

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 107

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Editorial

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

"Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." And so we earnestly pray "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

We naturally look at world events comparing them with scripture prophesy to see just how near our Lord's return is and in this connection I have received a letter from brother Phil Parry in which he writes "The emphasis upon the situation in Israel being put forth by the Christadelphians is so much in favour of Jews after the flesh that we could almost believe that Jesus Christ is coming for their benefit and not for those who have sought and are seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. As one Christadelphian put it to our brother Woodhouse some time ago, Christadelphians are in for a great shock in respect of their views on Israel and Palestine. In fact he believes as I do that they (the Jews) will be forced to evacuate the Land and their return will be through acceptance of the New Covenant. I myself believe that Ezekiel 38 & 39, Gog and Magog, is the same event of which John speaks in Revelation where God and Magog are gathered for destruction and to demonstrate to all the supremacy of the God of Israel, both to those who have become His people, or as in Ezekiel "My People", and the unconverted (as yet) nations of the world. This happens towards the end, or in fact, when the thousand years of Satan's power has been suppressed and he is loosed for a season for the fulfilment of God's Purpose. If Gog and Magog of Ezekiel is not the same as mentioned by name in Revelations, why is it that John does not mention two separate events? I have also always been opposed to naming Russia as the power or the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel 38 & 39 invading the Land of Israel just at the return of Christ. Christadelphians are presumptuous in doing this and if it is a sign they are looking for they may well be indeed due for a shock; it may not be any more a sign than the one they put forward of the fig tree budding forth as Israel's return. Jesus only alluded to the fig tree and all the trees budding forth as season signs of the summer to everyone, but the events of which He had prophesied were the signs he alluded to and when they began to bud forth the time had come for his Kingdom to be established. To be wise beyond what is written can cause blindness and a snare."

We are grateful to Brother Phil Parry for the foregoing letter and it may be some would like to make their own comments regarding it. All I wish to say at present is that it is my opinion that the Kingdom will be established world-wide in a matter of months, not years, and based on a foundation of righteousness which will be quickly established by Divine Authority and the present world order, referred to in the Psalms as "the foundations of the world are out of joint", replaced by each of the saints ruling over "one, five or ten cities."

We have received news that Sister Muriel Stormont broke her arm last November and we trust that she is making good progress. Also we were sorry to hear that sister Evelyn Linggood has arthritis in her hands making it difficult for her to write.

May the blessing of our Heavenly Father rest upon us all.

Sincerely your brother, with Love, in the Master's, service, Russell Gregory.

JESUS IS WATCHING US

At the time of writing this we are at the beginning of another year. Our daily readings have just taken us once more through the account of the first sin which later came to be referred to as "the sin of the world" which in due time the Saviour came to take away.

What I want to draw our attention to today is how Adam and Eve reacted when God questioned them about it: how Adam tried to put the blame on his wife, who in her turn put it on the serpent. This always reminds us of a common occurrence in every-day school life. The class is noisy. The teacher catches a pupil throwing something and jumps on him. "Now what do you think you are doing John?" Back comes the answer "Sir, Bill threw something at me." Then, Bill when questioned, blames Kevin. And so it goes on, and in the end the teacher is rarely any wiser about who sparked off the uproar. But here the comparison ends. The teacher does not know who started it. God does, and on the occasion of Adam's disobedience, knew. But it was still necessary to question the offenders to get it out of their own mouth, just as in a human court, each witness and defendant tell their own version of the crime or incident, even if it is fairly obvious what had happened. Putting the blame on others i.e. a common human failure, and if we are honest with ourselves, I think we are all guilty at times in this respect. It is very similar to the excuse made by the people with no full knowledge of the Truth blaming "sin in the flesh", or "original sin" for their failings.

Coming back to the sin of Adam, God knew all about it before questioning them had even started. And God and His Son know all about our wrong doings and what led up to it. But this does not absolve us from confessing them to our High Priest, because on this, followed by sincere repentance, depends God's forgiveness. It is the same as with a naughty child committing some misdeed. The father or teacher may know exactly what he has done by having watched him. But he still questions him to get it straight from the source so that the child and all witnesses know why he is being punished.

There is a well known novel with the title "1984" and one of the main characters is "Big Brother". The phrase in this novel "Big Brother is watching you" has become part of our language. And we must be conscious of Jesus, much more than "big brother" but our Lord and Master is watching us. Let us never forget that in our thoughts and conduct. What is more to the point than what we read in Psalm 159 verses 5-7, "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?"

When reading the account of the fall we also learn of the first law. The impulses by themselves, including hunger to satisfy our appetite, are not sinful. They only become sinful when used wrongfully. And this is what happened here. It is very probable, but we cannot be dogmatic on this, that the serpent, as well as Adam and Eve, saw animals eating of that tree without coming to any harm. All it needed was a mischief making serpent to point this out, and so incite Eve's curiosity. To make another comparison with a disobedient child: father says, "Don't touch the kettle, it's hot." The child has seen father and mother touching it many times, but unaware that it was cold, and not coming to any harm. So he gets curious. He asks himself "Why not? Just let me see what will happen!" And what will happen he burns himself and father punishes him besides. But let us get the right sequence of events. First, the law. Then temptation, be it from outside or from our own curious and questioning mind. Then sin. How right what we read in

Romans "Where there is no law there is no transgression." We all know how Adam was reprieved by God's merciful scheme of begetting a second Adam who would pay the penalty incurred by the first Adam by giving His life in His blood. And let us never forget to appreciate this supreme love and realise that we have no reason for high-mindedness.

Lot us walk worthy of God's mercy on us, who has shown us this truth which comes to us through His mercy and not by our own goodness. Let us always bear in mind that Jesus is watching us.

Brother G.L.Dreifuss.

We have received the following letter from a Christadelphian in reply to the last issue of the Circular Letter:-

"I'm familiar with the Nazarene doctrine re. Messiah's nature and in no way wishing to offend, I'm loathe to draw your attention to the often quoted scripture John 4:3. Now I'll proceed to other scriptures which break your argument re. Messiah's nature and indeed nature of mankind. On page 20 Psalm 47:9 is mentioned. This psalm refers to the Kingdom being established upon earth. Still on page 20, if I may say so, Paul made a play on words here (1 Corinthians 15:42-55), verse 52 "The dead shall be raised incorruptible." The worthy will not come out of their graves literally incorruptible, for even Messiah Himself had to await His change - see John 20:17. Why the reason for the Master's baptism and the temptation? (Matthew chapters 3 & 4). No, brother, your theory "clean flesh" makes a nonsense - worse, mockery of one of the most beautiful enactments of Messiah's life, namely His temptation in the wilderness. What of His humble submission to baptism - so fulfilling all righteousness? Why did the Master say "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God"? Isaiah 58 - read the whole chapter - this scripture could only apply to Messiah Himself. Why, (Luke 4:13) devil ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season. It seems to me Messiah was tempted most severely at some later date in His ministry, the season here being the clue. Hebrews 2:7 - as Messiah was made a little lower than the angels, then I ask, exactly what kind of nature did He possess? Referring back to 1 Corinthians 15:52 Yahweh knows who are His, therefore in verse 52 the word incorruptible is so used. Hebrews 7:27 - Under the law of Moses, once a year the high priest had to go into the Most Holy to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins... Surely you see Messiah the type hear who offered up Himself, Messiah who was without sin. Why did Messiah cry out upon the stake "My El, my El, Why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) because the Father is life and momentarily left His Son who passed into death, impaling the works of the flesh upon the stake (human nature) a nature derived from His mortal mother. How else could the Father manifest Himself but through human nature in the person of His Son. Dear brother, you are hair-splitting, and I believe, unwittingly holding a Roman Catholic doctrine. The Judgement Seat will reveal just who serve Yahweh and who do not. Little wonder it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living El. If we are manifesting that love that covers a multitude of sins, then we need not fear. Fear only hath torment.

Yours in the Hope of Israel."

In reply to the above :-

"Thank you for your letter of the 14th November, and thank you also for pointing out the wrong reference on page 20. This should have been Psalm 49:7, not 47:9. My apologies to all.

You raise many points in your letter and I will cover these shortly. However, I should like to say that it seems to me that there would be no differences at all between us if it could be settled whether or not Adam's nature was changed when he ate of the forbidden tree. Most of our differences have a bearing on this one point. To say his nature was changed seems to be an assumption, though, of course, this view is arrived at by a process of deductive reasoning starting in the New Testament and working back to Genesis. But the

Christadelphian view is not new for it was developed over 1600 years ago by Rome and their doctrine of Original Sin incorporates it. But so far as the Roman Catholics were concerned they had the complication of believing that Jesus Christ was the Third Person of the Trinity and they felt that God the Son, as they considered Him, could not have sinful flesh like the rest of the human race, so they were forced into developing the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in order to give Him “clean flesh.” However, Christadelphians don’t see this as a problem and are content to say that Jesus Christ had the same defiled flesh brought about by the original sin of Adam.

If the Christadelphian view could be shown to be correct I would certainly accept it without hesitation and would gladly rejoin them, but the process of deduction used in order to prove their doctrine is fraught with difficulties, not the least of which are translations accepted at face value when they are known to be faulty (e.g. ‘sinful flesh’ instead of ‘sin’s flesh’ in Romans 8:3) and ambiguous verses having one view forced on them which may not be correct. In fact, all the things that fifty years of association with the Christadelphian community I have been exhorted to avoid, saying “prove all things, hold fast that which is good,” only to find that those whom I love and have felt so close to for many years are using these wrong means to uphold their views. Needless to say, this is a great disappointment to me and fills me with sorrow.

So now I wish to deal with the points you raise. 1 Corinthians 15:52 “The dead shall be raised incorruptible.” Why should not the worthy ones come out of their graves literally incorruptible? I believe Jesus did and I believe those deemed worthy of eternal life will, too, and for this reason - that nothing unclean, or unworthy (and certainly not defiled mortal flesh) will appear in Heaven before the Glorious Throne of God. The Judgement Seat of Christ can be best illustrated by the judgement seats in the arena’s of Paul’s day, where only the winners appeared in order to collect their laurels and receive the applause of the spectators. The losers did not go up to the judgement seat for there was nothing for them, no crown and no applause. But that is on the earthly plane. On the heavenly plane, all who appear before the Judgement Seat of Christ will receive crowns of Righteousness and the applaud “Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

John 20:17, “Jesus said unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father.” I do not see that this has anything to do with Jesus Christ having to await His change to incorruptible nature. All He was asking of Mary was that He should not be delayed in going to His Father, by her embrace. This verse does not mean that Jesus Christ was in any way or for any reason untouchable and neither was it a rebuke but a kindly request on the part of Jesus that He may be allowed to go without delay, for Mary’s natural desire would have been to hold Jesus close as one so dear to her and whom she thought was dead but was now alive again. This thought is confirmed in Matthew 28:9 where we read, “And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him.” He was not untouchable.

Mark 10:18, “Why callest thou me good?” There is none good but one, that is God.” This is an isolated instance. In the absolute sense there is none good but God, of course, but Jesus also uses the same term ‘good’ elsewhere in a relative sense both of Himself and of others. The word here used is ‘*agathos*’ as in Matthew 5:45, “for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good.” Matthew 12:35, “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things.” Matthew 20:15, “Is thine eye evil because I am good?” Matthew 22:10, “So those servants went out into the highways and byways and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good”, etc. It is difficult to see how one can use this isolated instance of Mark 10:18 except to prop up a pre-conceived idea of sinful flesh.

Jesus baptism. Although Jesus Christ said “Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness” no one would claim that all righteousness was fulfilled by this one act but rather, that without this one act all righteousness would not be fulfilled. May I explain my view? When the Passover feast was instituted the people were instructed to seek out a lamb without spot or blemish on the tenth day and to set this lamb aside until the fourteenth day, during which time it did not receive any food. It was then sacrificed on the fourteenth day, so that it was set aside for a period of between three and four days. Now, if this lamb was selected late on the tenth day and sacrificed early on the fourteenth day then that would be a period of just three and a half days, and this I believe, symbolised the three and a half years of Jesus’ ministry in which He did without the things of the flesh, that is, the natural pursuits of man, and emptied Himself, spending His entire energies preaching the Gospel of Salvation, culminating in the offering of Himself as the Lamb of God

taking away the sin of the world. This three and a half years being the time in which He filled to the full all righteousness. The baptism of Jesus Christ signified His setting apart about three and a half years before He said “It is finished” (or ‘paid’).

The Temptation of Jesus. I am puzzled to see why anyone should think this should cause any difficulty. Jesus was tempted in all points as we are and this fact alone suggests that He was not given special strength to overcome temptation for if He was given special strength for this purpose then how can it be said that He was tempted in all points as we are? He would have been given an unfair advantage enabling Him to do what we could not. We are not tempted beyond that which we are able to bear but with the temptation we are given the way of escape from it by seeking the help of our Heavenly Father. Whenever Jesus was tempted He always appealed to His Father for help to overcome and if only we did the same, and made our appeal to God we, too, would lead perfect lives.

Hebrews 7:27,28. These two verses need to be taken together for verse 27 on its own is ambiguous and verse 28 proves which way it should be read. There is here both a similarity and a contrast. The high priests appointed under the law had infirmities, so it was necessary for them they should offer first for themselves in order to make themselves fit, in the sight of God, to offer for others. By contrast Jesus had no infirmities but was already acceptable to God as the perfect Offering. Jesus was not a priest before His crucifixion as He was not of the tribe of Levi but of the tribe of Juda. He became our High Priest after the order of Melchisedec upon His ascension into heaven. Nowhere in the Bible are we told that Jesus died for Himself but many, many times are we told that He died for sinners. Caiaphas said, just before the crucifixion, speaking not of himself, that is, not of his own volition but the Holy Spirit made him speak thus:- “It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” That is substitution and it is a statement from on High. How else are we to interpret it? Christadelphians have a dislike for the term ‘substitution’ but Jesus said He have himself as a ransom for us; we are told that we have been ‘purchased’ with the precious blood of Christ; that we were sold to sin as our master. This buying and selling; ransom and redemption all have one thing in common - they all involve substitution, the exchange of the “precious blood of Christ” for “the purchased possession.”

1 John 4:3. The argument using the subject of “Anti-Christ” is a “red-herring” which was introduced many years ago to divert attention from the point at issue which is, that all sin, imputed or otherwise, is abstract and not a physical property of the flesh which God made very good. Where is the scripture proof that shows this to be otherwise? There is none.

I am sure that over the years you must have considered all these points and maybe there is nothing new to you in what I have written. However, it was a pleasure to receive your kind letter and whether or not you have any changed views we must all seek for truth above all else. Jesus said to Martha “Thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” That good part would be better interpreted ‘best portion’ for Martha was preparing the meal for her guests and the “good part” or ‘best portion’ was for her chief guest. But her Chief Guest was giving the ‘best portion’ to Mary who was sitting at the feet of Jesus taking in all He had to say. May we do likewise.

Sincerely Yours in the Hope of Israel, Russell Gregory.

“To this man will I look, even to him
that is poor and of a contrite spirit,
and trembleth at My word.”

Isaiah 66:2.

WE ARE WHAT WE THINK

Dear brethren and sisters, whether we like to believe it or not we are what we think and the power of thought is the power of life. Thought is the first thing to proceed from our minds and it proceeds all actions and speech. Having said that we often speak without thinking. This being just one of the many evils of which our Lord said, “for from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts.” This is not to say that a man or woman can only think evil because of their nature, but that if we do not try to overcome our desires or thoughts, evil will most surely manifest itself. For evil is part of the wide way, therefore easier to follow after. Whilst we cannot be what is commonly termed narrow minded, we must set our thoughts and eyes on that narrow way that leads to life eternal. We must make sure that each evil thought, as it comes, is suppressed. It is no sin to be tempted by a thought, it is when we give in to that thought that we sin.

In Proverbs 23:7 we are told “For as he (or she) thinketh in his (her) heart, so is he (she).” It is up to each of us to think correctly. Our nature itself is no obstacle, this is but foolish thinking. What way shall we think? We cannot combine both evil and good thoughts and make any progress, that is like trying to go uphill and downhill at the same time. Nor can we think weak, fearful thoughts and grow strong by the process. The only way to think then, is to think creatively and lovingly. Prayer is often our highest form of creative thinking, therefore it is good to follow after the advice to “pray without ceasing.” To offer our forgiveness to others, is thinking that is aware of our own weaknesses and thereby strengthening. Hope is thinking about that good which will surely come, therefore joyous. Faith is sound thinking, that cannot see any insurmountable obstacle, therefore comforting. We should but follow the advice of Paul to the Philippians 4:8 - “Finally brethren (and sisters) whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of a good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Remember “to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” (Romans 8:6)

Brother Eric Moore.

Question:

As the dictionary definition for ‘devil’ or ‘the devil’ doesn’t help us very much in understanding the scripture usage of the term, can anyone please give an apt, succinct definition?

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The problems surrounding the gift of the Holy Spirit appear to arise mainly because the gift is regarded as an “all or nothing” action. The argument is that if we had the ‘gift of the Holy Spirit’ we ought to be able to do ALL the things the Apostles did, such as working miracles, speaking with tongues and prophesying. Since these manifestations are not evident among us, the conclusion is arrived at that the Spirit has been wholly and completely withdrawn, though no particular passage of scripture saying this can be found.

This “all or nothing” view is a hang-over from traditional church teaching, and from the claims of modern Pentecostal sects. It seems more in keeping with the teaching of Scripture that there are many manifestations of the Spirit, and some are given to one believer and some to others. Some appeared at specific times to specific people, and have been withdrawn, some are given to all.

The chapter which deals with this point particularly is 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul says (v.3) “No man can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” and later (V.7) “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Paul then goes on to state clearly that there are many different manifestations - wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miracles. We have no difficulty in realising that one

manifestation of a power is not all that the power can do, nor is it the power itself. For example, the shinning of the bulb of a torch by a battery is a manifestation of the power of electricity. So is the sending of a television picture via a satellite, or the running of an electric train of many hundreds of tons at high speed, or the melting of tons of steel in an arc furnace. No one is going to suggest that because you have the power of electricity in a torch battery you can melt tons of steel. The power is the same; the manifestation is different; in this case decided by man. In the case of the Holy Spirit, decided by God.

Paul, in fact, emphasises the difference between the manifestations of the Spirit by likening them to parts of the body (v.14-16) and shows clearly that while God has given different manifestations to parts of the body (the hand cannot see as the eye can) yet they are all controlled by the same mind. At the end of the chapter Paul emphasises that even in Corinth, where believers obviously had the gift of the Spirit, only some could prophesy, only some could work miracles, only some could heal (vs. 29&30). The gift of the Spirit manifested itself in different ways to different people even in Corinth, while elsewhere we see that only two Apostles are recorded as raising the dead and only nine were inspired to write scripture.

It is seen from other scriptures that the Holy Spirit manifested itself in different ways at different times. Jesus tells us that David had the Holy Spirit when he wrote the Psalms (Mark 12:36), and while arguments from silence have to be treated with care, it is entirely in agreement with Paul's explanation that we find no record of David working any miracle, of healing or any other kind. Similarly, John the Baptist was "filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15) and proved it by his teaching and in his recognition of Jesus as the Lamb of God, but it is never recorded that he did any miracles. *(see note). Both of his parents, Elizabeth and Zacharias were "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Luke 1:41 & 67) many years before Pentecost, but it manifested itself in their case in spiritual sayings - not in miraculous powers.

The point is clearly made in 1 Corinthians 12:11 that "all these (manifestations) are inspired by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as He wills." At various times, to various people God has given various manifestations of the Holy Spirit. To Jesus was given the Spirit "not by measure" (John 3:34); to the Apostles at Pentecost were given many special and powerful manifestations (particularly the working of miracles) to convince the people of their message; to Cornelius and his family were given such manifestations as convinced Peter; to 'holy men of old' the power to write scripture and prophesy; to us is given at least to say "Jesus is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3) and to some "the utterance of knowledge" (1 Corinthians 12:8).

There is no difficulty in accepting that some of these manifestations were given for a special purpose at a special time and have been 'withdrawn' either permanently or till God sees fit to give them again. This will be seen more clearly if we remember that it is not for us to say "We have the Spirit and can use it to heal or to prophesy or to speak with tongues" but that God uses us as a vehicle for such manifestations of the Spirit as He sees best in the period and circumstances in which his servants live (1 Corinthians 12:11 – "who apportions to each one individually as He will"). That He used the Apostles as a vehicle for particular manifestations which are not now apparent among us does not mean that He is not using us "through His Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11) in various ways today. It should not be discussed so much as to whether we have the Spirit as to whether the Spirit has us.

This view of the manifestations of the Spirit allows us to accept those many passages describing the constant action of the Spirit through all believers, (Rom. 8:9 "if the Spirit of God really dwells in you"; 1 John 3:24 "by the Spirit which He has given us") and yet to understand why we must reject the ideas of the Evangelicals, on the one hand, that all believers should have the power to heal and to speak with tongues, and, on the other hand, of the 'laying on of hands' by the Clergy of the Roman Catholic Church to convey ecclesiastic authority given by Christ to the Apostles specifically. Nor need we try to explain away Peter's statement on the day of Pentecost – "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and your children, and to all that are afar off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Him."

G. Arthur Mander

Editorial Note: It seems appropriate here to quote "John did no miracle" (John 10:41) though he was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth" (Luke 1:15). – Russell

PROOF OF THE GENUINENESS OF THE SCRIPTURES

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

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

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

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

Origin unknown.

MATTHEW 20 Verses 17 to 34.

In Luke's Gospel we read "When the days were well nigh come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." Jesus had travelled north to the area around the Sea of Galilee for John's Gospel tells us "He walked no more openly among the Jews, but departed to the wilderness into the city called Ephraim because the Jews sought to kill Him and there He tarried with the disciples." "There is the possibility that He had moved to the north because news of the raising of Lazarus had come to the ears of the Pharisees causing some consternation (John 11:47) "And that Chief Priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council and said 'What shall we do? For this man doeth many signs. If we let Him alone men will believe in Him and the Romans will come and take away our place and our nation.'" Their fear basically was a very personal thing; they held power, and were terrified that they would be deposed by the Roman authorities for not keeping the peace. Continuing in verse 53 - "so from that day forth they took council that they might put Him to death." Caiaphas summing it up with these words "Ye know nothing at all nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people that the whole nation perish not."

The time of the Passover was drawing near, the commemoration of their release from bondage in Egypt, a time when their fervour was aroused and hopes raised that there might be a similar release from the oppression of the Roman rule. Knowing from the scriptures that a Redeemer would come their anticipation would be heightened, maybe now would be the time of His manifestation. Maybe they had listened to the words of the Gospel proclaiming that the Kingdom of God was at hand that this Jesus was the promised Messiah and would announce a resurgence of the nation and the casting aside of the Roman yoke. Indeed they had a Saviour in their midst but did not comprehend the full import of His mission. Namely, that of bringing redemption within the reach of all mankind. Even His disciples closely associated with Him during His ministry, and privy to a far fuller explanation of His message were still blind to God's all-embracing purpose. From the Gospel records we know that He had warned His disciples of His coming suffering and death, and that Peter had rather heatedly rebuked Him saying "Be it far from Thee, Lord, this shall never be unto Thee." A natural human reaction to one he loved dearly. The very idea that anyone could raise their hand against the Man they knew as the Son of the Most High God, a Man full of compassion, love and

understanding for the Jewish people and especially those of lowly estate, and it aroused in them a defensive spirit. They had been chosen by Him and lived in close-association with Him for approximately three years, listening to and conversing with Him, and naturally a strong bond of love had developed within the group, and hearing Him preach to the multitude had aroused in them a new hope and a deeper understanding of the love of God.

Their return to Ephraim, away from the crowds and excitement that was building up in Jerusalem would afford Jesus another opportunity to prepare the disciples for the traumatic events that would take place a short time hence. But even here the crowds still gathered to hear His words and marvel at His miraculous healings, and it was necessary for Jesus to withdraw apart with the disciples, for His words at this time were to be for them alone. "Behold," said Jesus, "we go up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He shall be raised up."

We know that Jesus took many opportunities to withdraw from the people a time to commune with God the Father, and to renew His spiritual energy. We use a modern term "to recharge our batteries." We are all aware that there are times when peaceful reflection and deliberation away from the pressures of everyday life are very necessary, and we are certainly not under the same daily pressures that afflicted our Lord, physically and mentally. Apart with His disciples Jesus would undoubtedly explain more fully than the words in the two verses in our chapter would indicate. Earlier He had told His disciples He would suffer, be killed, and raised again on the third day. On a later occasion He revealed that He would be betrayed. This reference is in Matthew 17:22, "For the Son of Man shall be betrayed into the hands of men." Now here, at Ephraim, He was revealing a fuller picture - the betrayal the death sentence and delivery to the Gentiles - the mocking - the scourging – the cruelty of the death by crucifixion,' and not only that, but also the Glory of the resurrection on the third day.

The disciples would know from their upbringing under the Mosaic Law that mankind was alienated from God through Adam's sin and because of this all mankind was under sentence of death. But through His loving mercy God provided a way, through ceremonial sacrifice, entailing the shedding of blood, for the remission of sins confessed. This law was necessary, for Paul wrote to the Galatians "The law has been our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified through faith", and in the epistle to the Hebrews "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin." The life of an animal was not the equivalent of the life of a man, and no offering of a lamb could provide deliverance from the indebtedness caused by Adam's disobedience. Through Jesus Christ God Almighty was providing a way to remove this condemnation In John 3:16 we read, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." John the Baptist said of Jesus "Behold, the Iamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

These points Jesus would be making to His disciples and emphasising the law of Redemption as laid out in Leviticus 25, namely that a near kinsman not only had the right, but the duty, to redeem his poorer brother by the paying of a ransom.

"Behold" said Jesus, "we go to Jerusalem and all things that are written in the prophets shall be accomplished by the Son of Man." I think it is fairly clear that Jesus must have spent time expounding the principles of redemption to the disciples and how necessary it was that He, of His own free will, must go up to Jerusalem, for He was fulfilling the obligation His Father had set upon Him. God had sent His Son into the world not to judge it but that the world should be saved by Him. Despite His explanation the disciples still did not fully comprehend, for a few verses later we read "and they understood none of these things, and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said." It is possible that their blindness was caused by holding fast to the idea that the Glory of the Kingdom of God was very close. Even the three disciples Peter, James and John, who were privileged to witness His transfiguration and behold His glory, when His face shone as the sun and His garments became as white as light, still did not comprehend despite Jesus ordering them to say nothing until He was risen from the dead. This lack of understanding was necessary, for it required that at His crucifixion Christ be entirely on His own, and we know that near the end of His ordeal on the Cross even His Heavenly Father withdrew from Him. "And Jesus cried out with a loud voice 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' He alone, had to bear the burden of our sins, and no one could be with Him to provide any moral or spiritual support or comfort. By allowing His Son to suffer

in this way God was demonstrating that despite man's alienation through sin. He was still prepared to offer the way of redemption. Mankind was helpless and hopeless, and only His Creator could remove this stigma and give him a chance of salvation. In this way God was revealing Himself as a loving and merciful Father in a way that mere words could not express. In the offering of His beloved Son He must have suffered anguish, and that, far more deeply than we can comprehend, but in using this method to reconcile the world unto Himself the impact God made has reached down the centuries undimmed in its glory and promise.

There could be a second reason for the forth-coming death of Jesus to be hidden from the disciples. At His arrest they became a disorganised body, fearful for their lives. For we read in Matthew 26 "Then all the disciples left Him and fled." The startling news of His resurrection would electrify them and when they beheld their Master, welded them into a body with new energy and purpose.

It is difficult to put ourselves in their position, for we are privileged to discern the whole picture through the Biblical record. No doubt, if we had been there listening to Christ preach the Gospel of the Kingdom with the lifting of the burden of sin and the prospect of eternal life, we also would anticipate that these great events would take place in the normal life span of the person expounding them. The possibility that the Son of the living God, with all His powers, would submit to a degrading trial, scourging and terrible death would be far from our thoughts.

With this in mind, I think we can understand the disciples projecting their thoughts forward to the Kingdom, especially listening to the words as recorded in Matthew 19 "Verily, I say unto you, that ye who have followed Me in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

During the journey down from Ephraim to Jericho Jesus and the disciples would be joined up with other parties moving towards Jerusalem. It appears that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, must have found their mother in one of these groups. Their father either showed interest in the new Gospel of the Kingdom, or had died, for we find no further mention of him after his sons left him mending their nets when they answered Jesus call, for we read "Straightway, they left their boat and their father and followed Him." Their mother, Mary, was a devout woman, and a follower of the Lord, for we find her at the foot of the Cross with Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joses. As they travelled, her sons would bring her up to date with the latest news and how Jesus had spoken of the disciples sitting on thrones of authority, and this would focus their thoughts on the Kingdom and their position in it. Although the record in Mark reads that they put their request themselves, there is the possibility the disciples may have been rather diffident and connived with their mother to approach Jesus on their behalf. The request from either source would appear rather presumptuous. "Grant that these my two sons may sit on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left hand in Thy Kingdom." It could be that James and John had asked their mother to put the request remembering the rebuke that Jesus had given to Peter a little earlier. The appeal was ill-timed, their Lord would be mentally preparing Himself for the ordeal ahead, but their request was understandable, their desire was to be as close as possible to their Lord in the Kingdom, but their lack of understanding of forth-coming events made the request rather brash and unfeeling, but there was no rebuke in the reply and we note that it was to James and John and not their mother "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" Whilst the two disciples were considering the glory of the Kingdom, Jesus concentration was upon the events that would take place in a few days time, namely His crucifixion, which would redeem man from the condemnation placed upon Adam. This was to be the moment of His glory. By drinking of the cup of suffering and obedience proffered by His Father, remission of sins by the offering of sacrifices would be abolished. By paying the purchase price of His perfect sacrifice redemption would become a fact and no longer would the offer of eternal life be limited to the children of Israel but opened up to all mankind.

John writes, in his first epistle, "Herein was the love of God manifest in us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we love God, but that He loves us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins." The principle of the Atonement is not punishment, but the redemption of sinners. Christ submitted Himself to the will of His Father because He was aware of what was at stake.

Although the answer to the question “Are ye able to drink the cup?” was “We are able” it was an answer made in ignorance of the events that would take place in the near future. It was an answer that they would remember and consider far more deeply after their Lord’s crucifixion and resurrection, when their minds were opened and they would understand the glorious work of salvation wrought by the Lord Almighty through obedience of His beloved Son. The paying of the ransom price of a perfectly sinless and acceptable life, freely given, that removed the condemnation placed on Adam. They would recall His words “I am the Good Shepherd, and the Good Shepherd layeth down His life for the sheep. No one 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.” Only later, in the days when they received the power of the Holy Spirit could they confidently say “we are able”, for they would be filled with the Power of the Spirit and the full understanding of their Lord’s sacrifice and be prepared to lay down their lives in the service of their Lord. “My cup” said Jesus, “indeed ye shall drink.”

Of the two, James we know suffered death by the sword. Acts 12:1 “Now about this time Herod put forth his hand to afflict certain of the church, and killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.” He was one of many who suffered for their belief. There appears to be no record as to whether John suffered a violent death or not.

When the ten heard of James’s and John’s request they were filled with indignation concerning the two brethren. An understandable reaction for all wished to be close to their Lord, but they appear to have forgotten the parable of the labourers in the vineyard. Whether one laboured throughout the heat of the day or only for the last hour, in the cool of the evening, the payment was the same. Eternal life and a place in the Kingdom, the gift of God, and God is the arbiter of those who will receive it. A place in the Kingdom is the essential reward. There is no graduation of qualification. But the Kingdom, the Almighty God can allot positions to those whom He wishes. We have the parable of the Talents and the reward of the diligent servant, “Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.” As Jesus told the two disciples “to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but it is for them it has been prepared of My Father.”

On this occasion Jesus spoke to the twelve of the true nature of discipleship. His words clearly indicate that a desire for greatness was not a desirable trait in those seeking a place in the Kingdom. Verse 28 reads: “Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give His life as a ransom for many.” Jesus emphasised on a number of occasions that His disciples must learn a deep and constant humility, a humility that derives from our utter dependence on the love of God and the sacrifice which cleanses us from sin. He said “The disciple is not above his Master nor the servant above his Lord” and on another occasion “I am among you as one that serveth.” “A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another even as I have loved you” “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” “For no longer do I call you servants, for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth, but I have called you friends for all things that I heard from My Father, I have made known to you.”

The time was short, Jerusalem drawing nearer each day, Jesus, despite the trials that He was to undergo, did not waver, and we are reminded of His words recorded in Luke: “No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.” We usually consider His steadfast progress toward Calvary as starting with His ministry, but I think we can go back even further, to when as a twelve year old He said to His mother and Joseph “Whist ye not that I must be about My Father’s business?

At this early age He would not necessarily understand fully what His Father required of Him, but He was already aware that He held a unique relationship with the Almighty. His single-mindedness in obeying His Father’s will is an example to us all. His sacrifice could be of no benefit of itself to God for its only value is in the response it evokes in us.

Brother Jeff Hadley. (June 1987)

ABRAHAM'S FAITH AND ISRAEL'S HOPE

Is it a Dream or a Reality?

Not being aware that such an interview with the chief Rabbi was being shown on T.V. I was only able to witness a short part of it toward the end but enough to convince me that he was more concerned with the present state of the Jewish people than with the promises God made to Abraham and was more a diplomatic ambassador in the political world of nations, endeavouring to bring about in this way the things they desired, especially peace and prosperity in Israel. He said this was a "dream." A "dream" I suppose that he restricts to Israel only, and rules out the belief in a Messiah who has already come as a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy; Romans 15:8-9. And though Isaiah 49:3 refers to Jesus as Israel, it means here Prince, for He was the Prince of Peace and Heir Apparent to God He was a Prince, but will be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. However, I shall direct you to this chapter later on in my remarks, but suffice it to say that Israel after the flesh have been ensnared by the idols and Harlot doctrines of the nations by forgetting the words of the true prophets God sent unto their fathers as confirmed in Ezekiel 13 where God speaks of "the false prophets that prophesy out of their own hearts and follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! Ye say "The Lord saith it; albeit I have not spoken saith the Lord, O Israel thy prophets are like the foxes in the desert."

Paul reminds us of these in his epistle to the Corinthians 2 Corinthians 11 they appear outwardly as ministers of righteousness until the light of the Spirit Word reveals them as ministers of Satan. Israel's downfall was their failure to see a sacrificial Messiah and disbelief that he had come and spoken unto them as the Prophet of the Highest; their rejection of Him brought about their own destruction and the dispersion of the unbelieving survivors into all nations where they have to a great extent preserved and maintained their identity after the flesh but not after the Spirit. In his epistle to the Romans Paul gives the true and plain assessment of the Jewish position then and now, he both shows the advantage they had by birth and also the difference between the seed of Abraham by descent and through faith. As Paul brings us to his 9th chapter he reminds us of the advantage they had, but that being descendants of Abraham did not make them the children of promise as was Isaac "for in Isaac shall thy seed be called that is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God but the children of promise are counted for the seed." Even John the Baptist confirmed this when he addressed his contemporaries, "Think not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our fathers, for God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham." Jesus informed Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again he cannot enter the Kingdom of God." One has to be both born of the Spirit and become Spirit nature to fulfil those words, and Paul reminds us of this in Romans 8 vs. 22-25.

If only the chief Rabbi as well as many more Jews, read more of the words of Paul whose knowledge of the Law could not be questioned, neither his zeal, they would find as the light of interpretation shone through to them that "The Hope of Israel" for which Paul was bound with a chain of iron was no dream, as he declared to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 1:20) "For all the promises of God in Him (Jesus Christ) are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God..."

I think we are quite safe in saying that the present State of Israel both in the land of Palestine and among the nations is exactly as Paul assessed it in Galatians 4:21, a state of being either still under the Law of Moses by consent, or of being in Christ and Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. Paul says, "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman and the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from Mount Sinai in Arabia which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar, and answereth (or is in the same rank) with Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it written, "Rejoice thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." In other words, and contrary to what some people believe Paul puts Jew and Arab after the flesh, in the same category and both yet capable

of becoming Abraham's seed of promise through faith which is in Christ Jesus. The exhortation of Paul is, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free..." And how could we have this freedom better explained than in his Epistle to the Romans, especially chapters 5,6,7, & 8. Of Jesus John says, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right or privilege to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

John and Paul are both in harmony with David and the other Prophets, and bearing in mind Jerusalem which is above or in the heavenlies. Psalm 87 comes into focus and we are forced to the conclusion that the city where God has declared to place His Name consists of more than physical building materials. It is the city Abraham looked for whose builder and maker is God, a city which hath foundations, and we are all aware of what a vast subject can be made of this, with Jesus Christ as the chief corner-stone; Ephesians 2:15-22. The Psalmist declares (87 v. 3) "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the Highest Himself shall establish her. The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there." Ezekiel concludes his prophecy by naming the city from the day of her establishment of the highest, "Yahweh Shammah" - The Lord is there." David again speaks of a special seed in Psalm 22 vs. 30 & 31, "A Seed shall serve Him; It shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this."

We are assured that God is preparing a people for His Name and that His Name will be the centre of worship in the Holy Hill of Zion when Jerusalem is made a glory and a praise by reason of a nation that shall be born in a day. "Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in a day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travaileth, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth (or beget), and not cause to bring forth? saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and reverences my word; - Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble, or reverence His word; your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for My Name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed." (Isaiah 66).

This to me seems to convey a significance of our experiences in this modern day, perhaps it is therefore for that reason and our encouragement. Be that as it may, it is respect for God's word and not man's, that sometimes causes opposition and hate, but Jesus said we must get our priorities right for He had come in His Father's Name, and that Name was in Him as the Word made flesh, "Emmanuel." In like manner Israel in the wilderness journey accompanied by the Angel, were exhorted by the Lord God, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for My Name is in Him." (Exodus 23:20 & 21). Here is a great lesson to be learned. Any angel of the Lord sent by Him is authorised to speak or do that for which he has been sent in His Name, and could not go beyond that authorisation. See Isaiah 63:9-12, Ephesians 4:30, Deuteronomy 18:18 and 19. The Prophet like unto Moses was indeed raised up from among Moses' brethren, not from the seed of the serpent who were continually opposing his teaching (John 8:26). Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; (Hebrews 3:5). Those things concerned the Greater Prophet who was a Son though He took upon Him the form of a servant and humbled Himself that He might do the will of Him that sent Him, and as He said to those who boasted in themselves as the fleshly seed of Abraham and never in bondage, this was untrue. "And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36). "Therefore Christ is a Son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. Wherefore (as the Holy Spirit saith, today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation in the wilderness"). On the Mount of Transfiguration Peter made certain suggestions that did not include the lost sheep of the house of Israel nor the other sheep that were not of that fold, "but while he yet spake - behold a voice out of the overshadowing cloud, which said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." It is not for man to decide what is good where his eternal well-being is concerned. This reminds me of something our Brother Taylor said recently of some who profess they are on the road to the Kingdom of God but in the course of the journey they find a desirable cafe and decide it is good to remain there and so they fail to finish the course.

'But He hath shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.' Micah 6:8 God has sent His Son to show us what is right and good, therefore He said, "Hear Him." Paul exhorts us, "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh from heaven." We must also realise that the Father's Name is in Him but that we are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, etc. - but ye are come unto Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. The journey to our promised rest does not end there. Micah says we are to humble ourselves to walk with God and this means continual motion, continual seeking for guidance through prayer and allowing the entrance of His word to give light. Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world, he that believeth on me shall not walk in darkness." No, we are not come unto the mount of blackness and darkness, but to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, to the general assembly whose names are written in heaven, to Jesus the Light of the world - He who by the spirit of God shall bring forth judgement to the Gentiles (Not by the sound of a trumpet). He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall He not break or dimly burning flax shall He not quench: He shall bring forth judgement unto truth. Isaiah 42. This was the method of the Great Teacher, a gentle persuasiveness, much in parabolic form, to give men time to consider and allow things of the spirit to sink into the heart, and not quench the little feeble light that has already begun to dimly burn. "Never man spake like this man." "To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." We as stones in the spiritual house have to be constantly polished through the chastisement which is the experience of the sons of God, and though we are considered as living, or lively stones, we are the light in various colours but with the same beauty and brilliance which the light of the knowledge of the glory of God has shown to us in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not us. 2 Corinthians 4:6. It is in this way that we can appreciate Paul's words in Ephesians 2:19-22, "Fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God - built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus being the chief cornerstone, fitly framed together - growing unto an holy temple in the Lord, for an habitation of God through the Spirit." The development of character upon these principles will fit us for worthiness to obtain participation with Christ in His reign upon earth and bring in the New Heavens and the New Earth wherein the Holy City the New Jerusalem as a Bride adorned for her husband, and prepared of God, will dwell with Him and He with her.

Nowhere in Biblical History do we find that God built anything in the material sense, The Tabernacle in the wilderness was constructed by man under Moses, but God was the architect and His command to Moses was, "See that thou make it after the pattern shewn to thee in the Mount." The same applies to the Temple which was of more solid construction and had to remain stationary unlike the Tabernacle, but even the Temple was of Devine architecture with most of the materials of stone and wood prepared in advance yet in every way it was fitly framed together. In like manner Jesus by whom and on account of whom the previous patterns were decided and in whom God dwelt by His Spirit and Word was the true Temple, "for in Him dwelt all the fullness of the God-head bodily" so that He could say of His body, "I will (or perhaps it should read, you will) destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up." It is obvious that this is the work of God in Christ, the crucifixion and resurrection involving the three days, in the spiritual construction of the Temple of God by growing in grace and unto the fullness of the stature of Christ. Ephesians 4:15. Ephesians 2:21. In every way we look at it there is preparation; Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God - a better country, that is an heavenly, and so God hath prepared for them a city. After the passing away of the first heaven and earth, John saw a new heaven and a new earth, a new order of things for the establishment of the holy city the new Jerusalem prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. All these things were shown to John in signs and symbols and were not material realities, so that vast subject can be made of Revelations chapter 21 which will take too long at this stage, but it is a subject that will harmonise with the scriptures and the Epistles, and of which I have only touched on the fringe. In the garden of Eden God provided Adam with the bride from his side but it never advanced to the spiritual - so God in providing a new man will have produced a bride for him and when fully prepared will be presented for habitation in the true paradise of God wherein dwelleth righteousness. The true seed of Abraham therefore may truly say, of God, "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting." Let us then hear His voice through Isaiah 51:1-6 and Isaiah 52:1-8. Does not this harmonise with Revelation

21 and especially Revelation 3:12? For us who profess to be the seed of the promise by the freewoman, the words of Jesus from Revelation 3:12 are a fitting conclusion, “Hold fast that which thou hast (v.8 explains) that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.” “He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Bro. Phil Parry.

A FEW THOUGHTS ON PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introductory reading: 1 Kings 8:22-55.

Over 30 years ago, at a Bible Class I recall a talk on prayer and if my memory serves me correctly it was given by our late brother Rupert Chamberlain. I don't remember anything of what was said that night but I well remember my own feelings and the feelings of others who expressed their thoughts afterwards. It was so well received by everyone and felt to be so helpful that it was decided there and then that we should have more talks on prayer.

I was a young man then, especially young in the faith and I was listening to one of the respected Elders of the ecclesia talking upon a subject very close to his heart. If there have been any talks on prayer since then I have missed them and it has been my loss. I mention this because I believe it was partly due to my request to the Bible Class Program Committee that the subject of prayer should be included in this years program and when I agreed to give this talk, it was not because I felt I was the right person for the job but because I felt responsible for this subject being in the program at all.

But prayer is a subject of the heart and it is a big subject because it covers man's approach to God in so many different ways, for so many different reasons and on so many varied occasions. There is no way in which one could adequately deal with the subject in one evening.

The word ‘pray’ means ‘to ask’ or “please” and though not used any more in this sense in our modern language we are all familiar with this meaning in the scriptures. But prayer has come to mean much more than just asking and in the sense we shall use it here it is our approach to our Creator in our worship of Him, our reverence for Him, our thanking Him as well as our asking of Him.

So let's see some of the ways in which a few people in the Old Testament times approached God. Adam and Abraham and others talked directly with God, or with an angel as God's representative but there were other occasions when it was necessary to approach God through the priest or High Priest who would intercede for them. Then there were the sacrifices, the casting of lots, Urim and Thummim, vows, oaths and fastings all involving prayer. In fact, no part of worship can be left out of our consideration of prayer.

There are very many prayers recorded in the Old Testament for nearly all the Psalms are prayers, and besides these there are about 90 other prayers recorded. One of the most marvellous things about these prayers is that they are all expressed by man and women of great faith. They contain no errors, no false nor even doubtful or questionable ideas and in all these prayers we find nothing but truth. We find God-fearing men and women pouring out their hearts, expressing the very highest thoughts of which the human mind is capable. We see them reflecting the character of their great Creator, accepting His covenants, acknowledging His righteousness, proclaiming His love and mercy and grace, while, at the same time, realising their own unworthiness, understanding their obligations and, in humility, appreciating their great privileges. As a man thinketh, so is he and in considering prayer we are treading sacred ground where thoughts of the heart meet with God and it is a great honour to come so close as to share such intimacies, fears, hopes and joys.

The prayer that was read by way of introduction is the climax of the Old Testament. God had chosen the site on which the temple was to be built. The threshing floor of Ornan (1 Chronicles 21:18) "Then the angel of the Lord commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up and set up an alter unto the Lord in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." And in chapter 22 v. 1 "Then David said, This is the house of the Lord God and this is the alter of burnt-offering for Israel." Then in verse 19 David charges Solomon, his son, to build the house of God "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God: arise therefore and build ye the sanctuary of the Lord God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and the holy vessels of God, into the house that is to be built to the name of the Lord." 1 Kings 8 is the prayer of dedication of that temple - the sanctuary of the Lord God. It is the supreme prayer of the Old Testament, even as the 17th chapter of John's Gospel is the supreme prayer of the New, and it is that on which the Law of Moses centres, and indeed the whole of the Old Covenant before being replaced by the New Covenant.

It is a prayer which contains all the elements of worship, Praise, thanksgiving, reverence and supplication, covenants and vows. What may seem remarkable is the submissiveness of Solomon; his dependence and humility, for the kings of his time were despots who ruled with great authority and severity and while Solomon was fast becoming the greatest king of the greatest nation in the world his heart showed a right understanding of his relationship with his Maker.

If we are to fully appreciate these prayers it is necessary that we too, have a right understanding of our relationship with God, for only then can we know the depths and the riches of His love, and this, in turn, greatly affects our own attitude in prayer as well as enriching our estimation of the prayers we are considering.

God, over the years, made several covenants with man and in each it is God who formulates the covenant and man has no part in this but to accept whatever God decrees. These covenants show His righteousness, love and mercy and man has to acknowledge his proper standing in the eyes of his Creator.

The first prayer we will look at is in Genesis 24. Abraham's eldest servant ruled over all his house and in an earlier chapter we are told that Abraham's chief steward was Eliezer. It would seem likely that they were one and the same, so let's call him Eliezer here. Now this servant was the eldest of many. We would call him a slave today for he was owned by Abraham and he accepted this as his position. His duty was to do his master's bidding. Eliezer was also a God-fearing man.

Well, Abraham was old and he sent Eliezer on a long journey - perhaps some 600 or 700 miles - to find a bride for his son Isaac. A journey lasting about 3 weeks or so. At the end of his journey, Eliezer seeks guidance in prayer, - verse 12, "And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham." Notice how Eliezer asks for nothing on his own account, nor does he presume to address God as his God, but Abraham's. He makes himself of no account. Verse 14, "And let it come to pass that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink, and she shall say, Drink; and I will give thy camels drink also, let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac, and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master."

Here we see Eliezer's attitude as an example to us all as a right attitude for all God's servants and is the one shown in all the Old Testament prayers. And how quickly God answered Eliezer's prayer! Before he had done speaking in his heart there was Rebekah before him! He stood in wonderment for a few moments while the realisation of the events that had happened came to him. When he had finished telling Rebekah his mission, and learning that there was room to lodge in, he again bowed his head in thanksgiving and worshipped God. Verse 27, "And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth; I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my masters brethren." That was enough for Eliezer, for he wished for nothing more than to complete his mission. But let's just complete the next part of this delightful story - not that I wish to say much more about it but just for its own sake. Rebekah goes into the house to tell her family this remarkable news while Eliezer remains waiting outside. But not for long and the next words he hears have a familiar ring to them - "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without? For I have prepared the house."

This surely, was not the usual form of addressing a slave and we can only suppose that there was something about this man Eliezer which made it appropriate.

Next we will turn to Genesis 3. Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit. They knew they were naked and they hid from God. Now, prayer is our approach to God, but that's not what Adam and Eve wanted to do just now for they were fearful of Him and wanted nothing more than to get away from Him for they knew that their lives were in danger. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" and that's what they had done. It was necessary for God to show the initiative to bring them back to Him. So He called them until they realised it was no use hiding away any more. They had to finally approach Him and talk with Him. They were humble, full of remorse and ashamed. They wanted to put things right but there was no prayer they could offer that would put things right and they were told that God would put things right - in His way and in His good time. The coverings they had made for themselves would not do and they watched while a lamb was slain and the skin made into aprons for each to wear. We don't know how they felt in seeing the animal slain, but for most people it is unpleasant and to some a distressing experience, especially the first time. And to feel responsible for the slaying would only add to their sadness. But even more than just this, for they had to wear those skins day by day, always reminding them of their guilt; it had been all their fault. It was explained to them that one day God would provide a lamb which would take away all sin. However, until then, regular sacrifices had to be made.

Adam and Eve had no alternative but to accept a new relationship with their Creator, and God formulated a new covenant for them to live by. There was no going back to the way things were; the Cherubim, each with a flaming sword would have destroyed them had they tried to go back to Eden. We may be quite sure Adam and Eve offered up a prayer of thanksgiving that their lives were spared.

Adam and Eve were now sinners and had sold themselves and were slaves to sin. All future generations would now be born into that slavery, and even as slaves have no rights so man has no rights, but he must serve a master. However, slaves can be bought and sold, and God so loved the world that he set about buying. It was not the will of God that man should be slaves to sin and death. So now the covering of skins gave provisional re-instatement of Devine favour, and in the 4,000 years from Adam to Christ sacrifices reminded the God-fearing of their position of helplessness and hopelessness apart from the love, mercy and grace of God, and like Eliezer, they sought to do only the will of Him who sent them on life's journey.

Prayer is for our benefit. It is because of God's love for His children that He asks us to pray to Him, and indeed He demands it and puts us in situations which leave us no alternative. He knows our needs and He tries our hearts - time and again in order to build our trust in Him and develop our characters.

Now let's turn to Exodus 14. Israel, after leaving Egypt, was now three days journey into the wilderness. The Egyptian army came marching after them in order to recapture them and take them back again to slavery. The children of Israel had travelled down a valley to the sea shore. There were mountains on either side and they were in trouble. They had a big problem. Mountains to the right, mountains to the left, the enemy behind and the sea in front! What were they to do? They couldn't fight, for they had no weapons, and they couldn't flee, for there was no where to go. But their problem was their opportunity - their opportunity to show their trust in God, and they cried unto the Lord. Sadly, it was not a cry for help but a cry of complaint for they failed to show any faith in God, and in verse 11 we read, "They said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt with us, to carry us out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in this wilderness."

Moses, ever patient, pleads with them to put their trust in God. "The Lord will fight for you." But the lesson of appealing to God had yet to be learnt. Time and again the children of Israel failed to approach God in the right way and in the right frame of mind. Though they had been slaves in Egypt and had been severely treated and any complaint brought only harsher treatment and greater burdens, they would rather live for the moment in Egypt than put their trust in God. Where was their thankfulness and their appreciation of all that the Lord had done and was now doing for them? How many had hearts acceptable to God? Sadly, very few.

For a contrast we will turn next to 2 Chronicles 20. “It came to pass after this also, that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them other beside the Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. Then there came some that told Jehoshaphat, saying, There cometh a great multitude against thee from beyond the sea on this side Syria; and, behold, they be in Hazazon-tamar, which is Engedi. And Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. And Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord. And Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the Lord, before the new court, and said, O Lord God of our fathers, art thou not God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever? And they dwelt therein, and have built thee a sanctuary therein for thy name, saying, If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgement, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, (for thy name is in this house), and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help. And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee. And all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives and their children.”

How similar was their situation to that of Israel in the wilderness when they had mountains to the right, mountains to the left, the enemy behind and the sea in front! And here again, the people were in dire straits. And again, their problem was their opportunity to show faith. And they did. Jehoshaphat feared and set himself to seek the Lord and proclaimed a fast, and Judah gathered themselves together to ask help of the Lord. They put their hearts right with God. This is what it is all about. All things work for the good of those that love God. Jehoshaphat, in his prayer recalls Solomon’s prayer of dedication and they link themselves with the great purpose of God. They cried unto the Lord God in their affliction but this time to seek help. Verse 12 “for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon Thee, and all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives and their children.” It was no use looking around to see what they could do for themselves. They had to look up, and in order to look up one has to stand still. Verse 15 “And he (Jahaziel, a Levite in the congregation) said. Hearken ye, all Judah and all ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, thus saith the Lord unto you. Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God’s... verse 17 Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you. O Judah and Jerusalem; fear not, nor be dismayed; tomorrow go ye out against them, for the Lord will be with you.” Notice verse 18...

“And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord, worshipping the Lord and the Levites stood up to praise the Lord” and all this is before the battle had begun! Next morning they rose early and went into the wilderness of Tekoa where their enemies were encamped, and Jehoshaphat stood encouraging the people saying “Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets, so shall ye prosper.”

Verse 21 “And when he had consulted the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord and that they should praise the beauty of holiness as they went out before the army and say, “Praise the Lord; for His mercy endureth for ever.” Yes! the singers went out first - before the army! And all the people praised God, even as the enemy they were going out to meet were preparing for battle. What faith! What trust in God! Verse 22 “And as they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir ...and they were smitten ...and none escaped.” O what joy and thankfulness those people experienced that day. Their salvation was reward enough but on top of all this they had the spoil of their enemies which took them three days to collect, it was so much. And finally, they came back to Jerusalem. Verses 27 & 28 “Then they returned every man of Judah and Jerusalem and Jehoshaphat in the forefront of them to go again to Jerusalem with joy, for the Lord had made them to rejoice over their enemies. And they came to Jerusalem with psalteries and harps and trumpets unto the house of the Lord.” No doubt to offer thanksgiving in the house of God before returning to their homes.

We have looked at right and wrong attitudes of the heart in prayer, now let's turn to the subject of casting of lots and the Urim and Thummim. This casting of lots was used very extensively in the Old Testament and provision was made for it in the Law of Moses. It was a very deliberate way of seeking a decision from God. It was used on the Day of Atonement for deciding which of the two goats should be slain and which set free in the wilderness. It was used in the allocation of territory when the children of Israel entered the Promised Land. It was used to determine guilty people, and it was used in the allocation of Temple duties. The Urim and the Thummim appeared to be a method of casting of lots and used on occasions to determine guilty persons but also elsewhere used to seek council of the Lord.

In all cases it would appear to be the prerogative of the priests to cast lots. The first occurrence is in Leviticus 16:8. This is on the Day of Atonement and Aaron had to cast lots over the two goats "one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scape-goat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to make an atonement with him and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness."

It may seem a very simple matter but the choice of which goat should live and which should die was made by God and not by man, and there can be little doubt that before the lots were cast a prayer was offered to God, a prayer for guidance, of confession and of thankfulness, though no form of words is recorded.

Joshua. Jericho had fallen to the Israelites. The first city to fall to them as they entered the Promised Land under Joshua. Ai was next, but something went wrong. They were defeated and Joshua was perplexed. Verse 6, "And Joshua rent his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads." Then to verse 10 "And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou upon thy face? Israel hath sinned and they have also transgressed my covenant which I commanded them; for they have taken of the accursed thing and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and have put it among their own stuff. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies because they were accursed. Neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you." It may be noted that God could so easily have told Joshua that it was Achan who had stolen the clothing and the silver and the gold from Jericho and hidden it in his tent, but God, in His wisdom uses the casting of lots before all the people and this way all the people of Israel were involved. Indeed, God said that Israel had sinned - not just one man or one family. It was necessary for the people to consider themselves as one, so that whatever one person does affects others also. God declared that He would not stay in their midst if there were any amongst them who would not obey His commands. Verse 14 "In the morning therefore ye shall be brought according to your tribes, and it shall be that the tribe which the Lord taketh shall come according to the families thereof. And the family which the Lord shall take shall come by households. And the household which the Lord shall take shall come man by man." And so it was. The lots were cast before the Lord and in due course Achan was taken and he and all that he had was destroyed. As prayer is man's approach to God and all the nation were in prayer at this time, anxious to know why they had been defeated at Ai, who had sinned and what had been done to offend God that He should forsake them. And God was all the while drawing the people closer to Him, so that He should be involved in all they did.

When Joshua allocated the territory to each of the tribes of Israel it is recorded in Joshua chapter 18 that he "cast lots in Shiloh before the Lord." We do not know just what form the casting of lots took and we get no further help in this direction from 1 Chronicles where we read of the allocation of the Temple duties. It seems possible that the Urim and Thummim were used for the casting of lots but there can be no certainty upon this for there is a considerable amount of conjecture surrounding the Urim and Thummim, so I feel a few minutes spent looking at this subject may be well spent here. Let's see first of all what we know for certain about the Urim and Thummim and for this we will turn to Exodus 28 where we find that they consisted of two plates carried in the Breast Plate of the high priest. Verse 30 "And thou shall put in the breast plate of judgement the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be upon Aaron's heart when he goeth in before the Lord. And Aaron shall bear the judgement of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually." So we see that these two plates, carried in the breast plate were in some way connected with the judgement of the people. In the margin of your bible you may see that the meaning of Urim and Thummim is 'lights and perfections' but this is by no means the only interpretation, for others are 'doctrine and judgement,' 'declaration and truth', etc., none of which make much difference to our understanding of the matter.

In Numbers 27 we see God directing Joshua and the high priest Eleazer in the use of the Urim and Thummim, although only the Urim is mentioned. Verse 18, “And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hands upon him, and set him before Eleazer the priest, and before all the congregation, and give him a charge in his sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazer the priest (verse 21) who shall ask counsel for him after the judgement of Urim before the Lord. At his word they shall go out, and at his word shall they come in, both he and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.” As this was at the end of Moses life and the people were preparing to go into the Promised Land, it would seem that this going out and coming in would refer to battle. They had the land to conquer and now provision was being made for Joshua to enquire of the Lord, through the priest, as to when he should lead the people out to battle and when he should bring them in again.

King Saul used Urim and Thummim as we read in 1 Samuel 14:38 “And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people, and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day, for as the Lord liveth which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die. But there was not a man among all the people that answered him. Then said he unto Israel, Be ye on one side and I and Jonathan on the other side. And the people said unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee.... verse 41 Therefore Saul said unto the Lord God of Israel, give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken. And Saul said. Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken.” In the Authorised Version of the bible there is no mention of Urim and Thummim, but the Revised Standard Version reads at verse 41, “Therefore Saul said, O Lord God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this guilt be in me or in Jonathan my son, O Lord God of Israel, give Urim; But if this guilt is in thy people Israel, give Thummim, And Jonathan and Saul were taken...” verse 42, “then Saul said, Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan, and Jonathan was taken.” It would seem from this that the use of Urim and Thummim was the usual form for casting of lots.

One more thing to mention here and it is that God sometimes did not answer, as in 1 Samuel 28. By this time Saul had lost his faith and had been rejected by God.

This is now close to the end of Saul’s life. The Philistines had gathered a particularly large army and Saul was afraid. Verse 5, “And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines he was afraid and his heart greatly trembled. And when Saul enquired of the Lord the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.” So how could this casting of lots work if it could give a “no answer”? Well, the bible doesn’t tell us any more than we have considered so far, so now we must go outside of the scriptures to other sources to see if we can find out anything more, and here we learn that the priest, after making the appropriate request in prayer, would take out the two plates from his breast plate and throw them to the floor. If this is the case then the casting of lots was not unlike the tossing of a coin we would use today to see if it would show heads or tails. However, there is one most important difference in that there were two plates thrown down, not one. Let’s suppose that each of these two plates had the word ‘Urim’ written on one side and the word ‘Thummim’ written on the other side, then, when thrown to the floor they could each show ‘Urim’, or they could each show ‘Thummim’ or they could show differently, the one showing ‘Urim’ and the other ‘Thummim’ and this last case could be the ‘no answer’. With only one plate the people could receive an answer not in accord with God’s will, as may have been the case with the Apostles, for in the first chapter of Acts we find the eleven disciples deciding in their own wisdom, that either Barsabas or Matthias should replace Judas Iscariot in order to make up their number to twelve. And they prayed “Lord, which knoweth the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen...” and the lot fell on Matthias. But I wonder... did they give God the opportunity of saying neither Barsabas, nor Matthias, by giving a ‘no answer’? However, I believe it was the Apostle Paul, the one born out of due time, as he says of himself, that replaced Judas Iscariot.

Russell Gregory.

“But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.”