

Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 252

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Editorial

Dear Friends, Brothers and Sisters,

When reading through some old leaflets recently I came across and a short piece entitled “The Law of Sin and Death and The Law of The Spirit of Life” and while I agreed with most of what was written it prompted me to write the following:

Adam was introduced to the Law of Sin and Death in the Garden of Eden when God said to him, “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” It was a simple law and easy enough to obey – Adam was not to eat of a certain tree. He was given the care of the garden and could eat of any other tree but not this one. It was a test of faith.

Every thing God had created was very good and there was no evil in the world to distract Adam. It is seen that Adam had told Eve of this forbidden tree but we do not know how long a time it was they remained faithful to the command. However, eventually Eve succumbed to the temptation to eat of the tree and so did Adam, and then they feared the consequence and tried to hide away from God.

It is commonly believed that Adam and Eve began to die that day and that their eventual death was the punishment of which they had been forewarned, but this view is not right as can be seen by comparison with several other places in the Bible where the same wording is used to warn of a violent death in the day of transgression. Here we will mention just one of those examples - in 1 Kings 2:37 where Solomon laid a condition upon Shimei:- “For it shall be, that on the day thou goest out, and passest over the brook Kidron, thou shalt know for certain that thou shalt surely die: thy blood shall be upon thine own head”. Shimei disobeyed the king’s commandment and was slain. This makes it clear what the words mean - God had warned Adam of being put to death in the very day he transgressed.

Adam and Eve, then, were spared the consequence of the Law of Sin and Death, and were allowed to continue with their lives. It is of course God’s prerogative to extend mercy where He will and this is the basis, not only of the salvation of Adam and Eve but of our salvation too. This salvation was foretold to Adam and Eve when God said to the serpent “Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:14, 15). In the last part of this statement we have reference to the Law of the Spirit of Life through ‘the bruising of His heel’ inasmuch as the crucifixion of Jesus did not destroy Him; and we also see the ultimate destruction of the Law of Sin and Death by Jesus,

who bruised the serpent in the head, dealing it a fatal blow, thus putting an end to the consequence of Law of Sin and Death for those in covenant relationship with God through Jesus.

So how were Adam and Eve saved from the penalty of the law at the time of their transgression? In Genesis 3:21 we read, "Unto Adam and his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them". To provide the coats of skins an animal or animals must have died. This is the first sacrifice for sin, the first sacrifice typifying Christ; and throughout the Old Testament, especially in the Law of Moses, we see many more such sacrifices; then, in the New Testament, in Hebrews 9:22 it is confirmed that there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. We also read, in Hebrews 10:4, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" and it was for this reason that Jesus came into the world, to be the "better" sacrifice that could finally take away sin, or more precisely, take away the penalty due. Hebrews 7:19, "For the law (of Moses) made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God..."; verse 22, "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament", and Hebrews 8:6, "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." Better sacrifice, better hope, better covenant, better promises.

Adam and Eve's faith, then in this promised seed (Jesus), and coupled with the sacrifice of the animal/s in Eden, released them from the Law of Sin and Death and gave them entrance into the Law of the Spirit of Life.

The subject matter of the letter to the Hebrews is the sacrifice of Jesus, "the seed of the woman", who took away "the sin of the world" (John 1:29) giving access to the Law of the Spirit of Life in Him through baptism into His death. And not to the faithful of this present age only but also to the faithful before Jesus was crucified, as we read in Hebrews 9:15, "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."

The position of all Adam's posterity is defined in Romans 5 verse 12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, in whom all sinned" (see margin); then, verse 18, "therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" and verse 21, "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

A note of explanation is perhaps needed here for we have chosen the margin reference (verse 12) "in whom all sinned" because Paul tells us that we are all deemed to be "in Adam" for we all received our life from him, a life which he forfeited, or sold, to 'sin' and therefore a life under condemnation until we do something about it. What can we do about our position 'in Adam'? We can accept the free gift of the righteousness of Christ and so be justified by faith.

Romans 8:1-3, "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. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sin's flesh, and for a sin-offering, condemned sin (when He was) in the flesh."

In all ages God has made His purpose known by successive revelations and has provided the means for passing from under the Law of Sin and Death into the Law of the Spirit of Life. The means of achieving this have changed as God's plan has developed and in this age we have to be baptised into Jesus, that is, into His death as we read in Romans 6:3,4 - "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" that by the grace of God we may now be in covenant relationship with Him through Jesus sacrifice. Amen.

With sincere love to all in the Name of Jesus Christ. Russell Gregory.

Six Rules for Bible Studies

First: In any doctrine taught by types or shadows, the anti-type must always correspond with the type, and the shadow with the substance.

Second: In studying the Scriptures, consider that the New Testament is a commentary on the Old.

Third: Never be afraid of results to which you may be driven by your investigations, as this will inevitably bias your mind and disqualify you to arrive at ultimate truth.

Fourth: Investigate everything you believe - if it is the truth it cannot be injured thereby; if error, the sooner it is correct the better.

Fifth: Pursue this course with as much independence as if you were the only one concerned.

Sixth: Rely on no authority less than divine in so momentous an undertaking.

Dr John Thomas.

Continued from our last Circular Letter, page 7

“Who Hath Believed our Report and to Whom is The Arm of The Lord Revealed?”

B.A.S.F. Clause VIII. I have already made some comments on this clause in my reference to the “condemned line” and apparently by “condemned line” they do mean “condemned nature,” an unscriptural phrase and therefore invented to support their erroneous and preconceived notions. They say in this Clause VIII that the promises made to Adam, Abraham and David had reference to Jesus Christ, who, though wearing their “condemned nature,” was to obtain a title to resurrection by perfect obedience, and, by dying, “abrogate the law of condemnation for himself and all who should believe and obey Him.”

Let me say here and now that Jesus did not come to obtain any title to resurrection; He did nothing worthy of death and therefore did not forfeit His life in any way. As a Son of God, direct from the source of life, He was not legally under the condemnation by Adamic descent and therefore was not under the law of sin and death. If He had been He would have been in the same bondage as Adam, a servant of Sin as a Master, and not a servant of God and therefore alienated in the same way as all in Adam.

This is why the first sixteen words in Clause IX are absolutely true and of such great importance, but sadly enough negated, set at nought, by the rest of the words in the clauses which follow and those we have already considered.

For the benefit of those who may not possess the B.A.S.F., I will quote the exact words of Clause IX: “*That it was this mission that necessitated the miraculous begetting of Christ of a human mother, enabling him to bear our condemnation, and, at the same time, to be a sinless bearer thereof, and, therefore, one who could rise after suffering the death required by the righteousness of God. (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-35; Galatians 4:4; Is. 7:14; Romans 1:3-4; 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 2:14-17; 4:15).*”

I presume that these scripture references are meant to prove that Jesus was born with the same flesh and blood nature as ourselves and that being born of Mary was by lineage related to David. I wholeheartedly agree with this, that He was the seed of the woman and therefore of David according to flesh, nevertheless He was the Son of God by begetting by the Holy Spirit, for it is the spirit which gives life, the flesh profiteth nothing without life. His life did not come through the natural channels of fertilisation of the seed of Mary but direct from God and therefore Jesus not being in the loins of Adam when Adam sinned, His life was not under forfeit or in need of redemption. This was the reason for His miraculous begetting, so that God could

redeem man with a life that was “free” of the condemnation - a life which was not already forfeited to sin. Adam and all in him were Sin’s property, Sin’s bondservants, and could only be released by the equivalent life being offered, that is, a life which did not belong to Sin but belonged to God. You cannot pay the Devil with his own coinage. Here we will quote some important words written by Dr Thomas:

“Redemption is release for a ransom; all who are God’s servants have been released from a former lord by purchase; the purchaser is God; the price paid is the precious blood of Christ.”

Ask yourselves then, did God purchase His servants with that which belonged to Master Sin? This is what the Statement of Faith (B.A.S.F.) affirms, so you had better re-examine it and yourselves, whether you be in “The Faith.”

“Enabling him to bear our condemnation, and at the same time, to be a sinless bearer thereof.” If this means that Jesus did this on the Cross then I agree with this definition, but having been a Christadelphian for seventeen years I very much doubt that this is the definition meant here. I think they mean that Jesus, by partaking of flesh and blood nature, wherein was the physical law of condemnation, as they term it, Jesus bore the condemnation during His 33½ yrs but did not actually sin, and was therefore a sinless bearer of our, as they term it, “condemned nature,” and could only get rid of it by allowing the Romans to render Him lifeless on the cross.

This makes nonsense of the Atonement or Redemption in Christ as taught by Jesus and the Apostles, but we have come to expect it from so many of the so-called intellectuals of the Christadelphian Body and therefore we are not surprised. But what of the younger generation? Are they allowing themselves to be led in the same direction?

“One who could rise after suffering the death required by the righteousness of God.” It is true that Jesus did suffer the death required by the righteousness of God, but the compilers of this Statement of Faith did not believe this, neither do the majority of Christadelphians. They have already said that the death required by the righteousness of God was by natural decay, and death by natural causes – “dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.” Jesus did not experience this kind of death; he “tasted death” for every man, and this being the case it must obviously be a certain kind of death, a death of important significance, which indeed it was; a substitutionary death in the place of Adam and all in him on the federal principle; the death which came by sin, which Adam was spared through the redemptive price being paid, even the life of Jesus, on the principle of a life for a life.

Thus Clause X makes nonsense of Clause IX and denies the sacrificial mission of Christ, as in effect Jesus did nothing more than every man has done from the time of Adam, and far from dying a natural death He suffered an agonising death, which, I accept, other men have suffered, some I suppose, justly, and some unjustly, but Jesus suffered His death “the JUST for the UNJUST” that He might bring us to God, and not as A. D. Norris ignorantly states, to put out of action the Devil in His flesh. His mission was connected with His Father’s plan of redemption and restoration as He said “Even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28). This means that He did not die for Himself, as this would have been an injustice on God’s part, to allow His sinless Son to be put to death by wicked men, but God knew from the beginning that His Son would be a willing sacrifice, therefore He allowed Him to be put to death and in this sense only “it pleased the Lord to bruise him... to make his soul (life) an offering for sin.” (Isaiah 53:10).

The scripture references in Clause X are made merely to prove that Jesus was born of a woman, that He was the same flesh and blood as other men and we entirely agree that He was, but where we differ is in the fact of ownership; Adam’s descendants were sin’s flesh or flesh belonging to sin, whereas Jesus, though having the same quality of flesh was not sin’s flesh, but flesh belonging to God. The term “sinful flesh” in Romans 8:3 is not a correct translation and should be rendered “sin’s flesh” a matter of property or ownership. Much has been written on this subject and the wise shall understand. But let me go further and say that in the references are the significant reasons for Jesus being born flesh and blood and Christadelphians usually blind themselves to them. Hebrews 2:14 and 2:17 are two references, but Hebrews 2:9 is ignored for obvious reasons - ignorance of the Redemptive and Atoning work of Christ. For the writer to the Hebrews states, “Jesus was made a littler lower than the Angels for the suffering of death” (Hebrews

2:7), and that on account of this sacrificial death, through God's grace toward man, He was crowned with glory and honour; and well He should be for He was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin thus showing that it was possible to do God's will with the same nature as we inherit. Thus He was justified in delivering the message mentioned in Clause XI, "That the message He delivered from God to His kinsmen, the Jews, was a call to repentance from every evil work, the assertion of His divine Sonship and Jewish kingship, etc.

Clauses XIII, XIV and XVI all contain the same theme, namely, obedience to God's will as set out in the teaching of Jesus, the prophets and the Apostles. I simply marvel that they have the gall to print such things and then point to the Apostle Paul as an example in showing that it is impossible to do these things because of "sin in the flesh" (a Christadelphian phrase). Paul's words are quoted in ignorance and out of context - see Romans 7:14 "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin." Paul, is this true? You a man in Christ still carnal and under the Law of Sin and Death? How can you say such a thing unless you are referring to yourself as an unregenerated Jew unjustified by Christ? This you must be doing because you say "There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh (unregenerated state), 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." "For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." Romans 8:1-17).

Paul also says "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not... Romans 7:18. Can anyone dare to say that Paul did not know how to do good, how to conduct himself as a Christian? Was not Paul among Christ's kinsmen the Jews whom He called to repentance from every evil work Clause XI? Of course he was, and what an example of Christian conduct he set in his life after conversion to Christ. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only but to all them also that love his appearing," What a reward for a man who does not know how to perform that which is good.

Perhaps you can now see how foolish it is to wrest the words of Paul out of their context and so make him appear to be a liar. Clause XII - "That for delivering this message (that is, for preaching the restoration of the kingdom to Israel and a call to repentance from every evil work) he was put to death by the Jews and Romans, who were, however, but instruments in the hands of God, for the doing of that which he had determined before to be done, viz., the condemnation of sin in the flesh, through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all, as a propitiation to declare the righteousness of God, as a basis for the remission of sins. All who approach God through this crucified but risen representative of Adam's disobedient race are forgiven. Therefore, by a figure his blood cleanseth from sin."

This is the greatest concoction of blasphemy and untruth I have ever read and if blindness in part has happened to Israel, more so has it happened to Christadelphians!

The Jews and Romans were not instruments in the hands of God. Jesus was taken and by wicked hands was crucified and slain. Were the wicked hands the hands of God? Does God require sinners to condemn sin in the flesh? If this was how God had determined before to condemn sin in the flesh of Jesus, He could have done it through His own ministering spirits or Angels. But how a Just God could condemn something that He was wholly responsible for producing I cannot conceive. Sin is transgression of God's Law, so how it could reside in the flesh of Jesus or anyone else is beyond my comprehension, perhaps a member of the Christadelphian Body would like to explain it to me face to face, and also, why such an offering was forbidden under the Law of Moses and amounted to an insult against God. Also why was His crucifixion necessary at all in the eyes of Christadelphians, seeing that they believe that natural death was the means of condemnation of sin in the flesh? They should stick to one doctrine and stop their double dealing methods. Jesus is not a representative of Adam's disobedient race and never was; He was God's representative on earth and He is now the representative of His own brethren as a High-Priest over His own house. Even the compilers state this in Clause XIV "that he is a priest over his own house only, and does not intercede for the world, or for professors who are abandoned to disobedience, that he makes intercession for his erring brethren, if they confess and forsake their sins."

This is contradiction to the utmost. First He is a Priest or representative over the disobedient, and second He is a Priest or representative of His own house only. This is the confusion that sin-in-the-flesh mongers are brought to, and how indeed can people forsake their sins if Sin is in the flesh? Please, please give me a definition of how transgression of law got into the flesh of Jesus, for if it was in His, it was and is in ours, so how can we forsake it?

Christadelphians should make a closer study of Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 6, instead of quoting from it so glibly.

I have written quite sufficient to convince any sensible person of the unreliability of most Christadelphians owing allegiance to the B.A.S.F., but I must comment on Clauses XXIV, XXV and XXIX.

XXIV - "That at the appearing of Christ prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of God, the responsible (namely, those who know the revealed will of God, and have been called upon to submit to it), dead and living - obedient and disobedient - will be summoned before His judgment seat 'to be judged according to their works;' and 'receive in body according to what they have done, whether it be good or bad.'"

XXV - "That the unfaithful will be consigned to shame and 'the second death,' and the faithful, invested with immortality, and exalted to reign with Jesus as joint heirs of the kingdom, co-possessors of the earth and joint administrators of God's authority among men in everything".

XXIX - "That at the close of the thousand years there will be a general resurrection and judgment, resulting in the final extinction of the wicked, and the immortalisation of those who shall have established their title (under the grace of God) to eternal life during the thousand years." (Revelation 20:11-15).

Unfortunately, for the compilers, and those who accept their theories on the strength of superficial reading of scriptural passages referred to, these scriptures do not support them, and, we of the Nazarene Fellowship are fully aware of the theories which they have had to invent in order to make things fit their erroneous views.

Paul is plain enough in his words to the Corinthians; chapter 15 verse 42, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption' it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." Verse 51, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and shall be changed." Also 1 Thessalonians 4:14, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (or precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." "Ever with the Lord," - there is no mention or room for rejected among this glorious number; their names are already in the book of Life - they are the first resurrection on such the "second death" (which is at the end of the thousand years) hath no power. The Christadelphian theory makes it that the rejected live a thousand years before partaking of the "second death." Paul has "shown us a mystery," so now it is plain, why try to add to it, and make more of a mystery of it than ever?

The compilers of the B.A.S.F. have more people in the first resurrection than the last, which they call a general resurrection. Is this not contradictory? Surely if all the responsible rise at Christ's first appearing this would be more a general resurrection than at the end of the thousand years - when disobedience is more limited with the very presence of Christ and his co-administrators and when a child shall die a hundred years old and a sinner will also live longer! Surely you must agree that the general resurrection at the end of the thousand years includes all the responsible from the time of Adam until then, excluding the faithful. This in fact is proved in chapter 20, verses 4-5 of Revelation and excludes the class who are written in the book of life such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, David, the prophets, the Apostles, and all who have remained faithful. These all come under the resurrection of the just - the first resurrection on which the second death has no power. The resurrection of the unjust is at the end of the thousand years in which they

are judged out of what is written in the books, but those whose names are in the book of life are not subject to this judgment, they have already been judged as worthy of life ever-lasting, and had their names inscribed, and not blotted out of the book of Life, Revelation 20 speaks of Satan being bound or restricted from deceiving the nations for a thousand years, and afterwards being allowed this freedom for a little season. Verse 4 – “And I saw thrones, and they that sat upon them; and judgment was given unto them,” “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” 1 Corinthians 6. “And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God... and they lived and reigned, with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead (that is those who are not the first fruits unto God) lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years.”

The compilers of the B.A.S.F. have the unjust and just in the first resurrection, so in effect they are all priests of God and of Christ, reigning with him a thousand years. What nonsense! Read Revelation 20:11-15, and this you will find as the true definition of the ‘general resurrection’ and also the true period of the second death; which is at the end of the thousand year period only, the lake of fire. Revelation 20:10 and Revelation 20:14-15.

Now, in case you, of the Christadelphian Body (and adherents therefore of the B.A.S.F.) cannot comprehend all the contradiction and confusion of phrases presented to you therein, you will find on page 15 a list of 35 doctrines to be rejected just in case you are wise enough to see through the error and blasphemy contained therein as a means to block the humble logical reasoning of those who would know the Truth. Surely if members of the Christadelphian Body profess to a knowledge of the True Doctrine of Christ they would not need a list of “doctrines to be rejected” forced upon them. This to any one should be regarded as an insult to their intelligence. But when on examination some of these doctrines should be accepted (at least 5) it is a greater insult still.

Do you desire to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth - or cunningly devised fables? “Who hath believed our Report?” We conclude thus: “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power may be of God, and not of us.” (2 Corinthians 4)

You may think this discourse has been penned in bitterness, not so, there is a difference between being bitter and being zealous for the Truth - remember Jesus in the Temple when he said “ye have made it a den of thieves.” “Come and let us reason together.”

Brother Phil Parry

REBEKAH

This grand-daughter of Abraham's brother Nahor, and daughter of his nephew Bethuel, was better as a wife for Isaac than the heathen women of Canaan. A generation below Isaac yet suited for his age is thus an incidental proof of the truth of the record.

When we first read of Rebekah, she came to the well and found Abraham's servant waiting for Divine guidance regarding his next move. Rebekah, a beautiful girl, appeared, showed herself courteous, answering his request with “Drink, my lord.” Alert, she hastened, let down her pitcher and gave him drink. Then, with a sympathetic insight into the needs of another and a readiness to do all in her power to help she said “I will draw for thy camels also.”

She gave a straightforward answer to his question “Who art thou?” and readily informed him that provision for his comfort could be found in her father's home. She ran home to tell her mother with the quick eager movements which had been seen as she 'hasted' to draw water.

The servant was welcomed, and so was the information he could give concerning Abraham. The family, of course, knew something of Nahor's brother, and some news travelled between the families occasionally.

Rebekah and her mother would be delighted with the gifts of Jewellery, but the whole events of that remarkable day drew from Laban and Bethuel the candid declaration “The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.”

Rebekah decided with her usual promptness “I will go.” We wonder how much she knew of her great-uncle and the son of his old age - evidently enough to make her willing to leave home and family immediately. Did she think of it as a call from God as Abraham had done long before? She was ready to go at once, no hesitation, no lengthy preparation; accompanied by her nurse she left for ever the home which had sheltered her for so long - never to return to it, as far as we know, or to see any of its inmates again.

Arriving at the journey's end the travellers saw Isaac wandering in the field, apparently lost in thought. Rebekah's quick insight showed itself in her courtesy; covering herself with a veil she slid off her camel and met face to face the man with whom the remainder of her life would be spent.

We know very little of Isaac personally; he seems to have been quiet, thoughtful and peace-loving, all of which might be expected in view of his parentage and up-bringing. All his life Sarah had cared for him, and had guided his boyish thoughts into ideals worthy of his special position. Sarah was no longer there, and there is something pathetic about the lonely figure wandering in the field waiting to meet the woman whom the Lord was sending to share his life.

Isaac took her into Sarah's tent, thus indicating to all in the camp the social position of the new-comer, and claiming for her the loyal service which was her right. One short sentence completes the picture - “Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.”

We read nothing more of these two until twin sons came into the home bringing with them that parental favouritism which was to cause so much sorrow. Isaac loved Esau; Rebekah loved Jacob.

These lads were very different; the hunter and the home-lover. Rebekah had been told “the elder shall serve the younger;” her loving devotion was lavished on Jacob and her greatest ambitions were for his welfare. It thus became a matter of grave concern to her when Isaac asked for a meal preparatory to giving him the blessing. She was most anxious that her younger son should have this blessing, and without waiting to see how divine promise would be fulfilled, mother and son discussed a bold plan of deceit. Jacob demurred, mentioned the difficulties, but Rebekah was ready to meet them all, and not only so but to take full responsibility for the deception. Her orders were emphatic, “Upon me be thy curse my son, only obey my voice and go.” The fact that Esau had sold his birthright does not seem to have any effect on the events of this particular day.

We know the success of the deceit, and how Jacob's life was threatened by his angry brother. Resourceful Rebekah was faced with another difficult task. Jacob must be protected by some means; the safest plan would be to send him away – but suppose Isaac made inconvenient inquiries! His co-operation must be obtained, but how? A wife! Rebekah had her clue and tactfully remarked to Isaac that the women of neighbouring tribes were not suitable. Isaac agreed and Jacob left for a visit to his mother's family.

Rebekah's last recorded words to her son are just such as might be expected: “Now therefore my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away - then I will send and fetch thee from thence.”

This promise to send for Jacob either could not be fulfilled, or was frustrated in Padan-Aram; for Jacob and his mother never saw one another afterwards. Rebekah's trust in God was not equal to patient waiting

to see how the divine promise would be fulfilled; her impatience led to deceit, for which she was severely punished by separation from her favourite son.

Jacob, who aided in the deceit, also suffered severely, being exiled from home and family for twenty years; and the boy who had deceived his father was himself cheated by his uncle Laban. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

Jacob was forgiven and allowed to prosper, but many of his troubles might have been avoided if he had kept nearer to the ideals of Abraham and Isaac.

Rebekah was laid to rest in the cave of Machpelah, with Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac. Other members of the family were taken there afterwards, and there they sleep waiting till the Lord shall call them to their reward.

We study their characters and profit by their example; for certainly these things were written for our learning. We admire Sarah's trust in God, her loyalty to her husband and her constant devotion to duty. Her life had its difficulties but she met them bravely, and her name is among those of whom the writer to the Hebrews states, "God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city." Hebrews 11:16. Rebekah, too, had sterling qualities which we should do well to imitate, while avoiding any deception in our relations with others.

May the Lord grant that we, in spite of our failures, may remain true to Him; and being saved by His grace, be at last permitted to share the fulfilment of the promises made to the worthies of old.

Sister Mona Dawes.

We wish to introduce you to

VERITAS AND HIS FRIENDS.

In the early autumn of the year, when the heat of summer has wearied us, and we seek the new scenery and the fresh breezes of the sea coast, it often happens that we are agreeably surprised by old acquaintances turning up, who have sought the same healthy spot for a similar reason to our own. Leisure, past acquaintance, and a desire to make ourselves as agreeable as possible, lead us to a certain extent to company together; the hours pass more agreeably, conversation is more animated, and the needed stimulant and recreation are increased by this fatigueless contact.

This may explain how it was that four acquaintances were found together one evening seated in free and earnest conversation in a comfortable room after a pleasant day had been spent in rambles on the coast. By invitation, Pietas, one of the four, had persuaded the other three, Dubitas, Mentor, and Veritas, to come to his lodging to have some supper and some chat. He was not one of those who, finding himself unable to entertain his friends with his wit, bought them ice-creams. He was intelligent and hospitable, and added to the attraction of his not too frugal table by the spices of his sincere and sensible observations. The other three were decent men enough, each of the three having a fair amount of individuality which distinguished him from the other two. Dubitas was the one who seemed the most readily impressed, but then the impression was not a deep one, and wore off soon, so that you could not help feeling that he took nothing very seriously, and had no profound conviction of anything. Mentor was a man with a low square head, not given to talking much, matter of fact, without idealism or the power of scientific imagination. His conceptions were narrow and cautious, his tone hard and dogmatic. As for Veritas, there was nothing about him particularly striking; he gave you the impression of an entirely sensible man without genius or eccentricity; a man of temperance and moderation, rather than anything else, though this was rather from his manner than his utterances, which sometimes astonished those who did not know him intimately, by their apparently excessive and sweeping condemnation of things. The meeting had been brought about chiefly for the purpose of enabling the gentleman last mentioned to state for the information of his old acquaintances, what those singular religious opinions were which rumour said he had for some years espoused. All that they knew was that once he had been a very regular, earnest, and esteemed worker in what are

called orthodox ranks, but that at last he had severed himself from every kind of association with his former comrades and connected himself with an unknown people; unknown, saving that they called themselves in what seemed somewhat arrogant language, "The Brethren of Christ."

Meeting, as these had accidentally done at the coast, with opportunity and curiosity combining, it was arranged that an evening or two should be spent with Pietas, to enable them to talk these things over.

As they commenced supper, Pietas observed in a quiet, kindly, and introductory way, "Whatever attitude we may individually take in regard to religious truth, two things are undeniable - that each man ought to be perfectly honest in the matter, and that in the measure that our friends seem to have used their intelligence in arriving at their conclusions, so should they be respectfully considered. Dubitas and Mentor both nodded, leaving it to Veritas to reply.

"I quite agree with you there; but reflection on facts has shown me that anything like incorruptible honesty to oneself is very difficult to maintain, and therefore very seldom seen in men."

"If you will consider," he went on, "how men are prepared for the 'sacred office,' as it is called, and how all their after associations and circumstances constrain them to abide where they are, you will not wonder that religious truth is not a living growth within the mind, but a shell rather that resists all changing influence from without. Seldom does the creature cast its shell and find a new environment for its progressive being."

"But," said Pietas, "you would not have such training neglected by which the young are prepared to take the position of disappearing elders."

"O no," was the reply, "it is not exactly the system I am deprecating, but I simply point out the great and almost insurmountable difficulties surrounding a man as the result of his necessary education. I think you must admit those difficulties and admit that it will require a high type of honesty to enable a man to accept of truth wherever he may find it."

"O yes, I do admit that," returned Pietas. Here Mentor broke in, saying, "I think, Veritas, if you except the clerical profession, which I grant is hedged round with peculiar difficulties, the honesty you admire is a commoner quality in men than you imagine. I think the tendency of the age is to take an independent outlook upon things. What is your opinion, Dubitas?" "I? Oh, I think there is a great deal of talk about independence, and precious little of it. I am supposed to know something about free-thought, but as far as I know anything there never was a more lashed and ironed crew under hatches than free-thinkers."

"I think," said Pietas, "that Veritas is right as to the fact that such absolute honesty is scarce, but it seems to me he is wrong in demanding such unattainable virtue in a world like this." "If you will excuse me saying so," said Veritas, "that is an instance of the false and maudlin charity that is so common just now, and looks ridiculous when that ideal life is remembered which the teachers and guides of the Christian world are ever setting up before us. I say let that man, at any rate, who holds up the Christ to the admiration of men, have an honesty that shall protect him and his sailing from the scorn and contempt of his fellows. As to that 'noblest work of God,'" he added, looking across at Mentor, "being more generally found, I shall be pleased to find my opinion mistaken, and will look sharply round for instances of this species."

A smile gracefully finished off the repartee.

"Well," remarked Pietas, "I am sure we are each prepared to credit each other with entire honesty, and we are now perhaps ready to listen to our old friend Veritas giving some account of himself. Now, Veritas, tell us all about it."

"I would prefer," said Veritas, "that this account of myself should be discussed by you in a friendly way; that is, I do not wish simply to gratify you with a story, but to draw your attention to what I hold to be the truth."

In reply to this, Pietas gave the assurance that his friend need not think they sought amusement, but that they would break in upon his narrative often enough, showing him his successive slips down the incline of error, and doing their best to win him back to virtue."

“Well,” began Veritas, “there is one point in which I have not departed from the position taken by people called orthodox, and that is that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain the word of God to man. On that I have as firm a hold as most who profess as much, and since I came to interpret the scriptures as I now do; that conviction has immensely strengthened.”

(To be continued...)

What Jesus Said about “The Atonement”

Properly understood, “The Atonement” is meant to provide a “covering” for our sins, and reconciles us to God, and to each other. That lies at the very heart of the teaching of Jesus, especially in his “Two Greatest Commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40) and in the Sermon on the Mount. People who are reconciled to God live in obedience to the teaching of Jesus. If it has not done that for us, we do not yet understand the Atonement.

Down through the centuries countless thousands of pages have been written on the subject. All too often the simpler believers seem to get lost in the maze of words, and simply stop reading. Take heart! You are in good company! (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). I think Jesus had us in mind when, in the Gospels, He never ventured into any of those long complicated “expositions”. He preached a Gospel which offered salvation without them!

Indeed, have you noticed that Jesus never once used the word “Atonement”? For Him the very first word in the Gospel was “REPENT”! (Matthew 4:17). It is practical and radical repentance – turning away from sin to practice holiness – which results in reconciliation with God. Nothing less! You don’t need a PhD. to understand that it “works” and has achieved its goal for us when we begin to love Jesus and obey His commandment to “*love one another as I have loved you*”. (John 15:12). And that can be done without any of those complicated “Atonement theories” worked out by the “scholars”!

That said though, Jesus did talk about his death in relation to our salvation and when He did it was in the simplest of terms and all contained in a few verses. He spoke about:

1. Love in Action – A man laying down His life to save His friends. (John 15:13).
2. A Good Shepherd defending his flock from the wolf. (John 10:1-16).
3. A grain of corn dying to produce a harvest of many grains. (John 12:24).
4. A brass serpent “lifted up” for sinners to see, and be saved from a “bite”. (John 3:14).
5. The Bread of Life – Manna from heaven – Eating His flesh and drinking His blood. (John 6:53-58).
6. Drinking from a Cup. (Matthew 26:39-42).
7. His blood shed for remission of our sins. (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).
8. His blood shed to seal a covenant. (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).
9. A sacrificial “ransom” paid by Jesus for our release from the penalty of our sin. (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45).

And that's it! Just a few short word pictures designed to help us understand that He sacrificed His life to save ours – because He loved us.

In what follows we shall refer often to the fact that Jesus said that the reason for His sacrificial death was “*for the remission of sins*”. We needed remission of our sins to save us from the penalty we had incurred for our sins. However we must never lose sight of the Gospel's uncompromising accompanying call to repentance. The sacrificial death of Jesus cannot save us from anything if it stands alone. To receive the free pardon which it has made possible we must meet the conditions on which the pardon is offered. To qualify for pardon, we must each make our personal confession of our sins, repent, be baptised for remission of our sins, and turn away from sin to pursue holiness “*without which no man shall see the Lord*” (Hebrews 12:14)

1. LOVE IN ACTION – A MAN LAYING DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.

“*This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” (John 15:12-13).

Those words, spoken to His disciples at the “last supper” on the night before His crucifixion, are perhaps the most significant of the few that Jesus spoke about “The Atonement”. This is love in action! It tells us why the Atonement happened. It tells us what it was meant to achieve. It tells us how it was done. And it tells us what is expected of us now that our Friend has laid down His life for us.

Why did we need Him to do that? We sinned and were under sentence of death. Jesus is the Saviour who loved us enough to save us from that by dying for us. Now that He has saved us from our death sentence we are required to live in obedience to that same sacrificial love for one another.

It isn't easy for men to live that way! Almost beyond all that we can ask or think, says Paul. But it isn't impossible! We are promised that we can “*know the love of God which surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God!*” (Ephesians 3:14-20)

This is no ordinary love to which we are called. There is nothing – nothing at all which can quench it; not rejection; not reviling or mocking or false accusation; not spitting in His face; not plucking the beard from His face; not the buffeting and bruising which marred his visage beyond recognition; not placing that fearsome crown of thorns on His head; not flogging the skin from His back; not even nailing Him unjustly to a Roman cross.

Nothing – nothing in this life; nothing in all creation; nothing for all eternity; can ever make this man, or the God who is His Father, cease from loving us. (Romans 8:38-39).

That is the love which Jesus calls us to. And once we find it, it can never be quenched for all eternity.

2. A GOOD SHEPHERD DEFENDING HIS FLOCK FROM THE WOLF

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)

In John 10:1-16 Jesus pictures His mission as that of a good shepherd defending his flock from a wolf. In the process the shepherd loses his life, but the flock are saved from the wolf and none of them is lost. We, the sheep, live and are safe, because He died.

Of course this cannot be referring to our “natural death”, which we still experience. It must be referring to death of a different kind – the death which is penalty for sin – the “second death” – from which He has saved us by dying for us on the cross.

He has saved us from “the wolf” by taking upon Himself a “death penalty” which He did not deserve, to set us free from one which we did deserve.

3. A GRAIN OF CORN

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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)

Jesus is the single “*grain of corn*” who surrenders His own life to bring forth a harvest of many like Himself.

In the parable in Matthew 13:30, corn has been changed to wheat, but the message is the same. The crop has been sown in all the world, and is growing. At the Resurrection the “*wheat*” from the harvest will be gathered “*into the barn*”. (Matthew 13:30)

Because Jesus has died to give us life, we will not be burnt as will the “*tares*” at the judgement. We will live for ever!

4. A BRASS SERPENT

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up”. (John 3:14).

Jesus here points us back to an Old Testament story in which God sent “*fiery serpents*” amongst the Israelites as a punishment for their complaining against Him. (Numbers 21:5-9).

Many died, but when the people confessed their sin and asked for deliverance, God told Moses to make a serpent of brass, and set it up on a pole. Any who had been bitten were able to “*behold*” the brass serpent and live, instead of dying. (Numbers 21:9). Of course it ought to be obvious that merely looking at the brass

serpent was only part of the story. It needed to be accompanied by the repentance which led to God providing it as the means of healing. (Numbers 21:7)

When Jesus took that story and applied it to Himself, we are left in no doubt that the “*lifting up*” he had in mind was His crucifixion! You can easily use your concordance to check that the same Greek word for “*lifted up*” is used in John 12:32-33.

*“If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.
This he said, signifying what death he should die.”*

The message is simple. We need to “*behold*” Jesus “*lifted up*” on the cross in order to be healed from the otherwise fatal “*bite*” of sin. And of course, as John tells us, “*healing*” requires more than mere “*looking*”. It also requires belief. And that means belief in everything about Jesus – who He is, what He said, what He commands us to do, and what He offers in return for our repentance and life long growth in obedience to His commandments.

There is no need to complicate this story as some do, with speculative “*types and antitypes*” about the symbolic meanings of the “*serpent*” and the “*brass*”. Especially meanings which refer to them as symbols of Jesus being afflicted with some sort of “*serpent nature*”, or “*inherited condemnation*”, or “*curse*”, merely because He was born with a normal human body exactly like ours. Taken at simple face value, there is nothing about any of that in what Jesus said. Nor is it found anywhere else in the Scriptures.

Let us concentrate on what Jesus did say about the brass serpent and not on what He did not say. And reading at that level, the message is simple. He died on the cross to save us from the death we had incurred as a penalty for our sin. If by believing in Him, we repent from our sins, we will be saved from that death.

5. THE BREAD OF LIFE – MANNA FROM HEAVEN EATING HIS FLESH AND DRINKING HIS BLOOD. (John 6:53-58)

When Jesus invited his disciples to eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to live for ever, many took offence and left Him. (Verse 66)

Of course they had misunderstood. It wasn't literal flesh and blood He was talking about. It was His words. (Verse 63) We need to feast upon (hear and believe) His words about the life that was crucified, and the blood that was shed to save us from the penalty of our sin. And we need to feast upon His words about the way of life he practised that made his real flesh and blood a perfect sacrificial offering for our sins. And when those words are translated into action they will keep us “*spiritually alive*” in this life, and guarantee us eternal life in the Age to Come, instead of death at the Judgment.

6 DRINKING FROM A CUP – THE CUP OF SALVATION. (Matthew 26:39-42)

In Matthew 26:39, Matthew 20:22, and Mark 10:39, Jesus spoke about “*drinking a cup*” in a way which makes it clear that was He referring to His death on the cross.

It seems more than likely that it was a figure of speech taken from Psalm 116:13. “*I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.*”

His death on the cross was “*the cup of our salvation*”. He “*drank*” it to save us from the penalty of our sin so that we could have eternal life instead of death.

7 HIS BLOOD SHED FOR REMISSION OF OUR SINS. (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).

This statement by Jesus is firmly grounded in the Old Testament ritual of animal sacrifice. When people sinned, and repented, they expressed their contrition by sacrificing an animal – a bullock, a goat, a ram, a goat, or a lamb. Before killing the animal they were to lay their hand on its head as a token of identification. (Leviticus 4:29). By this they confessed that they had sinned and were worthy of death. The death of the lamb was a graphic illustration of the death which they deserved for their sin. But in the forbearance and mercy of God, the lamb died – and they lived.

Jesus uses that picture to describe His own death for remission of our sins. The animal in the Old Testament was only a prophetic symbol of Jesus. According to John the Baptist, Jesus was the real “*lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*”. (John 1:29, 36). Jesus died for our sins and we have been

pardoned. We identify ourselves with His sacrificial death as our own personal “*Lamb of God*” when we are baptised.

8 HIS BLOOD SHED TO SEAL A COVENANT. (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).

In Old Testament times it was customary for men making a covenant (contract) to “seal” it by offering an animal sacrifice.

Jesus refers to His own death in that same Jewish idiom. God wants to make an everlasting covenant with us. Jesus is the sacrifice which placed God’s “seal” (signature) on the covenant. These are the terms of the covenant:

“I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”
(Jeremiah 31:33-34; Hebrews 8:10-12)

The death of Jesus is God's guarantee of his commitment to the covenant. We make our own commitment to the covenant through repentance and baptism.

9 A SACRIFICIAL “RANSOM” PAID BY JESUS FOR OUR RELEASE FROM SLAVERY TO SIN.

“The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”
(Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45)

“Ransom” is a price paid for the release of a captive.

Note: “Redemption” is a word which Jesus did not use Himself, but in other Scriptures it has similar connotations to “ransom”. A price has to be paid for the freedom of the person in need of “redemption”.

The price paid for our release from captivity to sin, was the life of Jesus, freely surrendered in exchange for ours. (Matthew 26:28; 1 Peter 1:18-19)

SUBSTITUTION

The word “substitute” does not appear on the lips of Jesus in our English versions. In this article, I don't want to complicate things with a lesson in Greek. But if you want to check it out for yourself with a Concordance you can easily find that Jesus did use a word in this context; (Greek “*anti*”) for which one of the common meanings is “**instead of**”. Sufficient to say here that “Substitution” is certainly implied in the concept of “ransom”. Jesus “Ransomed” us by sacrificing His life to save ours.

But how can that be? It is obvious that Jesus has not saved us from experiencing “natural death”, “mortality”, “*the common death of all mankind*”. (Numbers 16:29). When their bodies wear out, believers with mortal bodies still die in exactly the same way as unbelievers. It is NOT related to whether or not we sin. Even a child who dies at birth without ever committing any sin, experiences that death. The death that is the consequence of sin is the “second death” at the judgment.

There is of course a sense in which Jesus has saved us all, saints and sinners alike, by exercising God's forbearance towards us in this life. (Romans 3:25 Act 17:30). We are all in the same position as that woman taken in adultery. Just as He did for her so also has He done for us. “*Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more*”. (John 8:11). In a very real sense, we who had incurred a death penalty for our sins have been given our lives back. We have been given a fresh chance to get it right. But that is simply a postponement of judgment until it has been determined how we will use the pardon offered. It is not the same as being saved from the death penalty which will be the lot of unrepentant sinners at the judgment.

We can accept the offer of pardon, repent and be forgiven, and be “born again” (John 3:5) to live new lives of obedience in preparation for the kingdom of God. Or we can reject it and eventually suffer the penalty of the “*second death*” in the lake of fire. (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:14).

It is that “penal second death” or “wrath to come” which Jesus died to save us from. (1 Thessalonians 1:10)

THINGS JESUS DID NOT SAY

1. Jesus did NOT say

“If you want to understand this stuff you will have to wait around for another 30 years or so, until someone called Paul writes a letter to the Roman Church!”

Please... I am not saying that Paul got it wrong! But I do suspect that Paul’s “exposition” in Romans might be amongst the things that the Apostle Peter said were “*hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction.*” (2 Peter 3:16 RSV). That some have indeed twisted it and got it wrong seems obvious from the way many have made “religious war” on each other because they disagree about what Paul meant. When we read Paul we would do well to remember that Jesus kept it simple enough for “babes”. (Matthew 11:25; Matthew 21:15-16; Luke 10:21). We must NOT insist on imposing our “*private interpretations*” (2 Pet 1:20) of Paul on those “babes” in any way which confuses and discourages them.

2. Jesus did NOT say:

that He died to save Himself!

“No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” (John 10:17-18)

He certainly did not need to die for any sin of His own.

He never said anything about any personal need to cleanse Himself from so called “defilement of flesh” or “sin nature”, or a “curse” arising from the “inherited qualities” of the human nature He was born with.

He never mentioned “original sin”, either in relation to Himself or to anyone else. Nor did He say anything about its “look alike” – which some call “Sin in the flesh”.

Jesus whole emphasis is on what He did to save us!

A SIMPLE CATECHISM

I suppose I could use an impersonal “they” or collective “us” in this short catechism. However I will use the first person instead because the atonement is meant to be so very personal between each of us and God. I trust that when each of you read those first person pronouns, you might be able to appropriate them to yourself as you read. This is the “short version” of what I believe the Gospel says Jesus did for us:

Q. Who should have suffered and died on the cross?

A. By any standard of justice, it should have been me - not Jesus. I sinned. Jesus did not.

Q. Who did suffer and die on the Cross?

A. Innocent Jesus - not guilty me.

Q. Why did Jesus go to the cross?

A. To save me from the penalty of my sins.

Q. What would happen to me if Jesus had not died for me?

A. I would still be unredeemed and subject to my own penalty on the day of Judgment.

Q. What has been achieved?

A. I responded to Jesus' call to repentance, and was forgiven.

My repentance has brought about reconciliation with God. It has changed my attitudes to other men, friends and enemies alike.

Now I live in the hope of inheriting the everlasting Kingdom prepared for Jesus and His brethren “*from the foundation of the world.*” (Matthew 25:34)

If we can answer those questions we understand the most fundamental issue of the Atonement!

OTHER THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT

There are of course many other references to the Atonement in other places in the Scriptures. We must be careful to avoid using them in a way which goes beyond the simplicity of what Jesus said. Outside the Scriptures there are many man made “theories” of how it works, some of them running to hundreds of pages! How do we decide whether or not they are “correct”? Have we got to single any one of them out to the exclusion of all others?

Maybe those are the wrong questions! The simple bottom line of any valid “theory” of the Atonement is that Jesus loved us enough to die FOR US to save us from the penalty of our sins. If we lose sight of that simple fundamental issue, none of them will “work” for us! The Cross is meant to inspire love IN US. If it doesn't do that we will never be able to give the obedience to which the Gospel calls us. (John 14:15, 23-24).

“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.” (John 13:34).

It is not open for any negotiation between us that I might not be reconciled with God, just because you think I don't understand or agree with what you think might be a better or more detailed explanation about the “legality” of how it all works.

I KNOW that my faith in the cross has reconciled me to God. It has saved me from the penalty of my sins and changed my heart towards God. What Jesus has done for me, has given me a new vision of who God is and what God is. It has changed my attitudes and my response to the laws of God. It has given me Eternal life!

But if you have a different theory I will not reject you on account of it! I have learned that love must concede that, even if your own understanding of how it worked in your case is different to mine, you may also have arrived where I am. If you are truly reconciled with God, that will be obvious from the visible “fruit of the spirit” growing in you, (Galatians 5:22-25). If I can see that, I dare not fail to confess you before men as my brother in Christ, (Matthew 10:32-33) just because we differ in our understanding of the detail of how it came to pass for each of us.

Have we “arrived”? How do we measure that?

“By THIS shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have LOVE one to another”. (John 3:35)

One last quote from the Apostle Paul:

“But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” (Galatians 6:14-15).

Brother Allon Maxwell

Hebrews 13:20-21 – A “Proof-text” for what?

“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will...” (Hebrews 13:20-21, A.V.)

Many traditionally minded Christadelphians believe, in the words of the Christadelphian scholar Peter Watkins, writing on page 20 of his booklet that: “Human nature is evil and offensive to God. It must be destroyed”. (“The Cross of Christ”, (published by the C.M.P.A.; and available on-line at: www.christadelphia.org/pamphlet/cross.htm#28),

As Jesus, Himself, possessed human nature the logical implications of the above statement are absolutely staggering. It appears, according to Peter Watkins - and may God forgive me for saying this - but it appears, that Peter Watkins is implying that there was some sort of ‘defilement’ concerning Jesus, that

rendered Him “evil” and “offensive” to God, and which only His death could remove. In his booklet, Peter puts it like this:

“In character He [Jesus] was perfect yet He had inherited from Adam a ‘serpent’ nature - a nature which could be tempted to sin. This nature was the cause of the trouble. It had to be cursed and crucified.”

But whose trouble is Peter Watkins actually talking about? Jesus never once succumbed to temptation – Jesus was perfectly, and uniquely sinless. So, according to Peter’s theory, was God being unfair to demand the sentence of death upon Jesus? “No” implies Peter, Jesus’ sinlessness cannot be put forward as any mitigating factor, because the human Jesus, apparently had nothing at all, to do with His own moral perfection!

On page nineteen, of his booklet, Peter writes: “All His virtue and the perfection of His character had come from God.” According to Peter, therefore, there is apparently no moral dilemma in God requiring Jesus to die – there are no mitigating pleas! He writes on page eighteen: “[Jesus] ..showed what to do with it [i.e. human nature]. He crucified it ...” And states on page 16, “By crucifixion our Lord placarded before the world what human nature deserves.”

The Bible however is totally silent regarding any bizarre notion that Jesus was apparently “evil and offensive” to God. Jesus, lived a perfectly sinless life (John 8:29, 46), and was repeatedly described by God as: “beloved” and “well pleasing”. (Matthew 3:17; 17:5, Mark 12:6), with whom God was always well pleased (John 8:29).

Students of Early Church history will recognise that strands of Peter Watkins’ theory actually find clear parallels with an early Christian heresy known as proto Gnosticism - with which some of the New Testament letters seem very much engaged in countering. Gnostic groups seemed to share a common belief that human physical nature was intrinsically evil, because it was actually composed of evil substance. This meant that ultimate salvation could only be attained by a release of the ‘real’ inner person, from the shackles of the supposed “evil body”.

However, nowhere does the New Testament state that human physical nature is intrinsically evil. To be sure, the human body is described as being “corruptible/perishable”, “mortal” and “weak” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44; 53-54), but it is never described as being intrinsically evil. 1 Corinthians 15:43 states that the body is: “sown in dishonour” (New American Standard version), but the Greek word for ‘dishonour’ here, is “atimia” which is an antonym of the word “glory” (‘doxe’ in Greek). ‘Atimia’ therefore means “inglorious” [see Henry Hayman’s translation], highlighting the fact that our present, weak, mortal, perishable bodies are now, comparatively ‘inglorious’ to our new, promised, supernatural spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15:43-44). It is true that the King James version of the Bible mentions at Philippians 3:20 “our vile body”, but the Greek here reads: “soma tes tapeinoseos hemon”, which literally means: “the body of the lowness of-us.”

The meaning therefore is as the N.A.B. translates it: “our lowly body”; or as Dr David Stern’s “The Complete Jewish Bible” puts it: the bodies we have of this humble state.”

In the sixteenth century the word ‘vile’ was still derived from the Latin word “vilis”, which merely meant “cheap” or “having little value.”

It is because human physical nature is not intrinsically evil, that the Apostle Paul is able to state, in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5, that ideally, he does not want to loose his physical body (his current “earthly tent”), but to have the future “heavenly body” (the heavenly house) put on, as it were, over the top of his current physical body. As Paul says in the Greek, he does not want, concerning his current physical body, to be “ekdusasthai”, which means “to be out-slipped”, or “to be stripped”, but, he wants “to be dressed upon” (ependusasthai in Greek) by his new heavenly body, so that, as he puts it, his mortality will be “swallowed up” (Gk. Katapothē), by divine life.

Paul is talking here, therefore, about the transformation of the physical body, and a kind of mysterious incorporation of the physical body, into the new spiritual body – not the physical body’s destruction, per se.

This identical line of thought is reiterated at 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18; where Paul is apparently hoping, to be amongst those who do not need to die, when the Lord Jesus comes again, to gather His elect (1 Corinthians 15:51-52 = 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Human physical nature therefore is not intrinsically evil – but it can be used for evil, if it is not governed by God’s Holy Spirit. Those people who are devoid of the Holy Spirit, nor governed by it (cf. Jude 1:19; 1 Corinthians 3:1-3) cannot please God (Romans 8:7) but are instead dominated by sin, to such an extent that personified ‘Sin’, can be said to dwell within them, as a resident Master (Romans 7:17,20). Those who live in obedience to the indwelling Holy Spirit, however, are said to have Christ within them (cf. Romans 8:9-10) and can be enabled to be ‘full of goodness.’ (Romans 15:14). However, it is the same physical, literal flesh, either way.

So how do Christadelphians attempt to justify their strange beliefs concerning inherently evil, human physical nature; and our Lord’s apparent need, to have His physical body destroyed in death? They try to do so by utilising barely more than a handful of New Testament texts, mainly drawn from the Epistle to the Hebrews - by which they seek to overturn a great mass of New Testament counter-evidence. One of these texts is Hebrews 13: 20-21 which they attempt to interpret as meaning that Jesus, apparently, needed to die in order to benefit from His own sacrifice, by participating in the New Covenant through which He was personally, raised from death. However, a closer analysis of Hebrews 13:20-21 illustrates that the verses cannot qualify as a ‘proof-text’; if only because of inherent linguistic ambiguities. The possible translational options from the Biblical Greek, into the English, are multiple, because the word order in the Greek is inherently ambiguous. In addition to this there is great uncertainty over how to translate the Greek word ‘en’, at Hebrews 13:20. The King James, Authorised Version renders the word as ‘through’, but this is by no means necessarily correct.

Hebrews 13:20-21, in the Greek of the New Testament, literally reads thus: “Now the God of the peace, the [one] having-led-up out-of [the] dead the shepherd of the sheep the great in (with?) blood covenant of an eternal, the Lord of us Jesus”. (Taken from N.I.V. - N.A.S.B. - interlinear Greek- English version of the New Testaments, compiled by the renowned British scholar, Alfred Marshall)

One can note how Alfred Marshall immediately signals the intrinsic semantic ambiguity, concerning the Greek word ‘en’ - by indicating (in brackets) that the Greek word ‘en’, can mean “in” - but can also mean “with.”

Michael Magill, in the literal translation “New Testament Transline” (Zondervan, 2002), translates ‘en’ as: “in connection with”; but notes that it could also be translated as: “by means of”; or “by” or “with” or “in.”

All this therefore means, is that there are several legitimate ways in which Hebrews 13:20-21, can be both translated, and interpreted. For example, are the verses Hebrews 13:20-21 stating that:

[1] Jesus became qualified to be the ‘Great Shepherd’ (cf. John 10:11), because He shed His blood on behalf of the sheep (John 10:15).

Or [2] Are the verses alluding to the fact that Jesus became ‘Great’, because His sacrifice created, inaugurated and ratified, the New Covenant, for the ungodly – and as a consequence, He is deserving of equal honour and praise, with the Father (compare John 5:23, and Revelation 5:11-14)

Or [3] Are the verses stating that believers, by virtue of being beneficiaries of the New eternal Covenant, are now personally enabled and empowered, to be thoroughly equipped, to do God’s will?

Or [4] If the Greek word ‘en’ is to be legitimately translated as ‘with’, then is the verse stating that Jesus was raised from the dead, and entered the Heavenly sanctuary, ‘with’ the blood, figuratively seen to be in His possession.

All these different, legitimate interpretative options find expression in various scholastic translations of The New Testament. Examples of such translations, concerning these various possible meanings of Hebrews 13:20-21, are as follows :

[1] The following Bible Versions translate the verses as indicating that Jesus became the Great Shepherd, solely by virtue of His altruistic, sacrificial death, for the sheep (John 10:10; 15 cf. also, John 15:13).

Weymouth's New Testament: "... Even Him, who, by virtue of the blood of the eternal Covenant, is the great Shepherd of the sheep."

Lamsa's Peshitta New Testament: "Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus; that great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant."

Mace's New Testament: "May the God of Peace who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ (who by the blood of the eternal covenant is become the grand pastor of the sheep) make you perfect."

The Emphatic Diaglott by Benjamin Wilson: "Now may that God of Peace who brought up from the dead the Shepherd of the sheep (become great by the blood of an aeonian Covenant) even our Lord Jesus..."

The Translator's New Testament; "...God...who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus and made Him the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with all that is good ..."

Other translations that translate the verse similarly, include 'The Twentieth Century New Testament', 'The Jerusalem Bible', 'The Good News Bible', William Barclay's New Testament, Coverdale's Bible and the New Living Bible.

[2] Bible translations that interpret the Greek to mean that Jesus 'became Great', because He inaugurated the New eternal Covenant; include the following:

The Epistles of the New Testament by Henry Hayman: "Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead that Shepherd of the sheep our Lord Jesus Christ – great in the blood of an eternal covenant, accomplish you in every work that is good"

Sharpe's Version: "And may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the shepherd of the sheep, great by the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight"

[3] A Bible version that takes the interpretative option that the blood of the new covenant equips and qualifies believers, to perfectly accomplish the will of God, is the '**Simple English Bible**', published by the International Bible Foundation. This translation reads: "God brought our Lord Jesus back from death. Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep. Using Jesus' blood of the eternal agreement, the God of peace will give you whatever good things you need, so that you can do what He wants."

Ferrar Fenton's version is similar: "But the God of Peace, who brought back our Lord Jesus from the dead, the great Shepherd of the sheep, purify you with the blood of an eternal settlement, supporting you in everything good ..."

This interpretation of the verse is also supported by the well known Bible commentator, Adam Clarke.

[4] The fourth interpretation is that the Greek work 'en' in Hebrews 13:20, should be translated as 'with', which gives the possibility that the verse is to be understood figuratively; namely that Jesus was raised, so as to enter the heavenly sanctuary, 'with' the blood of the new covenant, in His possession (cf. Hebrews 9:12, 24-25).

Translations in this category include the **American Standard Version**: “Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead, the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus.”

Other versions that translate the verse similarly include:

Rotherham’s ‘Emphasised Bible’, the ‘Holman Christian Standard Bible, The 2001 Translation – An American English Bible, and the Context Group Version.

It is also very important to note that elsewhere, in the Authorised King James Version of the Bible, the Greek word ‘en’ is translated as:

“in” - 1863 times; “with” - 139 times; “by” - 142 times “among” - 114 times;
“at” - 106 times; “on” - 45 times “through” - 37 times; “as” - 22 times,
“into” - 11 times.

The Christadelphian interpretation of Hebrews 13:20-21, that Jesus was raised from the dead as a direct result of Him being (supposedly) a personal beneficiary of His own sin-cleansing sacrifice, has thus been demonstrated to be an arbitrary translation which furthermore doesn’t harmonise with the rest of Scripture.

The Epistle to the Hebrews states quite categorically that Jesus’ sacrifice was only for moral transgressions, not for physical human nature.

Hebrews 9:15 reads: “For this reason He is the Mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

The Greek word translated ‘transgressions’ here, is ‘parabaseon’, which means ‘moral transgressions’, against a known law. There is no mention of redemption of ‘human nature’, or ‘sarx’ in the Greek. However, there are more serious considerations that seem to totally undermine the Christadelphian interpretation. Such an interpretation is dependent on the supposed fact that Jesus was personally in need of the New Covenant, and that He was personally included within that New Covenant (rather than being merely its ‘initiator’, only on behalf of others).

There is no evidence that Jesus was in personal need of the New Covenant, indeed the evidence points in the opposite direction.

The New Covenant prophesied in the Jewish scriptures (Jeremiah 31:31 ff.) states: “Deep within them, I will plant My Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I will be their God, and they shall be My people. There will be no further need for neighbour to try to teach neighbour, or brother to say to brother, ‘Learn to know Yahweh . No, they shall all know Me ...since I will forgive their sin and never call their misdeeds to mind.”

The main purposes therefore, of the New Covenant, are:

[1] For the forgiveness of sins.

[2] For the internalisation of God’s Law (Torah), so that,

[3] God’s people will instinctively know, love and obey Yahweh God (cf. Hebrews 13:20-21: God equips us with everything good, that we need, so that we can accomplish His will (Hebrews 13:20-21, cf. also 2 Corinthians 3:3, 6; Romans 8:4).

But could any of these, then future benefits, possibly have applied to Jesus?

Jesus was always fully pleasing to God (John 8:29). God always loved Jesus – even before the creation of the world! (John 17:24, 10:17). Jesus was always sinless (Hebrews 4:15, John 8:46, 1 John 3:5), and His

“food and drink” was always to do His Father’s will (John 4:34). Jesus always intimately knew, loved, and fully obeyed, His Heavenly Father (John 8:29). Jesus was the only one who had actually seen God’s form (John 6:46; cf. 5:37). In fact, He was the only one who ever really knew God (cf. “...No one knows the Father, but the Son”; Matthew 11:27, Luke 10:22). Jesus knew God so well that, God could be said to have ‘dwelled in Him’ (John 10:38, 14:10, 2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus was a dutiful Son, who was forever in His Father’s family (cf. John 8:35 [NIV] where the Greek word ‘oikia’ means ‘family.’). Jesus was always holy, even from birth (Luke 1:35); and was sanctified by God, set apart, and sent to atone for “the sin of the world” (John 1:29), but Jesus Himself was spiritually, ‘not of this World.’ (John 8:23). As such Jesus is described as “the Sanctifier” (cf. Heb. 2:11; John 10:36) – and we are those who are described as “being sanctified” (cf. Hebrews 10:10, 14; 13:12). Consequently only we are the ones who are ever described as being “sprinkled with the blood” (Hebrews 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2), never Jesus. As an obedient, and divinely trusted Son (John 3:35), Jesus fully co-operated with His Father, in all God’s works (John 5:19-21) for the salvation of Mankind, and so is described as being worthy of receiving joint honour and joint praise, with God (Revelation 5:11-14; John 5:23).

It seems clear therefore, that Jesus Himself was not in personal need of the New Covenant, and that therefore His sacrificial death must have been on behalf of others, and only on behalf of others. It is also clearly revealed in Scripture that Jesus died to enable people to be forgiven their moral failings, and moral transgressions – not their physical bodies (‘somata’ in Greek).

Romans 4:25 states: “He was delivered up because of our transgressions.” The Greek word here for “transgressions” is “paraptomata” - which means “moral failings”, “errors”, “lapses”, “trespasses”, “transgressions”, “offences” and “mistakes”. It occurs for example at Mark 11:25, where Jesus tells us to forgive others, so that God will forgive our trespasses – not our physical bodies (Greek: ‘somata’), nor our physical flesh (Greek: ‘sarx’)!

Jesus therefore died, not for people’s bodies or physical flesh but for moral mistakes and offences.

This fact is again clearly demonstrated at Hebrews 9:15: “Therefore He is the Mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.”

The Greek word translated into English as “transgressions” here, is ‘parabaseon’, (which is a synonym of ‘paratomata’, and also of ‘hamartias’ [sin]), and means: “wilful transgressions, against a known law, or rule of life.”

The New Covenant therefore, only deals with moral failings. Hebrews 9:24 therefore, clearly demonstrates that Jesus, in His capacity as the High Priest, of the new order of Melchizedec, went into the Heavenly sanctuary, solely on behalf of moral sinners.

The literal English of the New Testament Greek (see any Interlinear Greek-English New Testament) reads: “Christ entered ... into... the-heavens [it]self now to-appear-in the presence of God on-behalf-of-us.”

Similarly, the literal English of Hebrews 6:19-20 [organised in the correct grammatical English order – see Marshal’s interlinear] reads: “And entering into the inner [side] of-the veil where a forerunner on-behalf-of us entered Jesus.”

It is therefore, no surprise whatsoever that the morally sinless Jesus did not personally participate in the bread and the wine that symbolised His body and blood that was given “for the forgiveness of sins” (Math. 26:28) after His final Passover supper.

In the Synoptic accounts, after the Last supper, read thus:

Luke 22:19 (which = Mark 14:22 = Math. 26:26): “He took a loaf [Greek: ‘arton’] and gave it to them, and said “This is My body which is given for you.”

1 Corinthians 11:24 similarly reads: “He broke it [“a loaf”, from the Greek word arton] and said ‘This is My body which is for you.’”

Likewise Luke 22:20 reads: “This cup [says Jesus] is poured out for you, and is the new covenant, by my blood.”

The corresponding verse in Mathew 26:28, regarding the blood- symbolising wine is that the wine/blood is: “for the forgiveness of sins.” [‘eis aphenin hamartion’ in the Greek]. Nowhere is Jesus said to partake, Himself, of the Emblematic blood and wine. Indeed Jesus , when He gives the cup of wine to His disciples, actually states that He will not be drinking any wine, until God’s Kingdom fully comes (Luke 22:18).

Conclusion: Hebrews 13:20-21 cannot be commandeered by the Christadelphians, to support their apparently semi-Gnostic views, that Jesus’ physical nature posed a problem regarding His personal fellowship with God.

“Jesus who, in place of the joy that was open to Him, endured the cross, making light of its disgrace, and has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.” (New English Bible; Hebrews 12:2).

Brother Tony Cox

When Will Jesus Return?

We are pleased to say that the Nazarene Fellowship Forum is now up and running. One of the first topics which came up for discussion was on the return of Christ; when will it be?

The enquirer suggested that we really don’t know when Jesus will come and we may not be able to come close to knowing when it will be but we must always remain alert for His return.

In response Brother Julian Shipley wrote:-

“I think you are right that we cannot predict the day of his return. However, we are told there will be signs for those who are watching. Daniel 4:3, “How great are His signs and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation.” Also Luke 21:10-28, “Then He continued by saying to them, Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven... There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.””

In this excerpt from Luke’s gospel we can see some of the clearest signs of the near return of Jesus. In this quotation Jesus tells us that “there will be signs in the sun, and in the moon and in the stars.” But does this refer to the literal sun, moon and stars? There is perhaps here a reference back to Genesis 37:9,10, where we read of Joseph who “he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” But why should Jacob assume the dream referred to himself, Joseph’s mother and his eleven other children? This appears to be prophetic. Joseph’s father was Jacob, whom God later re-named Israel and we see in this family of Joseph’s father and mother and the twelve brothers, the nucleus of the nation they were to become - the nation of Israel we see today. So we suggest Jesus was referring to Israel at the time of His return.

In verse 25 Jesus goes on to talk of the “distress of nations, with perplexity” and this word “perplexity” means ‘with no way out’, or, ‘at a loss for a way’, or, we might express it today as ‘at their wit’s end’, for the nations are

finding no solution to the problem of Israel's existence as a nation in their own land once more. It is God's intention that they should be in their Promised Land for God has given it them, but the Muslim nations surrounding them, hate them and are intent on destroying them.

One of the teachings of the Islam is that if ever a land they once occupied should be lost to them it is their duty to Allah to fight to get it back. They see Israel as occupying their land and that is why they see it as their duty to fight a 'Holy War' in order to retrieve it for themselves! It is inevitable that Islamic nations will sooner or later attempt to overthrow Israel; there are millions in the armed forces of Islam but only thousands in the armed forces of Israel! And neither will Israel be able to count on military help from America if the western nations have another monetary crisis like the last one, and it is nonsense to believe Israel could survive without God's intervention.

Next we have "The sea and the waves roaring" and this too we see as symbolic - of the warfare among the nations. We have instances of similar expressions in the Old Testament such as in Jeremiah 6, and this tells of the time when the nation of Israel was overthrown by the Chaldees in 620 B.C. (It could also have a secondary application to Israel today in their faithlessness in God and their trust in their own devices). In verses 22 and 23 we read of the Chaldean army, "Thus saith the LORD, Behold, a people cometh from the north country, and a great nation shall be raised from the sides of the earth. They shall lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea; and they ride upon horses, set in array as men for war against thee, O daughter of Zion." Again, in Isaiah 5 which dealt with the Babylonian invasion, and this likewise could have a secondary application to Israel today, for the Babylonians came upon Israel as we read in verse 30, "And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof." In each of these references we have the symbol of armed forces likened to the sea and the waves roaring.

Then in Luke 21:26 Jesus talks of "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" and while this may not yet be literally true Jesus narrative continues, "for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." This tells us of God's intervention to save Israel from destruction and it is not difficult to understand why men's hearts should fail for looking after man's affairs when He has a different purpose for these events. This is now the "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." (Daniel 12:1).

It is also the time of Joel's prophecy to be fulfilled - "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision." (Joel 3:14). And in the next verse Joel continues to speak of Israel, - "The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining", and from this it appears that this again refers to Israel who will be invaded by the Islamic nations for at that moment we read in verse 10 that "the LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel."

This will surely be one of the greatest miracles that the world will ever experience and from what we see happening in the world today it seems it could happen very soon. What we must realise is that God knows all things even the very thoughts and intentions of our hearts. None of the faithful will be lost and the promise is that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved, as we read in Acts 2:20 & 21, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

But a word of caution, we read in Matthew 24:36 where Jesus said to his disciples, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only", so we must not be over-confident for we have seen in the past far too many predictions which have proved to be wrong, and we must always be prepared for a change of understanding. Nevertheless, the present political situation seems to indicate that the above events could well take place very soon. In Luke 21:31 to 33, we again turn to something Jesus said - "So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away."

The following notes written by Dr Adam Clarke nearly two hundred years ago are also of great interest.

Brother Russell Gregory.

Notes on Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39 by Dr Adam Clarke

Chapter 38. “The sublime prophecy contained in this and the following chapter relates to Israel's victory over Gog, and is very obscure. It begins with representing a prodigious armaments of many nations combined together under the conduct of Gog, with the intention of overwhelming the Jews, after having been for some time resettled in their land subsequent to their return from the Babylonish captivity, vs.1-9. These enemies are farther represented as making themselves sure of the spoil, vs.10-13. But in this critical conjuncture when Israel, to all human appearance, was about to be swallowed up by her enemies, God most graciously appears, to execute by terrible judgments the vengeance threatened against these formidable adversaries of his people, vs.14-16. The prophet, in terms borrowed from human passions, describes, with awful emphasis, the fury of Jehovah as coming up to his face; and the effects of it so dreadful, as to make all the animate and inanimate creation tremble, and even to convulse with terror the whole frame of nature, vs.17-23.”

Chapter 39. “The prophet goes on to denounce the Divine judgments against Gog and his army, vs.1-7; and describes their dreadful slaughter, vs.8-10, and burial, vs.11-16, in terms so very lofty and comprehensive, as must certainly denote some very extraordinary interposition of Providence in behalf of the Jews. And to amplify the matter still more, the prophet, with peculiar art and propriety, delays the summoning of all the birds and beasts of prey in nature to feast on the slain, (in allusion to the custom of feasting on the remainder of sacrifices,) till after the greater multitudes are buried; to intimate that even the remainder, and as it were the stragglers of such mighty hosts, would be more than sufficient to satisfy their utmost rapacity, vs.17-20. The remaining verses contain a prediction of the great blessedness of the people of God in Gospel times, and of the stability of the kingdom of Christ, vs.21-29. It will be proper to remark that the great northern expedition against the natural Israel, described in this and the preceding chapter, is, from its striking resemblance in the main particulars, put by the writer of the Apocalypse, (chap. xx. 7-10,) for a much more formidable armament of a multitude of nations in the four quarters of the earth against the pure Christian Church, the MYSTICAL Israel; an event still extremely remote, and which it is thought shall immediately precede the destruction of the world by fire, and the general judgment.”

Dr Adam Clarke 1825