

The Nazarene Fellowship Circular Letter No. 259

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Editorial

Dear Friends, Sisters and Brothers,

In the first chapters of the Bible we have the account of the creation of man.

God wished to test Adam and Eve's characters by giving them a law and free-will to choose to obey or not. By exercising their choice they could build characters well pleasing to God if they did well, otherwise they would be displeasing to God through selfishness. The first law was simple enough and they could have kept it; and while God asked for perfect obedience they in their weakness failed to obey' even though they had been warned that they would die in the day they ate of the forbidden tree. However God, in His mercy and by His grace, provided a way out for them by the shedding of the life-blood of an animal rather than seeing them die for their transgression, and so Adam and Eve were allowed to continue their lives under different circumstances.

In the course of time they had children and from the start we see how different they were. After Cain murdered Able, Seth and other children were born to Adam and Eve. It seems Cain's family chose to live a nomadic life and became wanderers in the earth while Seth's family appears to have stayed together perhaps as farmers.

We are not told anything of the history of the next one thousand six hundred years but the population grew and spread over a large part of what we now call the Middle East; and then we read in Genesis chapter 6 that "It came to pass when men began to multiply on the face of the earth and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose." It is believed by many that these sons of God refer to the descendants of Seth - those who kept the commandments of God, while the daughters of men are thought to be the descendants of Cain who had forsaken God.

As we can see from the Bible story and world history, most people neglect God's way and chose instead to do their own thing which so easily leads to more and more selfishness and wrong doing. So by the time of Noah we find (in Genesis chapter 6) that, "The Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man" and "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."

What a disappointment that the people did not see that God's way of good moral conduct was by far the best way possible, so full of loving kindness and truth; but they could not trust one another and they did not trust God either and selfishness prevailed.

We do not know how many millions of people were on the earth after one thousand six hundred years but only Noah was found faithful! Just one man who, in spite of all those around him, still put God first in his life and "Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD" for he "was a just man and perfect in his generations, and walked with God." But "the earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth."

God decided to make an end of all people and start afresh with Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives. Just eight people and the rest God destroyed in the flood.

The Apostle Peter writes of this in 2 Peter 2:5, God "spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly."

After the flood God said to those eight people, just as had said to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" – Genesis 9:1.

Next we move on several hundred years to Sodom and Gomorrah. In Genesis 14:12 & 13, we find that "Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly." And for their wickedness God said He would destroy those two towns. We can read the story in Genesis 14 onwards and then, in Genesis 19:24 & 25, we see that "the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground." But the night before this destruction God had sent two angels to Sodom and early next morning they took Lot, his wife and their two daughters by the hand and led them out of the town and told them to flee to the mountains and so, in God's mercy, wanted to save them from destruction.

Now let us move on another few hundred years to when the Children of Israel were living in captivity in Egypt and to free them from captivity God sent the ten plagues on the Egyptians until Pharaoh was forced to give them their freedom; about three months after leaving Egypt and while on their way to the Promised Land they were given a code of conduct which they solemnly promised to keep and obey. This was just the first portion of what became known as the Law of Moses. For promising to obey Him God made a covenant with them and they became known as the people of God. Yet only a few weeks after confidently making their promise to obey they failed by worshipping an idol! And so God again institutes sacrifices for sin for His chosen people.

Throughout their history the Israelites as a nation in covenant relationship with God repeatedly changed their allegiance between worshipping God and worshipping idols. For hundreds of years God patiently pleaded with them through the prophets to return to Him and frequently they, or some of them at least, returned to Him, but eventually matters became so bad that God forsook them as His people because there was no more He could do to turn their hearts to Him again. He had described them as "a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me: they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiffhearted." (Ezekiel 2:3 & 4). And so in Malachi chapter 4, the last book and the last chapter of the Old Testament we read "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."

But there was something else which God had in mind. He had forsaken the Israelites for being "stiff-necked" and "rebellious", so He turned to the Gentiles and offered to bring all who would into Covenant Relationship with Him through Jesus.

That was two thousand years ago. Jesus preached the gospel of salvation to the Jews and the night before He was crucified, at the Last Supper, His disciples were with Him when "He took the cup, and gave

thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament (i.e. New Covenant), which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matthew 26:27 & 28). The next morning at the time Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the temple was miraculously rent from top to bottom showing to the Jews that the Old Covenant was ended. They were no longer the people of God. The New Covenant was now in force and anyone coming to God had, from this time on, to become disciples of Jesus through baptism into His death. But this New Covenant was not only for the Jews but for the entire world – to as many as will come to God through Jesus and accept Him as their Saviour.

Sadly, the history of the Christian churches has been as dismal as the history of the Jewish nation. The teachings of the New Covenant have been ignored or taken away; new ideas have been added and much has been wrested until it is hard to recognise the truth without care and prayer.

The reason is that human nature hasn't changed. People the world over choose greed, authority over others wherever they have the chance. They wish to lead for their own grandeur and credit. They boast of their achievements and collect followers and persuade them that they know how to worship God the right way when all it is is their own way. The churches all have a share of modern day Scribes, Sadducees and Pharisees.

The Jews have not been God's people for two thousand years but they are nonetheless God's witnesses. Israel is back on the map and the Jews are trying to hold on to it as their Promised Land and they intend to stay there. Most of what was foretold of the land of Israel and its people has happened, there is yet a little more to happen. Jesus will one day rule from Jerusalem but not just yet. The judgments of God on the nations of the world are to come before then.

So this is our position today. The world is in deep trouble. There is yet to be the “distress of nations with perplexity” or in modern language we would express it as “the distress of nations with no way out” indicating that the heads of state are at their wit's end; at a loss how to proceed! The entire world is in distress and Israel is in the ‘front line.’

Here is what Jesus said “And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” (Luke 21:25-26).

With love in Jesus' Name, Brother Russell Gregory

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Note from Sister Audrey Bundy:

We were very pleased to receive a short note from our Sister Audrey Bundy. I believe she is now the oldest sister in the Nazarene Fellowship and she is almost completely blind and unable to read what she writes, so it was especially pleasing to hear from her; she asks to be remembered to all the Fellowship and sends her love to all.

ABRAM THE PATRIARCH

Part One

The Bible offers two reasons for Abram's departure from his home city of Ur. The first that Terah, his father, had decided to move out and travel to Canaan. The other one, the direct bidding of God. "Get thee out of thy country." (Genesis 12:1).

These points are not necessarily contradictory - it could be that his father had made the decision first and Abram, under Divine guidance agreed to accompany him. How God's bidding reached Abram, whether by vision or word of mouth is not recorded.

We do not know what prompted Terah to move from Ur, a city of some consequence with a well established pattern of life, and set out on a journey of over 600 miles. It must have been quite an upheaval moving all the family, their belongings, servants and herds.

How it was that Abram worshipped Jehovah, since we know from Joshua 24:2 that Terah worshipped other gods, is not explained. It could be that this influence came from his mother's side and this could also be the reason that the houses of Haran and Nahor also worshipped Jehovah. We have no knowledge of Abram's position in the city but his name means 'Father of the High Place,' so it may be that he held a high position in the temple, possibly a priest, and it could be here that the Lord's message came to him.

Leaving Ur, Terah and his family travelled to Haran and lived there until his death. While sojourning here we read that the Lord again appeared to Abram, with an instruction to move, but this time included a number of promises. The first instruction "Get thee out of thy country" had been accomplished by leaving Ur. The second - "And from thy father's house" now followed, so in Haran he left all his kindred except for his nephew, Lot, and moved towards the land of Canaan, as we read in Genesis 12:9, "and Abram went as the Lord had spoken unto him, and Lot went with him."

The seven promises he received in Haran and contained in only two verses, must have astonished him, especially the first - "I will make of thee a great nation," for Sarah, his wife, was barren as is recorded in the previous chapter, and both she and Abram were really getting past the age where an offspring could be expected. Such a promise could only be accepted and believed by one of exceptional spiritual faith.

The second promise, "I will bless thee," was to become obvious over the years through his increase in material wealth, for we read that the Lord gave him flocks and herds, silver and gold, men servants and maid servants, camels and asses. But far out-weighting all these were the Divine blessings as he drew nearer to his God.

The third promise was, "I will make thy name great." His name as Father of Israel appears in the generations of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the son of Abraham. A name renown throughout Israel.

Fourth promise: "Thou shalt be a blessing." Through a life of obedience Abram showed an example to us today, and is commended by God as we read in Genesis 18:19, "I have known him, to the end that he may command his children, and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment."

Fifth promise: "I will bless them that bless thee." A promise made evident in the blessing that God applied to those who have dealt kindly with the seed of Abram, the children of Israel - and the promise goes further - to those who share his faith, the spiritual Israel. Even as Paul wrote to the Galatians, "So then they which share Abraham's faith are blessed with him," and again as Christ said to His disciples, "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you he shall not loose his reward."

Sixth promise: "I will curse them that curseth thee." Here the opposite is true as God declared to the Israelites "I will be enemy to thy enemies and an adversary to thy adversaries." We have seen over the centuries how nations that have oppressed the Jews have themselves sunk into obscurity. This promise made

to the natural seed of Abram also holds good for his spiritual seed. Paul, in his letter to Thessalonica wrote, "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that have afflicted you."

Seventh promise: "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Another promise picked up by Paul in his letter to the Galatians, "the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed, so they which be of the faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Further in the same chapter, "that upon the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus that we might receive the promise of the spirit through faith." This promise first had a national application, that to Israel, but was to develop into an all embracing promise, covering all who will listen, that is, redemption through Jesus Christ.

With the move from Haran, Abram's life style underwent a dramatic change. From being a city dweller he now undertook the life of a nomad, moving steadily south towards Canaan, no doubt wondering when the Lord would show him the land of promise. "By faith," we read in Hebrews "he became a sojourner (a traveller) in the land of promise as in a land not his own. His first awareness that this was the land was at Shechem, where Jehovah appeared to him saying "unto thy seed will I give this land." We notice the land being promised to his seed before it was promised to Abram. We can imagine the joy with which Abram received these words. At last he had arrived at his destination, and here he erected an altar and made sacrifice, and it became a focal point for his worship of God.

Now, whether he felt unsettled here because of the Canaanites or whether it was necessary to keep moving to find sustenance for his considerable flocks, we are not informed, but Abram continued on towards the south and soon, because of the scarcity of fodder carried on into Egypt. It would appear that the faith that had given him the strength to leave his home town and travel so far failed him. Sarah, his wife, was obviously a woman of some beauty, and Abram, fearing for his life as her husband decided to say that she was his sister. It is difficult to understand why he undertook this step for God had promised that his seed would inherit the land of Canaan and since he, as yet, had no offspring, surely with a little thought he should have known his own life would be completely protected. This deception only threw Sarah into danger, for she was taken into Pharaoh's house and a bride price paid to Abram, that of Sheep, oxen, men servants and maid servants, she-asses and camels. How Abram's conscience must have pricked him when all these gifts were showered upon him! But the Lord, ever careful for His children, made clear to Pharaoh by plaguing his house, that Sarah was not available. Exactly how it was indicated that Sarai was indeed Abram's wife we are not told, Pharaoh's action shows up in a very good light - "Behold thy wife, take her and go thy way." An extremely magnanimous gesture considering the gifts he had already showered upon Abram, and to round it off gave his men charge to see him safely on his way.

There can be little doubt that Abram learnt a sharp lesson because of this episode, namely, to put his trust in the Lord. Presumably now the famine in the land had ceased for we read Abram returned to the altar he had built in Bethel. Here he called upon the name of the Lord, no doubt admitting his weakness in Egypt and ask forgiveness, and giving thanks for Divine intervention, and renewing his bond with his God.

The time had now arrived to make a break from his nephew, Lot. No doubt the combined families, servants, flocks and herds were becoming too large to control easily in their nomadic existence, and strife was breaking out between the two groups, possibly over pasture and watering. Abram, generous as always, gave Lot the opportunity to select the area he would prefer. Genesis 13:8, "And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray Thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand I will go to the right or if thou depart to the right hand I will go to the left." Lot obviously looking to the main chance chose what appeared in his eyes to be the best of the land. Verse 10, "and Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere... and Lot chose all the plain of Jordan." It was not such a good choice in the long run for we read that the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against the Lord exceedingly and it became clear in a short time he had dispensed with his nomadic ways and become a citizen of that place.

After Lot's departure Abram no doubt enquired of Jehovah what his next move should be. Quickly he received the answer, "Lift up thine eyes and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can number the dust of the earth then shall thy seed be numbered.” For the first time the Lord was being explicit to Abram and it could be that at this time he looked for an early fulfilment of the promise of the land, but the years passed and he possessed none of it. Abram learnt patience and slowly came to realise that the promises pointed to a future time, and a seed comparably more worthy than any offspring he might have.

Following the promise came the instruction, “Arise, walk through the land, in the length and breadth of it, for I give it unto thee.” But from the next few verses we get the impression that he did not undertake any long journeys, for we read he only moved to Mamre - no great distance, and then came news of the plight of Lot, taken captive by the King of Elam. This spurred Abram to travel the length of the promised land and in a brilliant campaign Abram, with only 318 of his servants, pursued the king for over 100 miles and defeated him, freeing the prisoners and recapturing the plunder. This raised the esteem of Abram in the sight of the surrounding peoples, and he could, in a very short time, have become a power in the land. But he was prepared to await God’s time. The land had been promised as God’s gift, and he had not been instructed to go out and conquer it or receive it from any other Lord.

Returning, Abram neared Jerusalem, or Salem as it was then known, and there he was met by the grateful king of Sodom who, in thanks, was prepared to give him all the plunder, provided all prisoners were turned over to him. Abram, very wary of being indebted in any way to the king, declared, “I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread even to a shoelace and that I will not take anything that is thine lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich.” A firm declaration that he wanted nothing to do with Sodom or its idolatry. The only condition made was that his small army should receive due payment.

It was also here that Abram was met by Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God. Abram’s attitude to this king was in marked contrast to that of the king of Sodom. The refusal to benefit from Sodom’s offer was set against his humble submission to Melchizedek and the payment of tithes. Here also Abram partook of a meal prepared by Melchizedek and from him received a blessing - “Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth.” This blessing foreshadowing when redemption through the seed of Abram would come to fruition, is picked up by David in his reference to Christ in the Psalm 110: 1 & 4, “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right” hand... Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec.” Also by the writer to the Hebrews who emphasised the exalted position of the Son of God pointing out that he was a High Priest by virtue of who he is and not because of his ancestry. A Priesthood valid for every age and for every man who seeks justification, and the blessing of Abram through faith in Him, “by so much also hath Jesus become the surety of a better covenant.”

While at Salem the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Possibly over the years Abram had become worried because there was still no sign of an offspring and his faith needed bolstering. As affairs stood at that moment the heir to his property was his steward Eleazar and Abram appealed to the Lord, “Lord, what wilt thou give me seeing I go childless?” Then came the comforting message in vision - “Fear not Abram, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward. This man shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. Look toward the heavens and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them so shall thy seed be. And he believed the lord, and it was counted to him for righteousness.”

The earlier promises had referred to the seed as the dust of the earth for number, on this occasion it is as the stars of the heavens. Here was yet reference, not only to the natural seed, but to the spiritual host, heirs to everlasting life and the Kingdom of God. Paul points this up in his letter to the Romans (9:6), “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, 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 the promise are counted as the seed.”

Despite the promises, still Abram had some doubt and needed a little more re-assurance - “Oh Lord, whereby shall I know?” The Lord’s response was unique. He made a pact, a covenant with his servant, by a sign that made a profound impression upon Abram. He was instructed to prepare a sacrifice of specific animals and birds and lay them out in two lines. When all was prepared Abram watched over them, waiting, driving away any birds of prey which came too near. The time must have been fairly long because as the sun set he fell into a deep sleep and a great horror of great darkness fell upon him. Then the Lord spoke to him

and he now received a quite detailed promise concerning his seed, their sojourn in the land not theirs, their suffering and their deliverance. As for Abram himself he would dwell in peace and die a good old age. At the climax of this promise we read that “a smoking furnace and flaming torch passed between the pieces of sacrifice. In that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram. The term covenant is generally used in the sense of an agreement between two parties, entailing both parties passing between the offerings implying that if one defaults they should be as the offerings. Amazingly, in this case, God was making a binding promise to Abram, for it was His glory that passed between the pieces, a covenant that was one-sided, and then the promise from God “unto thy seed have I given this land.” During his life-time Abram was not to see the fulfilment of this promise and yet the land had been promised to him as an everlasting inheritance. In this way an understanding of future resurrection came to him.

The glory which appeared between the sacrificial pieces also appeared to the Israelites as a pillar of cloud and fire, the thunderous storm on Sinai, and the radiance of the transfiguration; a glory the saints will observe with Abram on our Lord’s return.

Brother Jeff Hadley.

To be continued...

From The Christadelphian Worldwide Forum

Len B. wrote: - >>Also, don’t forget my reference to the “great settling of accounts.” The psalmist believed in it, and I do too. It’s not a final answer to the problem of evil, but it’s part. <<

Linda’s response: - I think so too. In Luke 17:1 - 2 “Jesus said to his disciples. ‘There are bound to be things that trip people up; but woe betide the person who brings them about! It would be better to have a millstone hung around your neck, and be thrown into the sea, than to trip up one of these little ones.’”

This is a dire warning of consequences which I think is often ignored or glossed over. Because we know that God is a God of mercy, grace and forgiveness, we forget that He is also a God of justice. The message of the justice of God and the death of the wicked isn’t a popular message these days even though the Bible is clear on this.

Something that is sustained throughout the scriptures however, is that whenever there is this judgement of God against wickedness, there is always a sense of overarching purpose that destroying wickedness happens in order that God’s people will be saved. Everywhere you look where there is destruction of the wicked, it is so that God’s people ultimately will live.

The question “ ‘Holy and true Master!’ they [souls under the altar]called. ‘How much longer are you going to put off giving judgement, and avenging our blood on the earth dwellers?’ “ Revelation 6.10. God’s response is that they were given a white robe and told to rest for a little while yet, until the full number of those to be killed, as they had been, was reached. The time is coming when judgement will be done, but the time is not yet.

“...the Psalms regularly ask how long this wretched state of affairs will go on for 13.1; 79.5, etc; there are dark hints about wickedness being allowed to go on for a while so that when God judges, that judgement will be seen to be just (e.g. Genesis 15.16; Daniel 8.23); there are fleeting glimpses in Genesis 3 and 6 of the place of evil as an intruder into God’s good creation, though this is never set out to our full satisfaction...The Bible simply doesn’t appear to want to say what God can say about evil...What the Old Testament does is to talk quite a lot, not about what God says

about evil, but about what God can do, is doing and will do about it. It may be possible to work back from there to some account of what the Bible thinks evil is, and why it's there, but that's seldom if ever the primary focus. Insofar as the Old Testament offers a theodicy (an explanation of the justice of God in the face of counter-evidence), it isn't couched in the terms of later philosophy, but in the narrative of God and the world, and particularly the story of God and Israel." (Evil and the Justice of God, Chapter 2, What can God do about evil? Unjust world, just God?)

In Luke 17. 1 - 2 quoted earlier, it is Jesus himself who gives the warning that it would be better to have a millstone around the neck and be thrown into the sea than to cause the "tripping up" of the little ones. This comes directly after the parable of the rich man being tormented in Hades. However it is that we interpret the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the overall message is the same; the rich man is in torment for his indifference to the suffering of the poor, while the poor man is carried to Abraham's bosom.

Evidence of the evil and wickedness of humans as individuals and collectively in groups is found in the Bible from beginning to end - from Genesis to Revelation. At the outset, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and the judgement of God was banishment from the Garden. Cain murdered his brother Abel (cut his throat, I read somewhere). "What have you done?" Yahweh asked. 'Listen to the sound of your brother's blood crying out to me from the ground. Now be accursed and driven from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood at your hands. When you till the ground it shall no longer yield you any of its produce. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer over the earth.' (Genesis 4. 10 - 12 The Jerusalem Bible)

Human wickedness became so bad and widespread, that God was sorry He had even made man. Genesis 6 - "I will rid the earth's face of man, my own creation...for I regret having made them...the end has come for all things of flesh; I have decided this because the earth is full of violence of man's making, and I will efface them from the earth." If God hadn't spared Noah and his family, there would not be one left.

When they came off the ark, God said in Genesis 9, "I will demand an account of every man's life from his fellow men. He who sheds man's blood, shall have his blood shed by man, for in the image of God man was made." God is promising that there will be judgement against those who shed blood.

And so it goes on. Sin and wickedness, over and over again. We know that the destruction of the wicked does not please God "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?" Ezekiel 8:23 The Bible is clear though, from beginning to end, right up to the end of Revelation, those who haven't turned from evil will be destroyed when evil itself is destroyed.

This is a recurring theme, right through the Old Testament and into the New. Jesus mourned over Jerusalem and the people. Matthew 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. So be it. Your house will be left to you desolate, for I promise you, you shall not see me again until you say 'Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord.'" "Then comes AD 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Human sin and God's judgements against sin, is sustained all the way through the Bible. N.T. Wright in "Revelation for Everyone" says, "First, as a wise old writer put it, 'You haven't yet considered the seriousness of sin.' Even after a century of war, terror and high-tech genocide, we are still inclined, in the Western world at least, to pretend to ourselves that the world has really become quite a pleasant place, with 'evil' merely a blip on the horizon with which we can deal

easily enough. However great the contrary evidence, this modern myth of the eradication of evil through ‘enlightenment’, leaving only a few minor mopping-up operations (preferably in far-away places) before Utopia finally arrives, has taken such a hold on popular imagination that any idea of God having to do anything powerful and destructive to address the problem is regarded as far too drastic, far too dramatic. But none of the early Christians, and certainly not Jesus himself, would have colluded with this glossing over of the seriousness of evil. (Wright, Tom (2011-11-15). Revelation for Everyone (p. 81). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.)

God makes no promises that our life in the present age is going to be easy or that every wrongdoing will be immediately judged. In fact we are warned that we are facing a time of terrible hardship. Even a cursory reading of Revelation and the time of the end shows that we are not going to smoothly flow into the new age. God’s people will be redeemed but anyone not found in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15.

Finally, it’s not that God doesn’t care or is indifferent to the suffering that evil humanity has brought on itself and on others, or that God will not judge (He has judged wickedness all through history), but that the time is coming when evil will be judged once and for all and God’s people saved.

Significantly, God did not destroy the Amorites until their wickedness was complete. And (Deuteronomy 9:5 NKJV) “It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you go in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God drives them out from before you, and that He may fulfill the word which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

The last words of the Bible...

Vs 8 – 21, “‘I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard them and saw them, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed them to me. ‘Look! Don’t do that!’ he said to me. ‘I am a fellow-servant with you, and with the other members of your prophetic family, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God! ‘Don’t seal up the words of the prophecy of this book,’ he added.

‘The time is near, you see. Let the unjust go on being unjust, and the filthy go on being filthy – and let the just go on doing justice, and let the holy still be holy.

‘Look! I am coming soon. I will bring my reward with me, and I will pay everyone back according to what they have done.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.’ God’s blessing on those who wash their clothes, so that they may have the right to eat from the tree of life and may enter the city by its gates.

But the dogs, the sorcerers, the fornicators, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves to invent lies – they will all be outside.

‘I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am David’s root and offspring; I am the bright morning star.’ The spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let anyone who hears say, ‘Come!’ Let the thirsty come; let anyone who wants the water of life take it freely. I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues that are written in this book. And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person’s share in the tree of life, and in

the holy city, which are described in this book. The one who gives this testimony says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon!’ Amen! Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.’” (New Testament for Everyone)

Sister Linda Gulbrandson

VERITAS AND HIS FRIENDS

“I remember,” said Dubitas, “my mother reading to us children, out of the gospel of Matthew; I think, about the 25th chapter, where Christ says to the wicked, at the day of judgment “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” I remember, also, of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where the rich man is represented as “lifting up his eyes in hell, being in torment;” and other passages of the same kind. I don’t see how you can escape the conclusion that hell forms part of the teaching of Scripture.”

“Oh, I admit that there is a Scriptural hell,” replied Veritas, “but I deny that the popular view of it is the correct one.”

“What do you take to be the popular view?” asked Dubitas.

“The view with which you yourself have been familiar from childhood. Pietas will perhaps tell us what that teaching is that he has listened to and read in the popular sermons of the age.”

Pietas being appealed to, declared that he was quite familiar with a certain doctrine of lurid and terrible complexion, but as a matter of fact he had not heard many references to it in the pulpit to which he had been in the habit of listening for some years past. He thought it was getting out of fashion in the pulpit to mention hell and the devil.

“But I suppose,” said Veritas, “though preachers are not in the habit of shaking their hearers over the burning pit as of old, the doctrine of incarceration with an arch-fiend and all evil spirits still retains its place in the half-beliefs of the church-taught public.

“Oh, yes, I think so,” said Pietas, candidly; “and I think the doctrine is freely made use of in Sunday Schools, and to the young generally, to create in them a salutary fear.”

“Just so,” replied his friend, “but what I want you to do is, to tell us in the most naked way what the doctrine is which you say is still current, though not much adverted to in public.”

With a slightly heightened colour, and the faintest degree of hesitation, Pietas said, considering just a moment, “Well, I suppose it is that somewhere in the invisible world there is a place of fiery torment, where the devil and evil spirits will finally be shut in to endure endless pain; and that the wicked are cast into this prison when they leave this world. I admit he added apologetically, “the facts cannot be made very intelligible, but I think this is substantially what is taught; whether it is believed is another thing.”

“I will not ask you, now,” said Veritas, “whether you believe it, but I will demand of you all, does the Bible teach that?”

Dubitas said he thought it did; Pietas said he thought some texts favoured such terrible teaching; Mentor did not express any opinion, but remarked, “I suppose you are aware that less revolting interpretations are put by learned men upon the passages usually quoted in support of this doctrine, especially as regards the fire which is not quenched.”

“Oh, yes,” replied Veritas, “I am aware that very many liberties have been taken with the Scriptures, by men who wish to keep the doctrine of hell, and at the same time make this prison as comfortable as

possible, but I think their interference with the Scriptures is quite unjustifiable, as I think I can show you. But at present allow me to put to my two friends here a few questions.”

“What,” asked Veritas, turning round, “does the English word hell mean?”

Pietas replied he had read that it meant “a covered place,” coming from a Saxon word signifying to “cover.”

“Quite true,” said Veritas, “so that as far as the English of the matter goes, the word ‘hell’ does not involve the idea of torment, but only of invisibility. Now if the English word ‘hell’ means ‘covered place,’ would not it be perfectly suitable to make it apply to the grave seeing that the dead in their graves are covered or buried out of sight?”

“That would seem justifiable,” was the reply.

“Then the next question is, what are the original Hebrew and Greek words for hell, and what do the original words mean?”

Mentor supplied part of the information sought by saying that SHEOL was the Hebrew word for hell.

“Correct,” said Veritas, “and an infallible way of getting at the real meaning of the word is to notice how it is employed by the various writers in Scripture who use it.” “Now, can either of you give me a single instance where sheol is used in the Old Testament to express a burning pit, a place of pain, or the prison of living evil spirits?”

Veritas waited, but the silence was only broken by his own voice saying, “What! after having told me the popular ideas of hell, cannot you find me one passage in which the use of sheol will bear them out? In all the multitude of texts where the Hebrew word for ‘hell’ occurs is there not one pointing to a place of fire, or pain, or torment?”

The candour of Pietas helped him to maintain silence but Dubitas did not care to be shut up, and so was beginning to shuffle by remarking that though sheol as a word was not used to indicate a place of torment other passages might teach it.

“One thing at a time, if you please,” said Veritas “we are dealing now with the Bible hell, and trying to ascertain what it means. Now the fact is, it is never in the Old Testament used to mean a place of torment for living beings, neither devils, evil spirits, nor wicked men. If this is true, and you know it is, then it is false to use the Bible word for such a purpose, for this gives to a falsehood an apparent Bible authority.”

“Do not the translators sometimes render sheol as the grave?” enquired Pietas.

“Yes,” said Veritas, “and with perfect justness; for sheol like ‘hell’ means a place covered or concealed. But if sheol meant a place of torment it would be impossible to render it ‘the grave.’ I daresay you have often heard the words of Job quoted, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest, and applied to saints who are supposed to have gone to heaven but look at the passage (ch. iii.) and you will see that the words refer not to heaven but to hell or sheol. How absurd it is to hear ignorant preachers and others talk about a ‘burning hell,’ and then quote words which apply to hell when they are wishing to describe the fancied peace and rest of heaven.”

To be continued

A Pearl of Great Price

In the parable of the labourers in the vineyard each one received a penny, whether he had borne the burden and heat of the day or had laboured but one hour; so those who are Christ's at His coming shall each receive the gift of eternal life - the young disciple who, at the last hour of the day of salvation, put on the Lord Jesus, and the veteran who from youth to old age has fought the good fight of faith; yet the place and position of these in the glorious Kingdom of God shall differ immensely from each other. And so the Judge heralds His advent cry: "Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be." And all this is in perfect accord with the apostolic deliverance, "The dead shall be raised incorruptible."

In further confirmation of this truth see the words of our Lord in Luke 20:35,36, "They who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from amongst the dead, cannot die any more, but are equal to the angels." And Revelation 20:6, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." In 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, the Apostle writes to the same effect; "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

This teaching of the Apostle is directly opposed to the doctrine that the dead in Christ rise in mortal bodies; but is in complete harmony with his glowing words in 1 Corinthians 15:51,52, "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." As in 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 two companies are spoken of - "the dead in Christ," and "those who are alive and remain" - so here; and both companies share the same glorious being and destiny; the dead raised incorruptible, and the living changed while alive; they thus, together, meet the Lord in the air. One incorruptible band, to be associated for ever with the ever-living Redeemer. Blessed Hope! Transcendent destiny!

So far from having to be tried for his life at the judgment seat of Christ, the Christian has his name inscribed in the book of life even now. Else what mean these gracious words "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels" - Revelation 3:5?

William Laing - From "How are the Dead Raised?"

A Defence of our Belief and Support of Paul's Declaration that the faithful in Christ shall be raised incorruptible at his coming.

Dear Brethren and Sisters,

We, of the Nazarene Fellowship confess that after the way which a certain contentious sect of our day calls heresy, so worship we the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, believing all things that are written in the law and the prophets: and have hope toward God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead both of the just and unjust, but not simultaneously at the coming of Christ. This they do not allow, though we have always exercised ourselves, to have consciences void of offence toward God, and toward, men. Let

these same say if they have found any evil in us, except it be for this one voice which we CRY standing among them, touching the resurrection of the dead, and the redemption which is in Christ, which qualifies us for the resurrection of the just if Christ remains away and we fall asleep in him.

Certainly Paul was preaching and advancing the importance of the resurrection of Christ to show the Jews that they had killed the “Prince of Life”, a man approved of God among them by many infallible signs and wonders, but he further asserts that He who raised Christ from the dead will also raise the faithful by his spirit power, “For when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, then shall they also appear with him in glory.” Should we tremble at such a thought? Felix did not tremble at this the resurrection of the just, but what Paul told him about the judgment to come, at the resurrection of the unjust. No doubt Felix had cause to tremble, unlike King Agrippa who after all did allow Paul to speak for himself and did know most of the customs and questions of the Jewish religion and not a misrepresentation of it and could therefore form an unbiased judgment Of Paul’s defence. We have not, and are not, blessed with any King Agrippa’s or persons like Festus who possessed reason and logic, so we have to be content to abide by the fact that “if our gospel be hid it is hid to them who are lost, and those who are responsible may indeed experience the resurrection of the unjust at the end of the thousand years’ reign of Christ.

The question before us is not that it is a thing incredible that God should raise the dead, but the order and election of the two classes mentioned in the Scriptures. Jesus, we must all accept, was the embodiment of the Word of God, and therefore His spoken words were not haphazard or uttered with the feeling of nonchalance, but in harmony with His Father’s will and plan. Let us dwell upon the words therefore which he expresses, and take note of the order of merit. Luke 20:55, “But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more; for they are equal unto the Angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he called the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead but of the living: for all live unto him. That is, all God’s children live unto him and will therefore be subjects of the resurrection of life.

Let me again stress the order of merit which Jesus (who is the resurrection and the life) uses, for He should know.

1. Those accounted worthy to obtain that world (The Kingdom of God).

2. They therefore qualify for the resurrection from the dead, neither can they die any more for they are equal to the angels: and are the children of God... “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus and if ye be Christ’s then are ye Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.”

In the light of this testimony of Jesus how can anyone contend that at His coming there will be a resurrection of the faithful and unfaithful, and after this it will be judged who is worthy to obtain eternal life in the Kingdom of God? This is directly opposed to what Jesus says is the case, and can only be held by people who are misinformed on the subject, or who cannot harmonise it with erroneous views held concerning the judgment. It is in their own interests therefore to have more respect for the Christ they profess to believe in, and to hearken to his word. If Jesus had said no more on this subject, it should have been enough to convince anyone that only the accepted of Him are the subjects of the first resurrection, but we need not leave it there if we would require further confirmation, and read with understanding.

I appeal once again to the words of Him who is “The Way, the Truth and the life.” (Matthew 19:27-50). “Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, verily I say unto you (i.e. the 12), that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first.” That is, these Jews who had first priority to the oracles of God and His calling, if they neglected so great salvation would not be among the chosen but would at the appropriate time be cast out into outer darkness. So the last shall be first and the first last: for many be called but few chosen. What then of the twelve thrones? We have

again the witness of Jesus, Rev. ch. 20, at the time of the binding of Satan for a thousand years. Verse 4 - "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; (these who sat on the thrones were not being judged but were given authority to judge or rule), and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God and which had not worshipped the beast neither his image... And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and Holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years." In view of this, can those who believe that the unfaithful rise at the first resurrection, believe also that they are blessed and holy, and that on such the second death hath no power? To believe such is the height of absurdity. Let such therefore find a sensible and scriptural alternative, for there is no alternative to truth if one desires light and life. If there are those who, for reasons known only to themselves, cannot differentiate between the resurrection of the just and of the unjust, then Jesus is not among them, neither is Paul. Jesus, in commending such who helped the needy and destitute says, "And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

There is another "recompense" mentioned in the Scriptures but this is not one of blessing and reward, but of vengeance. "Vengeance is mine, I will 'recompense,' saith the Lord." When can this be but at the resurrection of the unjust? "How long O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Rev. 6, v.10. Paul is every bit in harmony with Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:22, "Even so in Christ shall all be made alive, but every man in his own order; Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." In between we have the period of Christ's reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Which brings us to the time and period when the nations Gog and Magog, having been deceived by Satan released from his bondage of a thousand years, are destroyed by God's fiery judgments together with that Satan who deceived them, the latter being cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death, where the beast and the false prophet are.

John says (Revelation 20:11): "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." The Apostle Peter speaks of this in his second Epistle ch.3, v.10, in which the heavens and the earth pass away - no place found for them, says John. So they are dissolved. Can it be any plainer? Nevertheless, says Peter, "we, according to his promises look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." John not only looked for a new heaven and a new earth, but was permitted in vision to see it by signs and symbols. But before the latter he saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works.

I must admit that in the past I have read this account rather superficially thinking that it is just and unjust standing before God, but a closer examination will show this view to be incorrect. "I saw the dead," says John, "standing before God." Can dead people stand? Why of course not; they must be alive in order to stand. But John does not describe them as living but dead. And he goes on to say that "the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell gave up the dead which were in them. Why? Because these were their rightful owners', this was where they belonged. They, in my view, were the rest of the dead who were not subjects of the first resurrection but were nevertheless amenable to the judgment of God and the second death by reason of the things recorded in the books. Those whose names were in the Book of Life have already been accounted worthy of Eternal Life and are not seen by John as the dead standing before God. The words of Jesus, I feel sure, are still applicable to the faithful during the millennium as they were when he uttered them during his, ministry. "Verily, verily I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Jesus leaves no doubt that there is a resurrection of life and there is a resurrection of damnation, the latter cannot be the resurrection Paul was striving to attain unto - Philippians 3:10-14 - but that to which Jesus made reference in Luke 20:35. It is worthy of note that from verse 11 of Rev. 20 to the end John mentions nothing concerning the faithful; all he mentions is "the dead", and death and hell, and judgment out of the books that recorded their works. Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. We are told that death and hell were cast into the lake of fire; how could this be done unless those who were the constituents of the same and abode in death, were one and the same?

This in fact is a recording of what Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15:26 - "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." All who were cast into the lake of fire were the personification of sin and death, constituting those from Genesis to Revelation, and including the betrayers and murderers of Christ and his beloved servants of all ages. They are those who have sown to the flesh and have reaped corruption, having chosen by their works to abide in death. In bondage to the Devil.

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" says Paul, "neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." So it is obvious that those who come forth with bodies either capable of inheriting incorruption or capable of inheriting corruption, and it is therefore obvious that those whose names are in the book of life will have come forth incorruptible, and those whose names are not in it will come forth corruptible to experience judicial death.

The first death in Genesis which Adam merited by sin, was judicial and was the death which Jesus suffered for all, by blood-shedding, but the second death is also judicial but in this case, having rejected the Sacrifice of Christ, those who are guilty are amenable to it, and also as a consequence of their works of the flesh; and when I say 'works of the flesh', I am not referring to its physical quality but to the unlawful actions committed as opposed to those who cultivate the fruits of the Spirit,

Compare Romans 7:4-8 and Galatians 5:16-24. See also Ephesians 2:1-8.

We have a booklet dealing with where leaders were wrong about "Redemption, Resurrection and Judgment"; an analysis of much misunderstood doctrines. Except for my personal views in Revelation 20:11-15, most of the subject is dealt with, but how in any case anyone can misunderstand the first six verses of Revelation 20 is beyond me.

So that we shall have no doubts at all as to the subjects of the first resurrection, John declares that they had died for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God - and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. "This is the first resurrection." Revelation 20:5. Verse 6, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of His Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years." Can anyone wish to have it stated more plainly than this? Do we require that John should state the third time that the subjects of the first resurrection lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years and all others, but these did not live again until the thousand years were finished? Should anyone be so foolish, and declare John's statements to be put under the heading of doctrines to be rejected? To those who oppose our views should you not amend Clauses 24 and 29 of the Christadelphian B.A.S.F? Surely you should realise that your description of the first resurrection (Clause 24) should be worded as a general one, rather than in Clause 29 which you speak of as a reign of grace under God for a thousand years? Surely in six thousand years up to the coming of Christ you should have more rejected, than in a thousand years under the direct rule of Christ? Your wording is correct in Clause 29, but incorrect in Clause 24 as by now, if you have read the foregoing defence, you should realise, unless you prefer to be blinded by tradition.

Quotations such as 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 2:19 are conspicuous by their absence in Clause 24, and especially should the latter quotation be noted. Would it be Paul's hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing for the unfaithful and disobedient to be in the presence of Jesus Christ at his coming? Yet Clause 24 emphasises that this is the case, and not only so, but places the period of the second death at the beginning of the thousand years instead of the end, where it is specifically mentioned. But we are well aware that things have to be twisted, added to, or taken out of context, to fit misunderstood and misguided theories, so the analysis referred to on the cover of our booklet should be a great help to those who desire enlightenment on the subject rather than invented theories handed down and forced upon them under threat of excommunication, why listen to blind leaders whose counsel is to burn our literature? It has got to such a state now, that if I were seen handing some Christadelphian literature to a Christadelphian, that member would be advised by a fellow member in a so-called superior capacity, to burn it. This is the intolerable state into which misrepresentation of others and consequent indoctrination has brought them. The invitation "Come let us reason together" seems to be lost on them, yet God holds out that invitation to the worst of sinners.

I feel sure that it is not the will of the members of the Nazarene Fellowship to stand before a general assize and witness the weeping and gnashing of teeth of any who are cast out, especially sincere misguided people, and I doubt if they will have to. It is, however, those who are cast out of the inheritance of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who weep and gnash their teeth because they are permitted to see the patriarchs in the Kingdom of God just prior to the second death at the end of the thousand years. It is our wish to reason together with all, and rightly divide the word of truth, not wrest it out of its context to bolster up erroneous theories, and if we refuse to 'do this, we are refusing to listen to him who speaks from heaven, in favour of those who have declared they are past the investigating stage. We of the Nazarene Fellowship believe we have been called to comprise the general assembly and church of the firstborn which are written in heaven etc. (Heb. 12) and our faithful conduct will justify our names being enrolled or written in heaven, and we shall not have to wait for a judgment at his coming to determine whether our names are to be written in the book of life. Paul confirms this in Rom. 8:27-39. What a glorious hope to have through the love of God which is in Christ Jesus! There is no fear in this love, but perfect love casteth out fear." If we fear at all, let it be, lest, a promise being left us of entering into God's Rest, any should seem to come short of it. For unto us the gospel has been preached as well as unto the Jews of Mosaic economy. We are pleased and honoured to pass it on to those who have ears to hear.

Brother Phil Parry

Extract from the writings of Brother John Stevenson:

What has this to do with our beliefs in the Nazarene Fellowship? I think it is very relevant to understanding why we are so few. We believe that God requires us to use our intelligence to know good and evil, or truth and error, and it is refreshing to know that each of us is willing to listen to any serious argument against our beliefs. But the vast majority of the public are not like that. Here is a quote from Ernest Brady in 1955 from "Too True To Be New": –

"I do not think there is or ever has been a sect able to put forward a clear explanation of the atonement, for the reason that all alike go wrong at the very first step, in believing that natural death or corruptibility is the penalty of the sin in Eden. As I sat and listened to Brother Jennings in the Midlands Institute and saw a hall full of people being fed stones instead of bread, I can only confess that I felt sick at heart, and sad that I had been able to accomplish so little to enlighten them."

There have been many such frustrating occasions in the long history of the Nazarene Fellowship, but we should not be too disheartened because we should remember that knowing good and evil, or truth and error is not important to most people and their attitude is, "If I am wrong, it is because I prefer to be wrong." Here is another quotation - from Isaac Asimov, who was unfortunately an atheist, but was antipathetic to popular stupidity,

"Astrology is more popular today than ever before in history and more people than ever make a good living out of it. I have read that there are five thousand astrologers in the United States, and over ten million true believers... College students are no more a homogenous group than is any other large classification of humanity. Not all of them are interested in science; not all of them are truly bright; many of them are just bright enough to discover that what counts in this phoney world is merely the ability to sound bright – an ability which has carried many men to high political office... Many college students are taking up astrology in a big way because 1) it is the in thing to do, 2) it gives them a delicious, if false, sense of security, and 3) it gives them a passport to phoney intellectualism. And none of that is at all inconsistent with astrology being tripe."

Astrology is far from being the only sort of tripe believed in. Religious sects are notorious for preferring tripe to truth, with man-made creeds and arrogant authoritarianism. But Jesus loves us all, prayed for us, wept for us and died for us. We must accept failure and disillusionment as inevitable in our witness, but hope and pray that some people will see and respond to the light that Jesus brought into the world.

Brother John Stevenson.

Christ's Salvation and Immortal Resurrection

I greatly appreciate your and Helen's efforts in the circulation of the Circular Letter. Now there are so many booklets in existence concerning our controversy with the Christadelphians that it seems superfluous to add any more.

However, going through many of their writings I feel one great misunderstanding prevails among them which somehow has not been corrected by us thoroughly enough. They seem to be under the impression that Christ secured salvation by His sinless life in perfect obedience to His Father. It is quite true that had He not been obedient there could be no salvation for any of us. But this merely amounts to preaching salvation by works and entirely misses the reason for His miraculous birth. There were many whose works were perfect, though none of them without sin. But because of Adam's transgression we all fail to inherit anything better than living out our natural lives. We all live, through no fault of our own, under the handicap of being servants to sin. The expression "Servant to sin" is of course, symbolic. It means having inherited a life over which hangs the penalty of death which up to the coming of Christ had not been paid for but in type by means of the animal sacrifices. We are all born with this handicap. Just as in ancient times a slave could not redeem himself, never mind another slave, but somebody outside, such as a next of kin, could pay the redemption money, so none of us can redeem his brother but help comes again from outside in the form of One who like a next of kin was free to "buy us back," by voluntary paying the death penalty owed since Adam.

Only God, in His infinite wisdom and ingenuity was able to do this by giving His own Son. He was of the same nature as ours. To say that His bodily make up was such as to give Him special strength to overcome deprives Him of all His honour; if this were the case it could not be said He would not have been tempted in all points as we are. Where many misunderstand us is in this; What was the position of Christ that distinguished it from ours?

Not any special strength. He underwent the same everyday trials as we do, and more.

Not the fact that He did not sin, though this was important.

Not as many affirm, that He was God, or "part-God," which is the doctrine of the Trinity.

But His being born free from the death penalty incurred by Adam, because on His Father's side His life did not stem from Adam.

This is what we mean in our literature when we speak of His not being born servant to sin. This is what is meant by the concept of "Free Life" which so many oppose. His was a life born free. And it was here where our salvation started. He possessed a life free from anything related to sin. What He had to do was not to fail by sinning as did His predecessor, Adam.

He only was able to pay in anti-type what was foreshadowed by the types; by giving His own life in the blood thereof as the ransom price for Adam and his offspring. So what so many overlook is that the main difference between Christ's position and ours lies on the legal, and not on the physical side. He inherited the right to eternal life from His Father. It was His from birth. He could only lose it if He had sinned as did Adam. He truly inherited human nature from His mother with all its weaknesses, or else He could not have been tempted like us. All credit to Him that He overcame. We do not sin because of our nature, but because we fail to try hard enough, whereas Jesus did.

He was strengthened by faith and prayer, not by any special physical strength. And we could do as well if we had the will to make the effort.

I hope that these remarks are helpful to clear up these matters.

Now to another topic that causes so much controversy; the immortal resurrection.

To all those who think we rise mortal I would just like to put this question:-

David - the man after God's own heart,

Daniel - The man greatly beloved,

Paul - for whom a crown of righteousness is laid up (2 Timothy 4:8), as well as to all those who love His appearing. Can you imagine what they all must feel when they wake up from the grave and find themselves at a tribunal to see if they are worthy after all?

Now we are clearly told in 1 Corinthians 15:52 "...the dead shall be raised incorruptible." This is plain English. Some affirm that the original Greek does not quite mean this, but the ordinary man in the street does not understand Greek. Now if you need to be a scholar to understand it, then God has failed in three points:

1. Salvation is impossible for the unlearned.

2. If there is such an immense difference in meaning between the original Greek and our everyday English then God has failed in preserving His word so necessary for our salvation. There may have some minor translation/editor errors crept in, but not on such fundamental matters.

3. God is not telling the truth if "incorruptible" means the very opposite, or at least does not mean what everybody understands by the word "incorruptible."

Now we, like Paul, can rest assured that if we live worthy of our high calling to the end, we shall have been judged worthy already. Like Paul we are being judged all the time, continually, by our conduct now - 1 Corinthians 11:32, "But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world."

It is our very own responsibility of how we react to our great high calling, how we appreciate God's gift of His only begotten Son who suffered so much out of sheer unselfish love for us. Let us endeavour to live after the manner of the many worthies of old and not lose our salvation gained at such a high cost by our Lord and Master. Let us hold fast to the end of our probation so that we can be as sure as David, Daniel, Paul and many others when we die (unless the Lord returns before) that the crown is ours.

'Even so, come, Lord Jesus' - Revelation 22:20.

Brother Leo Dreifuss.