practice Christ-like principles and ideals. The only way to find the peace that some look for and expect is to be a hermit under a vow of silence or simply stop saying what you know is right.

The Christadelphians have stopped being controversial. In a recent letter to all members a leader says in effect “do not take sides, do not be concerned with rights and wrongs, just keep the meetings and the families in them united.” What a disgraceful message and one so alien to all Christ preached. No wonder the Christadelphian world is in chaos and with feeble pronouncements of that calibre even a union with the Pope seems quite possible.

The Churches are uncontroversial too; doctrine is hardly mentioned in sermons - just little talks about the fruits of the earth at harvest time and the evils of society at other times, but nothing to give offence for fear the handful of people who come each week are offended. Christ offended feelings and trampled on traditions and accepted practices, so should we; he was controversial so should we be. We are expected to be the salt of the earth and not the tasteless dregs of it.

Of course there is a place for exhortation and words of comfort and they can be a great help. But when you consider it the words used on those occasions are usually thoughts and expositions on controversies that we have resolved in reasoned argument and then find ourselves able to present as exhortation and encouragement to others. Paul’s words often seem to be just that - an edifying outcome of past

controversies, and conclusions he has drawn from Jesus teachings, that he then passes on to people of like faith.

Paul was another controversial figure, always in reluctant conflict with authorities of one sort or another. But he never shrank from speaking the truth, we should all be much poorer if he had done otherwise. Jesus said “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me - For my yoke is easy and my burden light.” So there is a yoke and there is a burden, it used to be persecution and death, mercifully those sufferings in the main have passed. At this time in the western world our tribulations seem to be those of isolation and an absolute alienation from the aims of most of the people we meet and hear of. We feel like outcasts because we treasure things that most people regard as mythical rubbish and we attempt to live by standards that are said to be outmoded by new philosophies and we advocate moral precepts that are wiped away by medical progress and technology. This then is our yoke and burden, that we must meet the enemies of Christ and his standards with our controversial questions and answers.

It is wearisome to find oneself often in conflict with others whoever they are and it's natural to wish for an end to it and to long for peace and quiet - but we must fight the good fight and remember that whatever it costs us, it can never compare with the cost of the sacrifice that was endured lovingly and willingly for us two thousand years ago.

Sister Helen Brady

Wrested Scripture Straightened Out and Re-set

**“For He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin,
that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”**

2 Corinthians 5:21

This passage of scripture is one of those which are so seriously wrested from their context and from their true sense, and made to support an idea that is very God-dishonouring. Let us therefore consider this passage, and let us do so in the following natural method, viz:-

- 1. The Vital Word.**
- 2. The Verse itself.**
- 3. See Chapter in which it occurs.**
- 4. Parallel Scripture elsewhere.**

The Vital Word

The important word is, of course, that which in the Authorised Version has been translated as “sin” (Greek - *hamartia*). According to the Greek Lexicons this word ‘*hamartia*’ may mean either ‘sin’ or ‘sin-offering,’ according to the sense required. It is found that when the Seventy Jewish Scholars translated the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures into Greek, they used that word ‘*hamartia*’ to signify both ‘sin’ and sin-offering.’ This explains much, for it was that Septuagint Translation which was in use in Paul’s day in Palestine.

Furthermore, we also find the same thing happens in the Hebrew, where several Hebrew words have each of those two separate meanings. And we must not forget that Paul, when writing to Corinth, was writing to an assembly which would appear from Acts 18 to be mainly Jewish. Those Jews would not misunderstand Paul’s use of that word ‘*hamartia*.’

Here, then, are the Hebrew words mentioned, each of which has the two meanings.

Chataah - rendered ‘sin’ 7 times, as – “Oh! this people have sinned a great sin. Exodus 32:31.

Chataah - rendered ‘sin-offering’ once – “burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.” (Ps. 40:6)

Chattath - rendered ‘sin’ 169 times, as – “pardon our iniquity and our sin” – Exodus 34:9.

Chattath - rendered 'sin-offering' 116 times, as – “Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin offering.” Lev.10:17

Chattath - rendered 'punishment,' etc., 7 times.

Chata - rendered 'sin' 165 times, as – “In all this Job sinned not” (Job 1:22.)

Chata - rendered 'offering for sin' twice as – “Slew it, and offered it for sin.” Leviticus 9:15.

Chattaah - rendered 'sin' twice as – “forgiving iniquity... and sin.” Exodus 34:7.

Chattaah - rendered 'sin offering' once – “for a sin offering for all Israel.” Ex. 6:17.

Asham - rendered 'sin' twice as – “Fools make a mock of sin.” Proverbs 14:9.

Asham - rendered 'offering for sin' once – “Make his soul on offering for sin.” Isaiah 53:10.

Asham - rendered 'trespass' 7 times.

Asham - rendered 'trespass offering' 35 times.

Ashmah - rendered 'sin' 4 times, and 'trespass' 11 times as – “Amon 'trespassed' more and more.” 2Ch. 33

Ashmah - rendered 'trespass offering' once – “in the day of his trespass offering.” Leviticus 6:5.

Consistently with this, the Diaglott thus renders the verse in question: “For Him who knew no sin, He made a sin offering on our behalf.”

The Verse.

When we examine the verse itself, we are confronted with this choice; either to abandon the Christadelphian idea or else to accept the doctrine of the personal pre-existence of Christ. For the actual Greek is, according to the interlinear Diaglott (and no Greek scholar will dispute the rendering here) - “him not having known sin.” The Lord Jesus Christ was made “*hamartia*” at a time when it could be said of him that He had not known sin. If this was at His conception, then He evidently must have existed as a person before then. (And if one says here that at His conception it could have been said of him that he had not known sin, well - the same could be said of every human being ever born).

The truth is clear and simple: The Lord Jesus Christ was made a “sin offering” for us at a time when it could be said of Him that He had never sinned.

The Chapter

About what does Paul discourse in this chapter? Is it 'sin-nature,' or is it actual transgression? Look at the verse itself: “who knew no sin” - what was that? “Sin-nature”? Look at verse 19 – “not imputing their transgressions unto them” - was that their 'sin-nature'? Look at verse 17 – “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” - is he 'new' by having been released from his 'sin nature' (as they speak), or by having been released from his past sins? Surely this.

So, in this chapter, Paul likewise contrasts righteousness with sin as two opposites. But righteousness is not the opposite of 'sin-nature,' for according to Christadelphian belief Christ possessed both simultaneously.

Parallel Scriptures Elsewhere

First we will take a parallel passage from Leviticus and then one from Isaiah. Leviticus 6:26, “The priest that offereth it for sin (*chata*) shall eat it.” We have seen some of the occurrences of this word '*chata*.' Let us note here that while it is sometimes rendered as “offer for sin,” it is 29 times rendered as “to make sin” and frequently rendered as “cause to sin,” as “made Israel sin.” 1 Kings 15:50.

Now supposing that the A.V. translations had have translated this passage (Leviticus 6:26) according to words only, apart from sense, we should have read in our Bibles: “The priest that maketh it sin shall eat it,” and the translators would have made a precisely similar mistake to the one they have made in 2 Corinthians 5:21. (N.B. “to be” are in italics). It is the work of translators to give the sense, and not merely to translate according to dictionary equivalents, literally, without regard to sense or idiom.

The translation of both passages should be uniform:-

Leviticus 6:26, "The priest that offereth it for sin."

2 Corinthians 5:21, "Offered Him for sin," or "made Him a sin offering."

When we look at Isaiah 53 we find there a phrase similar to the one under consideration. The English words vary, it is true, but we shall see that they do not vary in the original. "make his soul an offering for sin." We know that "his soul" (which in Hebrew is '*nephesh*') can alternately be rendered as 'Him.' And we have seen that here the phrase "Offering for sin" is '*asham*,' which elsewhere is translated as 'sin' (as in the example previously quoted). So that a variant translation of Isaiah 53:10 would be: "make him sin" which are the words of 2 Corinthians 5:21. But it is Isaiah 53 that gave the right translation, and 2 Corinthians 5:21 should be made to conform to that method of translation, and not Isaiah made to conform to Corinthians.

If there is any doubt concerning 2 Corinthians 5:21, as to whether it relates to Christ's birth or crucifixion, there can be no doubt concerning Isaiah 53. There it is undoubtedly the crucifixion that is referred to.

Again, take a three-fold chord.

1). Isaiah 53:10,5,9. "It pleased the Lord to make his soul an offering for sin for transgression."

2). 1 Peter 2:21,22. "Christ suffered... for us... He had done... no violence... nor deceit..."

3). 2 Corinthians 5:21. "he hath made him sin (offering) for us... who knew no sin.

In all these references the writers were referring to personal sins only and they teach that Christ was free from such transgressions. There is no mention anywhere in the Scriptures of Truth of any atonement for "physical-sin-nature," and these three writers agree in showing that Christ was put to death as a sacrifice for something of which He was quite free Himself.

I submit that this method of comparing obscure scripture with plain scripture is the only safe and only correct method of attaining to an understanding of it.

Brother A.H.Broughton.