

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

INDEX

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A

Abraham	R. THOMSON	
1. False step corrected, A		60
2. Communion with God		79
3. Lot in the gate of Sodom		84
4. Another valley		121
5. Promise fulfilled, The		170
6. Thine only Son whom thou lovest		204
7. Wilt thou go with this man?		221

B

Behold your King		
2. His temptations	J. STODDART	1
3. Transfiguration, The	J. S. BLACKBURN	25
4. His crucifixion	J. S. BLACKBURN	43
5. His resurrection	J. S. BLACKBURN	52
Bless the Lord at all times	HAMILTON SMITH	23
Book review	EDITOR	
Jesus rediscovered	MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE	128

C

Church of God, The	HERBERT HIRST	
	37, 90, 137, 248	
Comfort in trial and help in trouble	HAMILTON SMITH	33
Comforts of the Lord, The	HAMILTON SMITH	74
Correspondence		
Unconverted persons breaking bread		48
Crowned Christ, The		
1. His judicial glory	J. STODDART	71
2. Lamb in the midst, The	J. STODDART	93
3. Marriage in heaven, The	J. S. BLACKBURN	109
4. Glorious city, The	J. S. BLACKBURN	123, 129

D

David and Absalom	COLIN CURRY	29
David at Ziklag	J. STODDART	206

E

Editor's note book, From the Prayers in the epistles		181
Exceeding—A word study	J. STODDART	182

G			
Gates of Jerusalem, The	G. A. HOWES		141
H			
Heavenly calling, The	T. S. DAVISON		152
Hills and valleys	J. STODDART		161
Honour of his name, The	A. H. STORRIE		191
I			
Interpretation of scripture, The	COLIN CURRY		
1. Introduction			77
2. Attitudes			81
3. Key features		104, 116, 133	
4. Problems		148, 163	
5. Review and suggestions			177
Israel and the church			
<i>Adapted from J. N. DARBY by AUBREY F. HOWE</i>			
1. Introduction			113
2. Second coming of Christ, The			156
3. First resurrection, The			184
Israel and the church (contd.)	Adapted from J. N. DARBY		
4. Progress of evil, The			193
5. Israel and Palestine			225
6. Summary and conclusion			250
L			
Language of worship, The	J. H. B. MENZIES		97
Last words of David, The	COLIN CURRY		40
M			
Matthew and Mark	COLIN CURRY		233
Miracles	COLIN CURRY		4
P			
Plenary inspiration	ROBERT DAVIES	218, 229	
Psalm 19	ROBERT DAVIES		253
Q			
Question bread—Unconverted persons breaking bread			15
144,000 in Revelation 7 and 14, The			144
Wave breast, The			223

R

Realm of the superlative, The	A. H. STORRIE	9
Royal occasion	J. STODDART	245

S

Sadducees and Humanists	ALASTAIR DURIE	168
Seated Christ, The	A. H. STORRIE	160
Secret place of the Most High, The	HAMILTON SMITH	57
Seek ye first	J. S. BLACKBURN	
5. Sermon on the mount, The		11
6. Mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, The		17
7. Social and political aspects of the millennium		63
8. Parable of the sower, The		65
9. Evil in the kingdom		86
10. Treasure and the pearl, The		145
11. Net cast into the sea, The		189
12. Kingdom of heaven and the church, The		197
13. Olivet discourse, The		209
14. Kingdom in the epistles, The		236
15. Occupy till I come		241
Shine in, shine out (2 Cor. 4 : 6, 7)	J. STODDART	20

U

Understanding	J. STODDART	49
---------------	-------------	----

W

Water and blood, By	F. W. BOYD	202
Why were the gospels written ?	COLIN CURRY	214
Wondrous works of the Lord, The (Psalm 105)	ROBERT DAVIES	172

"BEHOLD YOUR KING"

J. STODDART

Echoes from St. Andrews, 1967

HIS TEMPTATIONS

Matthew 4 : 1/11

CONTINUING our study of the life of the Lord Jesus, "in the days of His flesh," we now consider a subject which demands our deepest reverence and the exercise not only of our faith but our adoration. Here again, modern treatment has rationalised the subject of the Lord's temptations so that no longer are these regarded as unique or special but simply an experience common to all men. How completely this is at variance with the whole teaching of Scripture need hardly be dwelt on here. The object of these studies, as already stated, is that we might know better "what is noted in the Scripture of Truth" and thus be guarded from the errors of our day and enriched in "the Truth as it is in Jesus."

Mystery beyond our ken surrounds the fact that the perfect, sinless Son of God, now about thirty years of age, had to be subjected to this unrestrained assault of the Devil. Doubtless it was a preamble to his ultimate attack, an attempt by Satan to find a chink in the armour of One to Whom the heavens were opened so recently at His baptism to say, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Had Satan heard this? We cannot tell, but it is striking that he should challenge the Lord at once with these very words, "If Thou be the Son of God. . . ." Probably in these words we have the key to the whole character of these temptations. Nothing else mattered if it could be disproved that here truly

was the Son of God, if after all He listened to the Tempter and, like Adam, deferred to the subtle suggestions he made. He would be but a son of Adam's race.

But let us look a little more closely at this vital conflict. From the waters of baptism, Jesus is "led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil" (v. 1). No other compelling power took Him into the arena, and there, without food and among the wild beasts (Mark I) for forty days and forty nights, He was tempted of Satan. At the end of this period, weakened with hunger, He is still confronted by the Tempter, who with an air of compassion now says, "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Could fault be found with this suggestion, apart from its source? Surely it was reasonable enough, but it entailed an act of obedience to Satan and the use of His power to satisfy His own need, both of which were impossible to Him. His direction was from another source. "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (v. 4). He could say on another occasion, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work." So Satan is rebuffed on the first count, not by a display of Divine power but by the humble dependence of his gracious Opponent on the Word of God, available to every man.

The enemy of God and men is not, however, easily daunted, and to

the fight he returns with increasing subtlety. The weapon which had been so effective in the Saviour's hands to parry the first thrust, now becomes the weapon of Satan's choice. Quote the Scriptures? So could he; and with characteristic cunning he suggests that, "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from the pinnacle of the temple, for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone." Can one Scripture defend itself against another? Let us see the Divine wisdom of the Son of God in matching this attack. We may note here that the Devil's quotation from Psalm 91 is manifestly distorted, because he omits the significant words, "to keep Thee in **all** Thy ways," which might have defeated his purpose, and, of course, to have quoted the next verse would have turned the weapon upon himself—"Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt Thou trample under foot" (v. 13). Returning to Deuteronomy, the Lord says to him, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (6:16). Here at once was the adequate reason for Jesus refusing Satan's second suggestion, and also the crushing rebuke to his attempt to tempt the Son of God. What consummate wisdom in Him made the enemy retreat again without success!

Little doubt Satan's master-stroke, the calculated coup de grâce, as he thought, lay in the third temptation. Here on a high mountain he lays before the eyes of the Lord Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them." (Luke adds, "in a moment of time.") Now Revelation 11:15 assures us that "the kingdoms of this world" will one day be

"the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." But this would take place in God's way and time and via the Cross of Calvary. Here at the Devil's suggestion was a tempting alternative to God's plan of redemption through suffering and death. "All these things will I give Thee (Luke adds, 'for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it') if Thou wilt fall down and worship me." Satan's claim to the world kingdoms was not disputed by the Lord, but at last the Devil's deepest ambition was unmasked, his motive behind every operation—to secure the worship that belonged to God alone—indeed to have the Son of God at his feet doing homage to him. Such has ever been and always will be the ultimate target of every Satanic effort. Would the Saviour of men weaken at this point? Would He give a moment's thought to such blatant and guilty schemes? On the contrary, He now commands Satan to be gone, for (again quoting from Deuteronomy) it is written "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." (Deuteronomy 6:13). We might have thought that the sheer impertinence of the Devil's proposal and the brash insult to the Lord's person would merit a more contemptuous reply from Jesus, but the third temptation is overcome with dignity and Satan himself routed with majestic authority.

So great David's greater son, armed only with the Word of God, and as Man using no Divine prerogative, puts to flight that old Dragon. Not yet is this the final battleground, not yet the annulment of Satan's vast power, but a sure token of his ultimate defeat.

Having considered briefly the main issues of the Lord's temptations, we may now reflect upon other aspects of this inaugural triumph of

Messiah the Prince, and perhaps seek answers to some unanswered questions. It must be said, however, at this point that inevitably many questions will remain unanswered, because “confessedly the mystery of piety is great.” (1 Timothy 3 : 16 J.N.D. Trans.). Such piety is of the very essence of our subject as seen in the perfections of the Lord Jesus under testings of the severest kind. Natural argument would contend that if He was perfect and incapable of sin, then these temptations were not really temptations at all, and therefore the victory was not really victory. Here we must ever remember that the temptations we have considered arose entirely from without, that is, at Satan’s instigation, and although they met with no vestige of response in the Lord Jesus, they were none the less severe as testings applied to a man. In the world of electrical engineering, so familiar to the writer, apparatus is tested by the manufacturer under many times more rigorous conditions than would ever be met in normal service. The object of this exercise is to prove that no flaw exists in the apparatus, or to bring it to light if it did exist. Such then was the testing applied to One Who was Israel’s born king, Whose service to His people thus commenced with such proof of His flawlessness.

The question has been asked, “ In what way do the temptations of Jesus have a bearing on our temptations as Christians ? ” It is true that, “ He was tempted in all things in like manner (as we are) sin apart.” (Hebrews 4 : 15 J.N.D. Trans.) Indeed, it is because of this we have a sympathetic High Priest, Who having “suffered being tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted.” (Hebrews 2 : 18). A difference of vast significance, however,

must be noted between His temptations and ours. In the main our temptations arise from sin within (James 1:14) as was stressed in our studies on the Epistle of James. With us, therefore, this entails the cleansing, saving effect of the “engrafted Word, received with meekness,” but not so with the Lord Jesus, of Whom 1 John 3 : 5 says, “ in Him is no sin.” The most rigorous tests applied to Him from without could only prove that no flaw within existed in His Holy nature. Of Him alone could it be said that He “suffered, being tempted,” and the anguish He thus endured as the Holy One of God is beyond our comprehension. But in the context of our present studies, His enemy is our enemy, and His victorious conquest is vicariously ours. So that as we face the common foe, we are enjoined to, “resist the Devil and he will flee from you.” (James 4 : 7 and 1 Peter 5 : 9) We may well thank God that in the conflict in which we are to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6 : 12) we encounter an already defeated foe. Not only was he vanquished in this initial wilderness engagement, but Satan’s master-stroke was foiled and his power annulled at Calvary, as we shall consider together in a later study in this series.

At the end of the wilderness temptations, Luke tells us that “ the devil departed from Him for a season.” (ch. 4 : 13). It would be difficult to define the length of this “season”, but surely it would be of short duration, and since “to this end the Son of God was manifested, that He might undo the works of the Devil” (1 John 3 : 8), it unlikely that he would leave Him for long. Surely the abundant instances in the Gospels where the Lord cast out demons suffice to show the Satanic character of the opposition He met. Perhaps the most striking of these is the

story of Legion in Mark 5, where the demented man came first of all running to do homage to Jesus, then crying with a loud voice, he said, "What have I to do with you, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, that you torment me not." Here is the most complete picture of a man utterly dominated by Satan's diabolical power. But the resistance to his deliverance by Jesus was broken, and the man himself set free to rejoice in the company of his great Deliverer. Truly the Lord had done great things for him, and this message he was charged to carry to others. Can we tell of Satan's defeat and Christ's victory in our own lives?

Of great value it is to observe the identity of the Devil's assault upon the first man, Adam, and the Second Man, the Lord from Heaven. In each case his approach followed the pattern of cunning appeal to basic needs in man, (a) to satisfy bodily appetite, (b) to demonstrate his prowess and (c) to acquire maximum power. In the first Adam the response was complete, for (a) the fruit of the forbidden tree was seen to be "good for food", (b) Satan said he could eat without dying, thus exhibiting his prowess, and (c) he would acquire the status of a god,

knowing good and evil, thus gaining great power. In the Second Man, the appeal to satisfy bodily appetite utterly failed, for bread alone was Word of God. Secondly, He needed not man's deepest need but the no demonstration of His prowess by casting Himself down from the Temple pinnacle, since this would involve tempting the Lord God; and lastly, Satan's offer of universal power over the world kingdoms, for the price of worshipping him, made no appeal to Him, for He would entitle Himself to such power by finally overthrowing Satan's vaunted title to it. Meanwhile, all worship and service belonged to God alone. Thus the valuable lesson is learnt that with all his wisdom and cunning, the Devil's approach is limited, and wise would we be to discern the pattern of his overtures to us, for it will be most sure to fall into one or the other of those we have considered. If so we must needs be ready with the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Finally, let us allow these humble meditations on the Lord Jesus, in the days of His flesh, to bring us to His feet in adoration and worship; and also to impel more loyal service to One so great, for He indeed is worthy alone.

MIRACLES

COLIN CURRY

THIS article discusses the supernatural nature of Christianity, in the belief that there is value in pausing to consider this, a matter perhaps ordinarily taken for granted by readers of this periodical. First, we make some general comments on

the Christian miracles. Next, the central miracle of all is singled out for particular consideration. Finally, we ask the question whether anything of a miraculous character is expected in the Christianity of today.

GENERAL COMMENTS

U n q u e s t i o n a b l y there are supernatural elements in New Testament Christianity. These present a challenge to the mind of the 20th-century reader, a challenge no less formidable today than in earlier times. The modern mind rightly shrinks from a too facile belief in seemingly incredible happenings. To balance this, however, it is fair to point out that the 20th-century outlook is not unique in finding difficulties with the Christian miracles. It is a mistaken notion, though a common one, that it was easier to accept miracles in earlier times than it is now. It always was difficult. The character of the miraculous events related in the gospels was as patent and as seemingly unbelievable then as now. Joseph the carpenter and Thomas the hard-headed disciple (to name only two) possessed, quite as much as modern men, the essentials for judging the events which came so close to them. To think that their faculties were less sharp, or that they themselves were less fitted for discriminating between the alternatives presented to them, seems completely unjustifiable. The issues presented by these events were clear-cut ones, even to the earliest Christians. Progress in knowledge over the years has not altered this situation, nor contributed to its resolution, in any basic sense. It is unfair to suggest, too, that the early growth of Christianity took place in days when the prevalent attitude was an uncritical one, when men were more gullible than they are now. The opposite is true. Christianity faced hostility from the start. Though every effort was made to discountenance it, the Christian faith survived with full insistence upon the miraculous elements it contained (including, most prominently, the resurrection of Christ). To say that

it survived this opposition is an understatement; it thrived under these conditions.

In view of this, while agreeing that formidable problems remain to be faced, we must clearly guard against understressing the miraculous in Christianity. There is a readiness in some quarters today to prune the content of the Christian faith to suit current mental attitudes. The line taken is to abandon the supernatural elements and to attempt to salvage something from what remains. This is a dangerous line. Little of value, little worth calling Christian, remains when this is done. It is inconsistent, to say the least, to stress the moral teaching of Christ while ignoring (or denying) His claims about Himself and His teaching about God, including His references to His words and His works as the demonstration of the truth of these claims. Such an attitude belies real respect for Him.

While we must not understress the miraculous in Christianity, it is also possible to overemphasize its importance. Christian faith is more than acceptance of the supernatural features which it undoubtedly embraces. It is a mistake to imagine that the Christian miracles were intended to convince sceptical people. The scriptural account does not suggest that this was the outcome. According to the gospel records both belief in Christ and unbelief co-existed in the presence of the same wonderful works. What was done was never so commanding as to compel a favourable response. Frequently the effect was to deepen adverse reaction to Christ: the more wonderful the deed, the more determined was the opposition (see, for example, John 11:47,48). Another consequence of the miracles was to

produce superficial followers of Christ: the unsatisfactory nature of this kind of response was noted by Christ long before events showed how shallow it had been (see John 2 : 23-25). Plainly belief in the miraculous is not the end in itself. If our response to Christ is the right one, according to the scriptural pattern, we must believe in Him as much more than a wonder-worker. His words, His character, and His person are of prime importance. The miraculous events must be allowed to draw attention to Him; it is their **significance** which must be sought and grasped. Those who companied with our Lord in the closest sense had a truer and deeper perception of what they witnessed. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1 : 14). In terms like these they expressed the insight they had gained; and we too must join them, in a like spirit of humility and worship, if His mighty works and His gracious words are to have their full impact upon us.

THE CENTRAL MIRACLE

As a first approach, then, it is not very helpful to give piecemeal consideration to the miraculous events recounted in the gospels, hoping in this way to decide whether they can be believed or not. To get closer to the heart of the matter, it is important to see that the whole of the Christian revelation is presented as a unique event, of an unquestionably supernatural kind. We are confronted in our bibles with one single comprehensive miracle, which centres around Christ Himself. The supreme claim is made, that, in Christ, **God** was manifest in the flesh. Our reaction to this will determine all our other attitudes. Believing it, we shall

certainly expect more-than-ordinary occurrences to be related in the history of such a stupendous happening. Where it is not accepted, doubt about the miraculous details will be inevitable. "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" (Matthew 22 : 41-46) continues to be the critical question, the question to end all questions. The firm truth implanted in the soul of one who truly knows Christ is "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16 : 16). Christian readers may well be thankful for light from heaven which enables them to be decisive on this key issue.

Seen from the viewpoint outlined above, the **suitability** and the **consonance** of the Christian miracles are features to be noted. In accepting them, we are not committed to credulous and uncritical acceptance of everything which would claim to be of a supernatural kind. Relics with magical properties, visions in the sky, holy water, and the like, will seem to us of an altogether different character from the gospel miracles. The New Testament miracles are not at all like mere magic. They are never acts of a merely spectacular, useless, kind. There is a distinctness and a quality about them, commanding our respect and attention. They are always acts which are meaningful; often they are acts of power, yet also acts of kindness towards individuals, acts of concern for humankind. The authority and grace of the Doer of them shines prominently everywhere. All is consistent with the claim that it is God's attitude and God's activity we are witnessing here. Again and again, moved with compassion, He dealt with otherwise hopeless individual cases. At other times, we witness an onslaught in depth upon demonic forces, which

seems designed to show how exhaustless, and yet how costly, was His intention and His desire to free men from the grip in which they were held. Elsewhere, particularly in the fourth gospel (where the miracles are called **signs**), miracles are selected which provide special pointers to the unique person and glory of Christ. As he brings his gospel to a close, John explains that this has been his procedure (John 20 : 30, 31).

We may summarize our main theme therefore by stating that Christ Himself, God incarnate, is the central miracle of all. His incomparable moral teaching, embodied in all His actions and ways, needs to be seen in **this** context. His claims about Himself, reinforced and illustrated by deeds entirely in consonance with them, must be given the full weight that they deserve. There is no Christian revelation apart from their truth.

Unique importance is of course to be attached to the closing events of the story, as it took place on earth. His **death** on the cross has no outwardly miraculous aspects, but it is in reality the key Christian event. He came with this object in view above all others ; He came to die ; here is the pivot of the whole story. The awful fact of sin must be faced and dealt with. There, in a transcendent way, God was displayed : His limitless love was demonstrated, His high standards upheld and underlined. It was done in an absolute and indisputable sense. Where sin abounded, grace much more abounded. There are special glories surrounding His atoning work which are of an inward and inexpressibly deep character. This certainly is an essential and basic part of the one supremely miraculous story.

Equally vital is the **resurrection** of Christ. This event, though seemingly unbelievable when seen alone, is nevertheless the apt and necessary sequel to the earlier events we have considered. It crowns and confirms all the rest ; it is the final seal upon the claims of Christ, the ratification of the value of His death. Unlike many of the earlier occurrences, however, special prominence is given to its evidential value. It was not an entirely private occurrence. Unbelief is challenged by it. " This thing was not done in a corner " (Acts 26 : 26) ; " God - - - hath given assurance unto all men (that He will hold them accountable) in that he hath raised him from the dead " (Acts 17 : 31). Christ Himself spoke (in advance) of His resurrection as the crowning proof of His greatness and glory, which would have all the evidential qualities to faith, though to unbelief it would still remain a stumbling-block (John 2 : 18-22).

In this wonderful way, the historical events associated with the incarnation reached their completion. When faced with this, one early witness, not easily persuaded of its likelihood, was impelled to react with the confession " My Lord and my God " (John 20 : 28). It came from his innermost being, confronted as he was with the greatness of His Lord. So too it should be with us, if we respond to Him as He deserves. The other reaction, however, always remains a possible one. As yet there is no coercion about the claims of Christ.

In concluding this section, one further point is worth noticing. The character and quality of Christianity is such as to leave every reason for doubt about scepticism itself. People may claim to reject the miraculous, but in a sense they have a bigger miracle still on their hands. The

difficulty of giving for the life of Jesus and its consequences, any explanation which is not harder than the Christian one is very great indeed. Sceptics believe the harder thing.

MIRACLES TODAY ?

As compared with the gospels, the book of Acts relates relatively few outwardly miraculous events. As the book progresses they become still scantier in number. Undoubtedly, in the Christian scriptures, the miracles cluster round the special unique events : they appear during the life of Christ, after His resurrection, and in the opening phase of the growth of the church after the descent of the Holy Spirit of God. This alone is enough to make us question the propriety of *extra-scriptural* miracles. Also, as we have seen, the quality of many supposed miracles of more recent date raises serious doubt about their acceptability. Rather, the New Testament teaching seems to suggest that overt events of this kind do not fit the character of the present day, when **faith** is the Christian's principle of life, when **spiritual** activity and growth amongst Christians should be the order of the day.

A great deal which is of a more-than-natural kind does, however, continue throughout the Christian age. The use of the term miracle may be less appropriate here, but within the lives of individual Christians, and in a joint sense too amongst Christians, spiritual life manifests itself in various ways. The opening verses of Acts indicate a change in the kind of activity about to be related. What Jesus **began** to do, in person on earth, was **continued** from heaven in a spiritual way. The descent of the Holy Spirit gives new character to the way God is at work. Effects of this kind are numerous ;

the new birth, the changed life ; the person with the old sinful impulses no longer dominant, whose actions are in subjection and devotion to his unseen Lord ; men and women who are "alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6 : 11). These are certainly more than merely natural occurrences. Fellowship amongst Christians, and mutual help and growth in the things of Christ, flow from a sharing in the same spiritual life ; here too is evidence of a real work of grace, having its source well outside the ordinary run of events. Our Lord, by His Spirit, is building His church, adding to it daily. Within the lives of those who compose it He is fostering features after His own likeness and character.

The few miracles related in the Acts belong to the transitional stage between these two phases of our Lord's work. Some of them may fairly be considered as **illustrating** the changed character of the Lord's activity in the situation then opening. A good example is the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the temple (Acts 3). We refer to this briefly in conclusion. It would be hard to imagine a better example of a complete and unhopedor change in a man's life. At first, begging and strengthless, every day alike, living a hopeless drab life with no horizon other than the next coin he might be given. Then, changed "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" into a living demonstration of Christ's life and power "walking and leaping, and praising God." Later, standing with the disciples, adding substantially to the testimony regarding Christ by his very presence with them ; so that even their opponents must admit (in private if not in public) that a notable and undeniable miracle had been done. That Name still moves people, and confounds adversaries.

All this has, or should have its parallel in the experience of Christians of our day. In some degree it is no doubt true in every Christian life. Striking and undeniable cases are by no means non-existent in the modern

scene. May our Lord have His full way with us, producing what is distinctive and honouring to Himself, and adding thus in a small way to the evidence of His greatness which He has so copiously provided.

IN THE REALM OF THE SUPERLATIVE

A. H. STORRIE

THE GREATEST SIGHT :

“Behold the Lamb of God.”

(John 1 : 36.)

THE Gospel of John has rightly been described as the most profound book in the world. Yet it is simple in its language, for it was written, under divine inspiration, by a simple man, a humble fisherman. The first eighteen verses of chapter one, forming the prologue, is certainly the greatest writing ever penned. In the verse above quoted, John the Baptist calls attention to the Lord as the Lamb of God, and doubtless did so with the deepest feelings of admiration and the highest possible exultation. And who was He whom he bade his hearers behold ? Therein lies the greatest sight that eyes can rest upon : the Lamb of God ! Looking back, the first chapter of John's Gospel sparkles and glows with the divine glories of the One there presented. He is the Word who ever was, who was with God and who was God. He is the Logos—the expression of all that God is, and He is the substance expressed. He is also the mighty Maker of all things, and exclusively so. In Him was the life that is the light of men. To Him the Baptist bore witness.

Amazing truth, the world's Creator was unknown in the world He made, such was the world's dense darkness ! He came to “His own” only to be refused ! Yet, there were some who received Him, thereby becoming the children of God—a vital relationship, for such were born of God.

As the Word He ever was, but He became flesh and tabernacled with men, who beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Following the Baptist's faithful testimony, which includes our Lord's baptism with all its glory and beauty, we come to the second heralding by John of the Lamb of God (v 36). Is the thought not overwhelming that this great One, eternal in His being and in His omnipotence, is also the Lamb of God, and therefore the embodiment of docility, humility, purity and sacrifice ? Andrew and his companion “came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day. . .” May each one of us have the same blessed experience, for as another has said : “To contemplate Him as the Lamb, is to have Him engross our thoughts. To meditate much upon the Lamb of God is to engage our minds with the

greatest subject of thought in the universe. There is no subject in the world so vast, so sublime, so pure, so elevating, so divine. Give me to behold the Lord Jesus, and my eyes see every precious thing."

We know that we see our blessed Lord in other aspects, but in the midst of the throne in heaven He is still "a lamb as it had been slain."

THE GREATEST LOVE :

"Greater love hath no man than this"

(John 15 : 13.)

AS is well known, love has a great place in the writings of the apostle John. Three times we read of his leaning on Jesus' bosom, and this not to make any petitions, but in deep appreciation of the divine love that there pulsed. May each one of us not do likewise, and thus abide in divine love? Is this not the highest blessed individual experience open to every believer today?

All things have their climax; and the climax of love is to die for its object. How deeply the soul of the apostle Paul must have been moved as he penned those words ". . . the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20). The love of God is towards the world; the love of Christ is towards the church; but the love of the Son is always towards the individual: "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus," (John 11:5). "Gave Himself" writes Paul! we affirm, with the greatest of reverence, that He could not have done more; such is the climax of love. Our Lord's crucifixion has well been described as the masterpiece of love, for His dying excels all His other deeds. His agonizing death of the cross surpasses all His other acts. His incarnation was a great marvel:

" See Him in the manger,
God on earth, a stranger,
As a babe in swaddling clothes the
world's Creator lies,
By the great neglected,
Unto scorn subjected,
Whilst the angels haste to feast on
Him their wondering eyes."

But a greater wonder is His cruel death upon the cross of surpassing agony. We do our utmost to make our loved ones as comfortable as ever we can, in their dying moments; but the Lord of the universe, He to whom all power belongs, is impaled on a Roman gibbet, even bereft of His garments, having been scourged, spat upon, bruised and crowned with thorns. And, saddest of all, He was forsaken by His God when "He who knew no sin was made sin for us. . . ." Well may we speak of the love of Christ that passeth knowledge!

THE GREATEST HOPE :

"They shall see His face. . . ."

(Revelation 22 : 4).

COULD the redeemed of the Lord hope for anything more sublime, elevated or blessed?

What must Mary's feelings have been when she looked upon her wondrous Child and saw, as doubtless she later did, His sinless smile? And as a boy how fair He must have appeared in the midst of the learned doctors in the Temple, hearing them and asking them questions! And did He not come into something of His own on the mount of transfiguration? "His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light," (Matthew 17:2). As Peter records: "we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." Peter does not record having seen Moses and Elijah, but he does record the Father's voice to Him from the excellent glory:

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (2 Peter 1:17). We, too, shall see His face, but we shall not forget that it was, for our sakes, once “more marred than any man’s.”

And who are they who have this greatest and most precious of all hopes? They are His servants, who have already by faith here below, “Looked unto Him, and were lightened.” Theirs will be the heaven

of heaven, the cream of heaven, to see His face, and to come out in His character, having His name in their foreheads.

“There is rest in the calming grace
That flows from those realms
above;
What rest in the thought! we
shall see His face,
Who has given us to know His
love!”

SEEK YE FIRST

J. S. BLACKBURN

5. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

OF the three great kingdom discourses of Christ in Matthew’s Gospel, the first, in chapters 5 to 7, gives the laws controlling behaviour in the Kingdom, and the characters suitable to the Kingdom. “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God,” is a precept taken from Luke’s form of this discourse, and if we seek to obey it we must give a high place to accepting the challenge of these chapters. Too often the defence mechanism is adopted of assuming that since this is a Kingdom, and not a Church address, we can quietly ignore it for practical purposes. To read these chapters with conscience awake is to realise their challenge to every one who names the name of Christ.

At this stage not a word is said to modify the expectation from Daniel’s prophecy as to the form in which the Kingdom of God was to be set up, except for several indications that these directions were to apply to disciples in a hostile world.

It is first to be noted that the Great King here addresses Himself to confessed disciples. The way of salvation, of repentance and faith

will not be found here, nor the redemptive work of Christ which makes them possible. The hearers are clearly understood to be disciples of the Master, and secure in the awareness of a settled relationship with their Father in heaven. This relationship with their Father in heaven, and the implied participation in His nature is the only hint of the power which produces such character and makes such behaviour possible.

As we have already remarked, it has been questioned whether these precepts are valid and mandatory for believers in the church dispensation. This suggestion must be examined, and it will easily be seen that there are senses in which the sermon shares the position of the gospels generally, that of a transitional and intermediate period between what was proper to pious Jews as pictured, for example, in the opening chapters of Luke’s gospel, and the status of believers subsequent to the gift of the Holy Spirit. It would be foolish to ignore this transitional character. In John 16: 12 to 15 this incomplete nature of all

that the Lord imparted to His disciples is made explicit : " I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them yet. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth."

That this discourse presents a challenge greatly in advance on all that went before will emerge clearly in a moment ; but the main point on which there remains something which falls short of the full New Testament position concerns the Law. It will soon be seen, however, that the terms in which the Law is here enforced and confirmed and fulfilled are not really out of harmony with Galatian truth, but most clearly leave room for it. When, positively, we see that the moral basis for this teaching is perfection, as God is perfect, it must be recognised that we should abandon any reserve in applying these precepts to ourselves, and enter on a confrontation of conscience and precept, of set purpose, with boldness and courage, as well as with humility and contrition. Here is the beginning of seeking first the Kingdom of God. Here, first of all, is the point at which we will pour the first of our prayers, and the finest of our energies into the enterprise of seeking the Kingdom.

An analysis of the sayings collected together in these three chapters will serve to highlight their unity and completeness.

- I 5 : 1—16. Disciples in a wicked world.
- II 5 : 17—48. The Kingdom's advance on the law.
- III 6 : 1—18. Good works : alms, prayer, fasting.
- IV 6 : 19—34. Material possessions.
- V 7 : 1—12. Our brothers and our Father.

VI 7 : 13—27. The true and the false.

I. This section has two parts. Vv. 3—12 contain the beatitudes and vv. 13—16 responsibilities of disciples in the world.

'Blessed' is a characteristic bible word, especially in the Psalms and in these paragraphs of the Gospels. It is to be clearly differentiated from the same English word in such usages as Ephesians 1 : 3, and 1 Peter 1 : 3 ("Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ") or Matthew 21 : 9 ("Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"). In these latter cases it means something akin to "praised" or "worshipped." In the beatitudes it is often said to be equivalent to "happy"; but this needs qualification.

Perhaps its meaning would be best represented by understanding that these are the people truly to be congratulated or even envied. In the Old English usage, (so long as we remove any idea of a bow to the gods of chance!) these are the lucky people. In any society there exist the characters praised, cheered, congratulated and envied by all their fellows. Indeed, to a very considerable extent the quality of a society is defined by the characters who receive its plaudits. Without question the adulation and material gain accorded to the idols of sport and entertainment are a most revealing exposure of the quality of our society and its values. Right in the forefront of what the Great King says about the Kingdom is this literally shocking list of its ideal characters : the poor, the mourners, the meek, thirsters after righteousness, merciful, pure, peaceable, persecuted. On earth these will inherit the Kingdom, and in heaven their reward is great.

In vv. 13 to 16 the disciples are brought face to face with their responsibilities and privileges as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. It is by their witness that they fulfil these preservative and light-giving functions. There must be good works to be seen and witness to hear. When men see their good works, then on hearing the witness they will glorify the Father of such people, whom they cannot see.

II. In this section, (most important for understanding the law of Moses), the relation between the law and the precepts of Christianity is explained. Here we have to take account of the fact that the disciples then being addressed were Jews, and indeed that the whole of Matthew's Gospel is an apologia for Christianity addressed to Jews.

The true purpose of the law can never pass away. It must be fulfilled. There are at least two important ways in which this fulfilment is to be understood. First, in Jesus the types and sacrifices and prophecies of the law were fulfilled. Second, when believers would come to be in the full light and blessing of His work, then the righteousness of the law would be fulfilled in them (Romans 8 : 3).

In the section from v. 21 to 48 six examples are given which contrast the Old Testament law with the present authoritative dicta of Christ. "It was said. . . but I say." These examples present the way whereby the law, not only as a means of justification, but also as a rule of life, was to be annulled by being replaced by a rule of life which very much **more** than fulfils the law. At the same time the law continues unimpaired as God's standard for condemnation, but never giving life. Full weight for Christianity **must** be given to the message of Galatians, depending on the gift of the Holy Spirit. "I through the law am dead

to the law, that I might live unto God." (Galatians 2 : 19). "If ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law." (5 : 18).

In this way we can see how Matthew 5 : 17—20 leaves room for fuller light for the Christian in Galatians. On the other hand, so far as the disciples' behaviour is concerned, nothing can be higher than the standard of these six examples in vv. 21 to 48, for they end, "Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." No standard could be higher than this, and no standard for the disciple should be lower.

In each case the law of Moses is not repealed, but the restraint of the new code searches not only the act, (murder v. 21, adultery v. 27, divorce v. 3, oaths v. 35, revenge v. 38, enmity v. 43) but also the state of mind, heart, and spirit from which action springs—a vast step ! Each of these issues is as alive and pressing and relevant today as it ever was, and their condemnation of the standards of the "permissive society" is devastating. To be a Christian is to be a fearless rejector of the morals of every permissive society, from that of Corinth to that of the late twentieth century. This is not to deprive the Christian of the good life, but to stimulate him on the road to the highest good. In the end it will appear that the Christian's natural power of will is not pitted against the seductions of all permissive societies, but he is given a new power from God. This part of the truth will follow later, but in this place, and by this voice, the standards are unequivocally proclaimed, and we must proclaim them with the same stark clarity, yet with humility.

The last two of the six, relating to revenge and hatred will serve as an example of how the principles are to be worked in detail. The English philosopher Hobbes in his "Levi-

athan" presented the concept of the state of mere nature, and his celebrated dictum was that in this condition human life is "nasty, brutish, and short." It is against this kind of background that we are to see the restraint on the "state of nature" imposed by the law of Moses. A man in this state of nature who suffered damage to his eye would not ever consider inflicting exactly equivalent damage on his assailant. He would go beyond. His state is exactly presented in the case of Lamech in Genesis 4 : 23, who boasted in the chant to his wives, "I have slain a man for wounding me!" It might be sufficient for Cain to avenge himself sevenfold, but Lamech would demand seventy-seven.

To this spirit and behaviour, the law of Moses brought restraint, the restraint of strict righteousness. Revenge must be exactly just, for an eye, an eye, and no more : for a tooth, a tooth, and no more. Shylock had to admit the impossibility of carrying this out in practice, but the principle of restraint on the stormy passions of man to strict justice is clear in the law of Moses. Hatred is to be reserved for enemies.

How immeasurable a step forward, and how unattainable a standard in merely human strength, appears in this 'new morality' now proclaimed by Jesus ! "But I say unto you, Love your enemies." It is not any longer to be a question of re-

straining the extent to which your hatred of your enemy may be expressed, but hatred, motivating revenge is to be replaced by love, blessing, doing good, and prayer. How many apparently insoluble personal problems would be solved by obeying v. 44 : "Bless them that curse you, . . . pray for them which despitefully use you."

Vv. 45 to 48 then point to the way God has taken to make possible the impossible, and that is to make men His children. V. 45 is perhaps the greatest of the sayings called by Chesterton 'gigantesque.' God's goodness is as absolutely impartial as the sun and the rain, and it is in this sense that the disciples were to imitate their Father's perfection.

The remaining sections III to VI will not here be dealt with in detail. Either they work out in other examples the warning against mere externalism in religion, or they deal with subjects which have already been considered in our first chapter. In 7 : 21 the final precept, leading to the parable of the houses built on sand or rock, is to contrast "saying Lord, Lord," and doing the will of our Father in heaven. In Kingdom truth, and to this we shall have to return more than once, hearing and confessing are very important indeed : but hearing and saying are by themselves not enough. The acid test is action : to hear these sayings and to do them.

NEW TESTAMENT MINISTRY

Professor Harnack, in the light of the lists of ministers given in Paul's Epistles, arrived at the following conclusions : 1, that in the Church of the first century a clear distinction was drawn between the ministry of preaching and that of administration ; 2, that the former was filled by apostles, prophets and teachers, the latter by bishops and deacons ;

3, that the former had received a definite gift from God, while the latter was of human appointment ; 4, that the former exercised a universal office, travelling from one community to another, while the latter had no authority outside the local Church to which it had been appointed.

Adapted from J. W. C. WAND.

QUESTION

IS the implication of the following sentences true or false? If unconverted persons break bread, it is their responsibility. Who are we to judge?

If unconverted persons break bread it is unquestionably their responsibility, as in the case of all their acts; but the responsibility of unconverted persons if they break bread is surely not the really important question for us to answer. I propose to assume that it is the questioner's intention that responsibility in the matter of unconverted persons breaking bread should be made the subject of enquiry from Scripture on a wider basis.

The first point to be made is that Scripture firmly allocates responsibility for care of the local Church in all its aspects to the persons variously called bishops or elders, each in the particular local assembly where he is found. It is not allocated to a "brother's meeting." It is not allocated to the Church in its entirety. Acts 20 : 28—"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers (bishops)." 1 Peter 5 : 1—"The elders which are among you I exhort, . . . feed (be shepherds to, tend, care for) the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight (bishopric)." 1 Timothy 3 : 2-5—"A bishop. . . must. . . know. . . how to. . . take care of the Church of God."

On some detailed ways in which this care will be required and is to be made effective by the action of the elders Scripture is no less ex-

PLICIT : to watch over and keep pure the doctrines taught (1 Timothy 1 : 3); to rule well (1 Timothy 5 : 17); to give hospitality (Titus 1 : 8); to convince gainsayers by sound doctrine (Titus 1 : 9); to stop the mouths of unruly talkers (Titus 1 : 11); to work hard at the job of eldership and so to provide leadership and advice (1 Thessalonians 5 : 12); to warn the unruly and comfort the feeble (1 Thessalonians 5 : 14). Will anyone maintain that these are not primary needs today, or that local assemblies would be different from what they often are if these functions were being diligently fulfilled?

In the second place, the problem created by the wish of unconverted persons to join themselves, temporarily or permanently, to the Church of God in any city was not an issue in Bible times or in the persecution centuries for obvious reasons. It is not therefore listed among the primary jobs allocated to elders. Nevertheless we believe that the Word of God provides the guidance needed for every age and condition. What guidance does it give about unconverted persons breaking bread?

One only really needs to ask whether this problem fairly comes under the heading of watching over and caring for the Church. It will be quickly seen that it is an essential constituent of caring for the Church. Let anyone put together two verses of Scripture. Acts 20 : 29-32 is explicitly given to provide guidance as to future conditions not at that time in existence. "After my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among

you. . . therefore watch. . . (and for your sole resource in dealing with future problems not yet experienced) I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace." Alongside this, consider John 10 : 12-13. "He that is. . . not the shepherd. . . seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep. . . because he. . . careth not for the sheep." Can we see these two Scriptures together and doubt that it is a responsibility of elders today to supervise, and be responsible for the entry into Church fellowship of persons who might be wolves ?

Again, consider Church history. What was the real point of origin of the state of affairs in which we find so many so-called Churches almost completely secularised ? (The Church condition from which many of us believe we have by the grace of God been recovered.) It stems unquestionably from the action of Constantine in making Christianity for the first time a state religion, with the necessary consequence that heathen nations incorporated into the Empire were by that fact assumed to have the right to Christian privileges. Conversion to Christ was by the sword. (This is in my view the most likely symbolic meaning of the Nicolaitanes in Pergamos (Revelation 2 : 15)—a spurious "victory over the peoples"). It should have been a major job of those who were at that time responsible for watching over the Churches to prevent the entry into the Church of these hoards of unconverted persons. It was the point at which the Church began to pass into centuries of almost complete darkness, from which only partial recovery has been granted.

Further questions arise. I cannot escape the feeling that the question ultimately concerns permitting christians not normally in the same fellowship to break bread. Is the expression "breaking bread **with**" really a Scriptural idea ? Breaking bread includes in its grand fulness of meaning for the Christian heart that it is a badge of devotion to Christ and of the communion of His body, the Church. Should we permit our use of words to suggest that "to break bread with" is in God's sight an act of committal to any fellowship smaller than the Church of God ?

Another series of questions arises about elders. Many early Brethren believed and taught that the dispensation is in ruins, and we must not, and indeed cannot, attempt to restore the official structure of elderhood. But they did not deny and refuse to act on Scripture. They believed and acted on certain passages which they held to justify recognition of elders not ordained by apostles. Of these the most representative are 1 Thessalonians 5 : 12 and 1 Corinthians 16 : 16. I will suggest my own translation of the former. "And we beseech you, brethren, to recognise the men who are in fact undertaking the toil among you, and are providing the leadership, in the Lord, and whose counsel is in fact proving helpful." Should we be less definite today ? Should we ever take refuge behind the absence of apostolically appointed elders as an excuse for not carrying out the functions for which the Lord provides "the mighty ordination of the pierced hands" ?

6. THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

THE seven parables of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel make up the second great Kingdom discourse. After listening with the crowd to the parable of the sower, the disciples came to the Lord apart and asked Him why He was teaching by parables. "He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given." (v. 11) In this verse is a critical advance in the progress of the revelation of Kingdom truth, and the most careful consideration must be devoted to it.

In the chapters intervening between seven and thirteen there are four references to the Kingdom, and it is a matter of some interest that in two of these the expression used is not 'the Kingdom of Heaven,' but the 'Kingdom of God' or simply 'the Kingdom.' These references will not be given special attention at this moment, beyond noting that they might well have sounded mysterious to those who heard them before the explanation now given. In His commendation of the centurion's faith, the Lord said to the crowds who were following Him, "many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven." (8:11) A little later the Pharisees committed the unpardonable sin of attributing the liberation of the demoniac to Beelzebub. In reply, the Lord vigorously repudiates this charge, and explains that the intervention of God in power for the liberation of man from devils is the Kingdom of God. "If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the

Kingdom of God is come unto you." In these two sayings, uttered in the hearing of the crowds, the Lord would appear to them, and indeed was, witnessing both to the fact of a Kingdom then present, and at the same time to a Kingdom promised for the future when all the saints of all ages would enter into their fulfilment and reward. How could both be true? The new revelation now to be given explains this riddle for the first time.

These references and the chapters in which they occur also bear witness to the state of affairs which made this the opportune moment for the new revelation. The picture presented is of the national leaders with eyes wide open withholding acceptance of the Kingdom being preached, and recognition of and submission to the Person in whom that Kingdom had come near. In superlative degree the Lord Jesus had shown Himself to possess every quality required to fit Him for the throne. See His compassion in 9:36. "When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." Being moved with compassion, would His wisdom be equal to guiding the people aright? Behold in the Sermon on the Mount the laws forming a Kingdom which would indeed be the desire of all nations, the guidelines for a society promoting man's highest good. Given the compassion and the wisdom, would He wield the power to deliver men from the Evil One? Those who are most familiar with the story are as much as any in

danger of overlooking the stupendous marvel of His instant mastery over all the foes of mankind, from those which have by the development of the highest human powers been with difficulty kept in check, to those which have without a single exception defeated the efforts of the greatest. In the portion of the story contained within the limits of only two chapters, Matthew nine and ten, disease, demons, tempest, and even death itself are under His control. Where He rules, these foes will not any longer remain to bring suffering and sorrow. Gather together the wisdom of all the philosophers and the knowledge of all science and the might of every conqueror and it will be found that a start has scarcely been made to master these four tormentors of man. Jesus was master of all, and yet He was "despised and rejected of men ; a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ; and we hid as it were our faces from Him ; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." In the wisdom and knowledge of God, the full proof of man's evil, as well as the full power of God's love, required such a climax, and so there was necessary a form of the Kingdom of God suitable to a King refused and therefore absent in heaven.

Attention must first be given to seizing the full import of the words 'mystery' and 'mysteries' as everywhere understood in bible times. The word 'secret' in A.V. of Daniel 2 represents the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and the LXX translation of the same word is 'mysterion.' In the Greek language from the earliest times and right through the Bible period the word 'mystery' meant a secret the knowledge of which was greatly to be desired by men and imparted special powers and privileges to men who possessed it. Such knowledge was un-

attainable by human powers, and was capable of reception only by the initiated. Great importance was attached to the process of initiation, and thereafter such knowledge could only be imparted to men by God, revealing it by His Spirit. This word evidently served the purpose of the Spirit of God, since it is taken over by the inspired writers of Holy Scripture, and a christian meaning given at every point.

The passage now under consideration is the first example of the New Testament mysteries, and like several others, has special reference to the period between the first and second comings of Christ, a period relatively unilluminated by Old Testament prophecy. A distinguishing feature of this first New Testament mystery is that in two out of the three Gospels where it occurs, the plural 'mysteries' is used. In non-biblical literature the plural 'mysteries' described the rites of the mystery-religions. I can only suggest that in Matthew and Mark the plural 'mysteries' denotes each of the parables of Matthew thirteen as separately a mystery, and perhaps our study of them will confirm the justness of this view.

By the Lord's use of the word mystery, therefore, we are prepared to expect the divine revelation of a secret hitherto hidden. Every part of the expectation aroused by the introduction of this word is satisfied in the verses 11 to 17 which form the general part of the Lord's answer to the disciples' question, Why speakest Thou unto them in parables ? Is this secret worth knowing ? Is it greatly desirable ? Read vv. 16 and 17. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see : and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye

see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." Is its reception greatly dependent on the spiritual history and condition of the hearers ? Indeed it is. The crowds and the leaders could not see or hear rightly because their heart was waxed gross, and their ears dull of hearing, and their eyes they had themselves closed. The disciples could see and hear because they were disciples. They had accepted the authority and the Person of the Divine King himself, and it was by His revealing authority that they could hear and understand.

In what sense was the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God a secret hitherto hidden ? It was no secret that the Kingdom would certainly come. In our chapters three and four we have already remarked on this and described in some detail the Kingdom as Daniel foresaw it. What Daniel prophesied the wise understood. The secret hitherto unrevealed was the **form** in which the Kingdom would at first be seen. No contrast could be greater than that between events which inaugurate the two forms of the Kingdom. The Kingdom as foreseen by Daniel begins with the coming of Christ like the lightning, which every eye shall see. The LORD shall send the rod of His strength out of Zion. He shall rule in the midst of His enemies. His people shall be willing in the day of His power. The Kingdom in its mysteries was to be inaugurated by the Sower going forth to sow the seed of the Word of God, in the manner we shall shortly study in detail. The seven mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven begin with the personal activity of Christ here in Person in the world, the story of which activity unfolds itself in Matthew as we have seen. "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of

Man." And they end with the harvest at the end of the age. In Matthew we learn that the end of the age is the period immediately preceding the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven. They thus unfold the story of the Kingdom over the whole period between the first and the second comings. During the Kingdom when established in power in the future, Satan will be bound and shut up, "that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled." During all the period of the Kingdom mysteries, the enemy will be most active in his efforts to nullify and to frustrate the effects of the Word in spreading the Kingdom.

It is our purpose to examine the seven mysteries in some detail, but it will be useful to make some general observations at this stage. The parables of Matthew thirteen are naturally divided into two classes, by the fact that the first four were uttered in the hearing of the multitudes by the sea side, while the last three were given to the disciples alone, inside the house. "Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house : and His disciples came unto Him." (13 : 36) Three parables were explicitly interpreted by the Lord, and apparently all the explanations were spoken to the disciples alone. While it is plain that the crowds did not understand even what they heard, yet the first four parables present the mystery Kingdom in its outward form as seen by the sea of the nations, while the last three present an inside view, as the heart of God is engaged in it. In the latter, there is no active energy of evil.

Within this broad distinction, we may distinguish two pairs in the first group of four parables. The first two parables, both concerned with sow-

ing the seed, cover the whole period from one point of view, and bring us already to the end of the age. The third and fourth parables, those of the mustard seed and the leaven, present particular views of the ways in which the mature system is permeated with evil. The last three dwell on the joy of the King in what gleams and glows through all the evil, the treasure and the pearl, and, in the last, the care taken to garner "the good." In the treasure and the pearl we come to the point where the two great themes of the Church and the Cross enter into the Kingdom mysteries.

"Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an

householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." (v. 52) Here is an objective for all who seek first the Kingdom—to be well-supplied householders who can make good provision for household or for guests. Perhaps the idea of a scribe instructed unto the Kingdom envisages a scribe in whose mind and heart are stored the treasures of the Old Testament. If such a man were to become a disciple, he would then add immeasurably to his treasure, by becoming instructed unto the Kingdom. Let every reader list high amongst the aims on which he expends the best of his energies, to be such a scribe, to be such a householder, and, under the Master, to be able to dispense of such a treasure.

SHINE IN - SHINE OUT!

J. STODDART

A STUDY OF 2 CORINTHIANS 4 : 6,7

OF all created wonders there are few which provide such complete contrast as that between light and darkness. In source, character and effect they present the most absolute incompatibility. Scriptures abound which appeal to this fact, both in Old and New Testaments, to illustrate the moral dissidence between good and evil. Perhaps one which comes most readily to mind is the question asked in 2 Corinthians 6 : 14, "What partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" No answer is given because it is self-evident. No single whit of agreement is there between them.

A right understanding of the verses under review is helped by a careful consideration of the account

of Creation in Genesis 1. Paul regards this as understood when he writes, "For God Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness. . ." This is clearly a reference to Genesis 1 : 3 where the first utterance of the Creator is recorded, "And God said, Let there be light and there was light." Not until the fourth day were the "greater and lesser lights," sun and moon, made to rule the day and night, so that the light of the first day was not derived from that source. We read that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1 : 5), and such must have been the underived and uncreated light which dispelled the initial darkness in which the earth was shrouded. Thus, whether in the physical or the spiritual sphere, when God begins

His work of creation, He sheds the light of His Own presence on the scene, and the darkness must retreat before Him.

This is the God Who has "shined in our hearts" to dispel the moral darkness there, and v. 4 states that this is the effect of "the gospel of the glory of Christ, Who is the image of God." The shining of Creatorial glory must have been great, but how much greater this moral glory shining in its effulgence in the Son, by Whom all things were made. What but sovereign grace could ever have caused such wondrous light to shine in a believer's heart? What joy to be able to say, if nothing more, "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." (John 9 : 25) Yet in the unbelieving mind the darkness remains, because blinded by the god of this age. Thus faith alone is the window through which God's light shines in, and its transforming power is experienced in the heart. But the simple fact is that a window has a double function, (a) to allow the light to shine in, and (b) to let the light shine out. Let us observe in v. 6 that He has "shone in our hearts for the shining forth (or radiancy) of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (J.N.D.) Here surely is something which requires more consideration than it sometimes receives.

The shining in of the light causes us to say with Job, "I abhor myself," but it also eclipses everything else, even the brilliance of the noonday sun, as in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. What heart can contain the brightness of such light? Surely it must shine forth, and though for three days Saul remains without sight, soon he is miraculously made to see again. A few days with the disciples at Damascus and we read, "straightway he preached Christ in

the synagogues, that He is the Son of God." (Acts 9 : 20) The light that had shone in was now shining out, and continued to do so ever more effectively from then on. Ananias who was the first disciple sent to the newly converted Saul, was told by the Lord that "he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." Now v. 7 says, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels" and this man was among the first of these.

Doubtless the "treasure" describes the surpassing quality of the light as it touches the heart. Whatever we regard as treasure must have a powerful effect upon our lives, for we recall the Lord's words that "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6 : 21). Again in the parable of Matthew 13, when the man had found treasure hid in a field, "for the joy of it he goes and sells all whatever he has, and buys that field." (v. 44 J.N.D.) But the remarkable thing here in 2 Corinthians 4 : 7 is that such priceless treasure is placed in so unworthy a casket. Usually men place their gems in that which would enhance or even add to the value of the gems. But an earthen vessel, a vessel of clay could scarcely do this, and indeed we might think it could only obscure the light. Why does God choose to place His treasure in so earthy a man as Saul of Tarsus, who never cherished a right thought about Christ, but opposed and persecuted Him? Surely the latter half of v. 7 supplies the answer to this enigma. "That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

We cannot read these verses without casting our minds back to the astonishing saga of Gideon's victory in Judges ch. 7. Seemingly contrary

to all good judgement, Gideon had successively **reduced** the size of his army from 32,000 to 300 to deal with the overwhelming host of the Midianites; and the equipment of his men seemed equally incongruous, for "he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers (earthen vessels), and lamps within the pitchers." But at the command of Gideon they advanced upon the enemy camp, blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. Only when the earthen vessels were **broken** did the light shine out, and the hosts of darkness (represented by Midianites and Amalekites, who "lay along the valley like grasshoppers for multitude") ran, and cried and fled in terror. What military strategist could have conceived that broken earthen vessels could have proved so effective a weapon? "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." (2 Corinthians 10 : 4)

But the object of the exercise is "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." (v. 7) Of His chosen vessel, the Lord said, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake." The surpassing greatness of God's power was to be demonstrated in that fragile vessel of clay, crushed and broken by suffering yet triumphantly shining out in the darkness, and spreading the light of God's grace in every possible, and impossible situation. The outward man may perish (the vessel of clay), yet the inward man is renewed day by day (the treasure within). Such then is the process by which God suits the vessel for His Own purpose and glory. But we might think that the cost is high, and even question whether God's ends are best served by such means. We think of Paul,

commissioned to be the apostle to the Gentiles and yet permitted to be thrust into a Gentile prison almost as soon as he set foot on European soil. Yet the "excellency of God's power" opened wide not only the prison doors but the stony heart of the warder and of many another in Philippi. Aggravated daily by a thorn in the flesh, the very messenger of Satan, how could this make him a better vessel for God's service? He must pray and pray again that this might depart from him, so that his service might not be impaired. But let us hear the answer to such importuning. "The Lord said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And the apostle's response? "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the **power of Christ** may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12 : 7/9) And so with the complete catalogue of Paul's tribulations, each one became an instrument in the Potter's skilful hand to perfect His chosen vessel and to cause the light to shine more powerfully.

How surprised his Philippian friends must have been to receive Paul's letter from the prison at Rome, and to hear him say, "I want you to know, brethren, that what has happened to me has really served to **advance** the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ." (Philippians 1 : 12 R.S.V.) Defeat? No! Frustration? Never! Advance? Most surely! The most radiant light that ever shone through that vessel of clay streamed from the darkness of that same prison at Rome, and we need only reflect how poor and ignorant the Church, through its history till this day, would have been without the so-called prison epistles of Ephesians, Philippians and Colos-

sians. To read and value these letters is to allow the light of the knowledge of the glory of God to shine into our hearts, but are we prepared to be as vessels of clay in the Potter's hand, moulded to His design, so that we might radiate that light in this world of darkness? Here then is the challenge implied in the two verses considered. It is, alas, all too possible to find joy in the truth we have re-

ceived, the shining in of the light, and yet be much less concerned that this precious light should shine out to others who as yet may not have known its blessing.

May we covet, not only the light, but to be vessels of that light, "vessels unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Timothy 2 : 21).

"BLESS THE LORD AT ALL TIMES"

HAMILTON SMITH

(Psalm 34)

(Verse 1). The thirty-fourth Psalm presents the experience by which a godly man learnt to bless the LORD at **all times**. It is easy to bless the Lord sometimes, when circumstances are favourable, but only faith, that that has proved His goodness and faithfulness, can bless the Lord at all times. Thus lifted above all circumstances the Lord is praised "continually."

(Verse 2). This spirit, that can praise the Lord at all times, will only be found in one who has unshaken confidence in the Lord. So the Psalmist can say, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." Wealth, social position, human ability, may fail us; but the Lord can be trusted at all times. Moreover, to glory in the Lord is to take ground on which all the saints can be together. At once, therefore, we read, "the humble shall hear thereof and be glad." An ignorant and unlearned man, like Peter, and a well-born and learned man, like Paul, find themselves on common ground, and on the highest ground, when both can say, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." To boast in poverty or

ignorance would be mere affectation; to boast in wealth or learning would be mere vanity. It was not Peter that said he was "unlearned and ignorant"; nor was it Paul who said he had "much learning." Others said these things of these believers. Forgetting the things that are behind, they could say, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," and, so doing they found themselves together on common ground and are both taken up by the Lord for the highest form of service as Apostles.

(Verse 3.) It is this lowly spirit, that glories only in the Lord, that draws the saints together. So at once the Psalmist adds, "O magnify the Lord **with me**, and let us exalt His name **together**." The believer who boasts in his wealth, or intellect, or birth, is seeking to magnify himself, and in that measure divides the Lord's people. How often division amongst the people of God can be traced to vain glory that seeks to magnify self. The disciples of the Lord fell out by the way through disputing among themselves as to who should be the greatest (Mark 34).

We thus learn that the humble spirit, that blesses the Lord at all times, boasts only in the Lord, and exalts His name, will draw the saints to one another with the Lord as their gathering centre and bond of fellowship.

(Verses 4-7). Having presented the great theme of the Psalm in the first three verses, the Psalmist passes on to give the experience by which he learnt to bless the Lord at all times, and exalt His Name. This god-fearing man found himself in circumstances which filled him with foreboding fears (4); his way seemed dark (5); and troubles accumulated (6). Difficulties and wrongs pressed upon him. He was opposed by those whose hearts were filled with enmity (21), whose tongues spoke evil, and who sought to cover their evil with guile (13).

In these difficult circumstances he did not rise up in a spirit of pride and anger, and strive with his opponents. He did not seek to avenge himself, but, he says, "I sought the Lord." He confides all his exercises to the Lord, and spreads out his trials before Him.

He then tells us the result, for, he says, "The Lord delivered me from all my fears." The Lord gave him light for his path, and saved him out of "all his troubles." Moreover, he found that, though opposed by man, he was guarded by unseen angelic power. If then the Lord delivers this lowly man from "all" his fears, and "all" his troubles, he may well bless the Lord at "all times."

(Verses 8-10). Having experienced the goodness of the Lord the Psalmist calls his brethren to "taste and see that the Lord is good," and thus realise the blessedness of the man that trusts in the Lord, and walks in His fear. Such will find, in a world like this, that they may have many needs, but they will not want. The

Psalmist had sought the Lord and had been blest; now he can say to others, "they that seek the Lord shall not want any good."

(Verses 11-14). In the verses that follow there is set before us the path of quietness and peace through a restless and hostile world. Would we find "life" in the midst of a world of death, and "see good" though passing through a world of evil, then let us so walk in the fear of God that we keep our tongues from the evil that would slander or injure others, and our lips from speaking guile in the attempt to excuse ourselves. Let us depart from evil and do good, and, instead of striving with our opponents, let us seek peace and pursue it.

(Verses 15-18). So walking we shall find that the eyes of the Lord are upon us and His ears are open to our cry. He is against them that do evil, but delivers the righteous out of all their troubles, and is nigh unto them of a broken heart and a contrite spirit. If our hearts are broken by all that is around, and our spirits contrite by reason of what we find in ourselves, we shall discover that it is still true that "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."

(Verses 19, 20). Nevertheless, though there is a path of "life" and "good" for the godly, it is ever true that, in an evil world, the righteous will suffer. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," but in their afflictions they will have the watchful care of the Lord. He delivers; He keeps His people from harm, for not one of their bones is broken. He will deal with all the wicked. He redeems the souls of His servants, and none that trust in Him will be left desolate. Thus learning the grace of the Lord in the midst of afflictions the soul may well say, "I WILL BLESS THE LORD AT ALL TIMES."

“BEHOLD YOUR KING”

J. S. BLACKBURN

Echoes from St. Andrews, 1967

3. THE TRANSFIGURATION

Matthew 17 : 1/8

THE subject of our study this morning will indeed be recognised by all, as in every sense of the term central to our series. Let us put verse 8 in the forefront as the great end that we pray might result from our meditation from this passage. After their sleep was passed, they lifted up their eyes and “they saw no man save Jesus only.” It is a very good thing when we can help each other and acknowledge the help that comes from another. But behind all, this is what we desire, that when all is said and done our eyes might be fixed upon “no man but Jesus only.” Let us keep before our minds and hearts all the time these two words, “Jesus only.”

I have suggested already that the transfiguration is central to the gospel story and to our study. It stands between the initial presentation of Himself by our Lord Jesus Christ to His earthly people and the moment when He set His face definitely to the cross. It stands at the moment when He first began to speak to His disciples of the cross. “From that time forth Jesus began to show unto His disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem and suffer”; in the same chapter in the gospel of Luke where we have the story of the transfiguration we read at that moment Jesus turned His face and set Himself to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9 : 51). “And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

It was in very truth a point that lay at the centre of the gospel story and therefore in the centre of our meditations of this week.

We must first ask the fundamental question, What was the transfiguration all about? What was its prime purpose? And in what particular way did it really represent to us the Saviour, the blessed Son of God? It is natural to us to think of this as being the shining forth of the divine glory of the One Who had veiled His glory in flesh. It seems natural to us to think of this as the representation of the very pinnacle of the glory that belonged to this Person Who was transfigured before His disciples. I venture to suggest that in thinking thus we should misconceive the passage, and that we ought to subject ourselves to what the passage itself says and what one of the principle participants, Simon Peter, says about it afterwards. From verse 28 of the previous chapter we understand that the transfiguration was the fulfilment of a promise given by the Lord Jesus six or eight days before, “They (shall) see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” The equivalent passage in the gospel of Mark reads: They shall see “the kingdom of God come with power,” and in Luke it simply says that they shall “see the kingdom of God.” Thus the true meaning and purpose of the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ was that the disciples should be given a sight of the Lord Jesus in the glory of His coming earthly kingdom.

Some will find this view inconsistent with the words which speak about the Son ; " This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear him." This is not so. That most excellent name of Son is used in scripture not only of Christ's eternal Sonship in deity (the only-begotten of the Father) but also as a title of the Messiah in manhood and beginning in time. In Psalm 2, to the king anointed on Zion's holy hill, Jehovah addresses Himself thus : " Thou art my Son ; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Also, in Isaiah 42, Jehovah speaks of His delight in His King : " Behold my servant, - - mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth ; - - he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles - - and the isles shall wait for his law." The Sonship of the Lord Jesus in manhood and in time is most clearly witnessed in Luke 1 ; when the angel, after promising that the Holy Ghost would come upon Mary and that the power of the Highest would overshadow her, continues " **therefore** also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." He shall be great and He shall reign.

I would like to press gently and humbly that we cannot get beyond these statements of the Lord that what was happening was that He was showing them a vision of the coming Kingdom as it would be in its power.

Now let us see what one of the principal participants says about this scene in 2 Peter 1 : 11, 12. " For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in re-

membrance of these things." " These things " in verse 12 are the things that belong to the Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and then Peter goes on to say, how important it is, since he is about to leave them, that he should put them in remembrance of these things. Then in verse 16 he explains " For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have thus the word of prophecy made surer (New Translation) ; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." In other words it was the word of prophecy about the coming Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ that was made surer to them when they saw this vision of His majesty on the holy mount.

What was the purpose of the transfiguration ? I feel that we have here a very practical example of the Lord's care for His disciples. In verse 13 of the previous chapter we have the familiar story of how the Lord Jesus asked His disciples what was the popular opinion of Himself, and then He elicited from Simon Peter the great confession : " Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And verse 21, " From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be

raised again the third day.” Now the Lord Jesus was explaining to His disciples that the One Who had said unto them “ follow me,” was not going to enter immediately into His Kingdom and His glory, but there would be an intermediate period of rejection and bitterest suffering. It must have been a staggering shock to them to learn that they were following a rejected Lord, and therefore they must expect to share His rejection. This is indeed true in the experience of all who truly follow the Master, from that time to this. “ If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it : and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it ” (v. 24).

Here we must pause, and point out as a matter of experience, the paramount importance for every Christian of this saying about losing our lives. The climate of life around us is such that few would dream of having any other object in life than that of extracting the maximum amount of pleasure. The true disciple of Christ is deliberately accepting a course of life which foregoes many pleasures which are regarded as life itself by the worldling. Without them he would consider himself as good as dead. With quiet insistence, this verse 25 reminds us that this is indeed true. The Christian, by confessing the rejected Christ as his Master, is deliberately choosing to lose his life, in the faith that in doing so he will gain the life that is life indeed. And we can only experience now, in any measure of its fullness, the life that is life indeed if we set ourselves with purpose to lose our lives here upon the earth. Many things in the mercy of God are given to us which give us pleasure and happiness, and relief and comfort, but in many important basic respects

the reason why we have foregone and strengthen each other to forego many things that other people pursue is because of this verse. We have been called to lose our lives, so that in this way we may really gain them. Let us never forget this. If someone points out what we are missing, our confession is that we are deliberately losing our lives in order to gain, now and hereafter, the life that is the real thing. “ Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

The disciples did not bargain for this. What can possibly keep and strengthen us if there lies before us a life like this ? There are many things to strengthen and keep and comfort the disciples in a life like this, but the particular thing that is given to the disciples here in order that it might strengthen them to lose their lives, is a view of the coming glory that lies ahead. If there is a deep, dark valley to be passed through then how different it is if there is also to be seen a bright shining land of glory ahead, and it was to let the disciples see the bright shining land of glory, with “ Jesus only” there that this vision was given to the disciples. It was given to them, as it says He was transfigured “ before them.” It was for the disciples, that they might see the glory of the coming Kingdom, that the Lord was thus transfigured. A well-known hymn, slightly amended, gives a just picture of this truth :

“ The Kingdom glory gleams afar,
To nerve my faint endeavour.
So then to watch, to work, to
war,
And then to rest for ever.”

Up to this point we have been considering the bearing of the previous chapter and of Peter’s witness in 2 Peter 1, in order to reach a clearer view of the true meaning and purpose of the transfiguration. We

must now dwell a little on the passage read.

Through the gospel page and Peter's letter, the mountain top experience is made available to every disciple, but it was to three chosen men that this vision was first given. With a wisdom and love far above our understanding, the Lord prepares His servants individually for what in His plan lies before them. Theirs was to be an outstanding responsibility in the church's earliest days. James was an early martyr and Peter and John were manifestly pillars on whom much depended. It was the choice of the Lord Himself which matched their future responsibility with the special acquaintance with Him given them in the holy mount, at the raising of Jairus' daughter, and in Gethsemane.

To see what they saw, the appropriate place was on "an high mountain, apart." Eyes which are to see clearly the things of God, have to be lifted above the plain of man's activities, and this is witnessed in the several mountain scenes of scripture.

If we put together the descriptions that occur of His appearance it has often been noted that there are two particular aspects which seem to strike the disciples though they were so overcome that, as Luke tells us, they fell asleep. These were the dazzling whiteness of the light and the brightness of the shining that they saw there. Moses, in the story of Exodus 34, was up there in the holy mountain and he came down with his face ablaze with the glory that reflected the fact that he had been in the presence of Jehovah. But what they saw here was no reflected glory. It was the glory of the Son of God that belonged to Him alone shining out and brightening all that lay around. He was white and He

was shining with purity and glory and majesty and they were almost smitten to the earth by what they saw. And then we read that there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him.

Now in closing I will draw attention to particular features of the totality of this scene, which is a representation of the coming Kingdom. It is a representation of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of man, in His Kingdom, and it is a representation of the Kingdom when it will come in power. Standing absolutely unique in the solitary splendour of His majesty, there is the blessed Son of God, and then we have two kinds of people with Him. First, Moses and Elias speaking with Him, and then on the ground completely overpowered by what they saw, the disciples still in the flesh.

Moses and Elias were respectively the men who originated and restored the true religion of Israel. Moses established it and Elijah restored it. And it was for this reason doubtless that this honour was put upon them and they were seen with the Son of God in the holy mount. Another most striking fact connecting the three persons here seen talking together, is that all three fasted forty days, and this surely forms another link between the denial of self presented as a challenge to the disciples shortly before, and the position of honour in which they are found on the mountain. But there are other facts about them which are very interesting. One of them died and is found here in heavenly glory after his death. The other never died, but was taken to heaven with the chariots of the Lord and fire, from another mountain. These two who are in closest communion with our Lord Jesus Christ, transfigured in His Kingdom glory, were repres-

entatives of the heavenly saints, those who will die and will be raised to meet the Lord in the air, and those who, will never die, but like Elijah will pass into the presence of the Lord, transformed to His likeness, but never passing through death.

The other members of this scene are the people who though believing in Jesus, were Jews and represent God's earthly people, having their particular part in the coming Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is in Luke's gospel that we read of the **occupation** of those who were with the Lord in the glorious majesty of His Kingdom. If we only had Matthew's account, when we read that Moses and Elias were talking with Jesus, we might have enquired what could possibly be the subject of such a conversation, there in the glory of the Kingdom. We read in Luke 9 : 31 that they spoke of His exodus, of His going out of the world by way of the cross, concerning which He had just been speaking to His disciples. They were speaking together of His death which was about to be accomplished at Jerusalem, and indeed the cross of Christ and the precious blood of the Lamb slain will for evermore be the theme of those who are with Him in His Kingdom.

Peter made the mistake of trying to put on an equality the two men who were in the glory with the Lord

Jesus, with Himself, and therefore the bright cloud overshadowed them. And indeed there were clouds lying ahead, clouds of deepest blackness for the Lord Himself, and for those who would be His own. They had been given this vision, so that amidst the darkest clouds, they may ever be strengthened by the knowledge that they will be with the Saviour in His coming glory. And out of that cloud there came the words, “ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear him.”

Of all the things on which we might meditate, there is nothing more wonderful, nothing more important, and, when all is said and done, nothing more effective in our hearts, than the knowledge that the Father's full delight is centred in the Son. According to the good pleasure of His will, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, God will gather together under one head all things in Christ (Ephesians 1 : 5). What is this, the good pleasure of God ? No reader of holy scripture could doubt that the Father's full delight is centred in the Son. To give to us the greatest possible spring for devotion to Him, and for desire to be like Him, in order to affect our worship, in recognising what it is that we should present to God that is always a fragrance and sweetness to Him, then perhaps the greatest of all lessons that we can learn is that the Father's full delight is centred in the Son. “ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear him.”

DAVID AND ABSALOM

COLIN CURRY

2 Samuel 14

THE life-story of king David is full of incident and interest. It has many admirable episodes, and also not a few shameful ones. We may be sure that lessons are to be learnt

from the sombre facts of the history as well as from its brighter features. Certainly the part of the story involving David's son Absalom belongs to the darker side of the picture.

Banished from his father's realm following the murder of his brother Amnon, the present chapter tells how Absalom was reinstated. His subsequent revolt against his father comes in the ensuing chapters. Some of the lessons of this part of the story are pointed out in this paper. Comments are centred mostly upon chapter 14.

THE STORY IN BRIEF

There seems little in common between David in this phase of his career and the man of bold faith in God, with the confident, free-acting, open-hearted spirit so characteristic of him particularly in his more youthful days. We see here a man under a cloud, a king not able properly to handle the situation which faced him. Stark and serious trouble had arisen, close at hand, within his own family. The personal grief was heavy enough; and there was also the burden of dealing with it rightly, in a public way, in accordance with his God-given responsibility as ruler of the kingdom.

This dark chapter in David's life does not stand alone. Other grim events, in which David himself had played a leading part, form its background. Gross and terrible sins, which David now bitterly regretted, lay in the fairly recent past. Psalm 51 enables us to sense something of the deep and harrowing experience he passed through when, his conscience having been awakened, he faced before God the enormity of his sin. Arising from the full confession and repentance which this experience entailed, he was able to know and marvel at the forgiving grace of God. But, nevertheless, it was impossible to undo the results of those deeds. David reaped the bitter consequences of his own lustful and murderous acts: he saw these very

things appearing again, in shockingly uncontrolled fashion, in two of his sons; first in Amnon, then in Absalom, taking the law into his own hands and murdering his brother in a calculated, merciless way. The chapter opens with Absalom in exile (not, it would seem, an over-severe penalty for so foul a deed) and with no intention on David's part to restore him.

Another actor in the story was Joab. He makes a move when David would have preferred none to be made. Joab was one of David's trusted military leaders, and clearly a hard and ruthless character. He had been an accessory, at David's instigation, in the death of Uriah the Hittite. Here again we see the shadow of earlier events cast upon the scene. David had used Joab then; he must take his advice now. That advice is given in crafty and veiled form; otherwise it might not have been accepted. By means of the story related by the widow of Tekoah, David is tricked into making a decision about Absalom. Her story about her two sons, one having killed the other, is basically similar to David's own story. Yet the details are made sufficiently different, and the plight of the poor widow appears to be so real, that David considers it quite unsuspectingly. He makes a quick decision in her favour; her son will be protected. Only then is David made aware that he is no bystander in the matter; he is presumed to have judged more than the widow's case alone. His attitude to Absalom is held to need reviewing in the light of what he has just pronounced.

So again David is seen caught in a web of developments which he would have wished to avoid. Absalom is brought back from exile, but David's reluctance about this is still

apparent. Absalom is made to remain in his own quarters, without seeing his father. For two years that situation continued; and it is changed only as a result of further high-handed action from Absalom. Then, Absalom ultimately meets his father again, as described in the final verse of the chapter. The coolness and the unreality of the reconciliation is the main impression gained, however. Absalom's next move, described in the following chapter, and indeed all his subsequent behaviour, confirms quite plainly that it was in no sense as a humble and repentant person that he was restored to his father's presence.

There can be no question about David's love for his son Absalom, despite the unpleasantness of his character. Later, after Absalom's death, the lamentation wrung from David's heart clearly indicated its reality and its depth. But David was also conscious of other principles which must be upheld. His duty to do what was **right**, and openly seen to be right, was clear. He well knew that kindness to Absalom, in the frame of mind in which he persisted, was not consistent with that duty. Wrongs in his own life, faced with God in a deep experience known alone to himself and God, sharpened David's awareness of the hatefulness of evil ways and attitudes, and strengthened his desire to uphold God's standards at all costs. Unfortunately those same wrongs had the effect of tying his hands, hampering his freedom to act according to the right. How could David possibly hope to appear consistent, in the eyes of Joab and others like him, in insisting on right dealing with Absalom when he had so recently flouted right principles in his own life? David's position is indeed a weak and unhappy one here, and its causes are not difficult to trace.

ITS LESSONS

The direct lessons of the story are almost self-evident. It clearly shows the gravity of **sin** and the impossibility of dealing with it, once involved in it. The complicated ramifications of a sinful act; the complete inability to undo what has once been done; the sorrow and shame into which sin, once committed, brings its author; these are some of the plain lessons we can gain. A man is in no position to deal with moral issues when in a state of moral weakness himself. Much may be cleared up by proper humility before God and confession of unworthiness. But, even though forgiveness is granted, and fully appreciated, the repercussions of a person's sin may long afterwards be felt. What a man sows, he also reaps.

Another lesson of the story is the folly of a light treatment of sin. It puts the emphasis on the need for **righteous** ways. Whatever David may have been obliged to permit, in his compromised position, it is **not** God's way to overlook wrong, and David knew this well. The story of Absalom indicates that mercy shown to a proud and impenitent person merely hardens him in those attitudes. It also underlines the fact that there is no ultimate profit, indeed there is great loss, in continuance in the self-interested line, in the haughty and unrepentant frame of mind.

Our Lord in a well-known parable told of the return and the reception of an erring son (Luke 15 : 11-23); and perhaps one of the most rewarding lessons of the present story is derived by contrasting it with that parable. In the parable, the reception given by God to a returning sinner was depicted; and, comparing it with the return of Absalom to his father, some striking differences are to be noted. First, the attitudes

of the two sons in their wrong-doing are completely different. Absalom defiantly says "If there be iniquity in me, let him kill me"; but the returning prodigal, meaning every word of it, says "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." God can, and will, welcome one who returns in this fashion, full of confessed error and emptied of self. But He does not, and will not, receive a person with high thoughts of himself and no sense of the seriousness of sin. Secondly, the warmth and scale of the welcome accorded to the prodigal stands out in marked contrast to the manner of Absalom's reception. The parable stresses the alacrity and the joy with which the father welcomed his long-lost son, illustrating in a remarkable way the richness and the free-flowing grace of God to those who are confessedly undeserving. It shows plainly that God is not restrained in any way in His readiness and His ability to show favour towards a true penitent.

David's weak position in relation to Absalom and his sin, hampered by past errors, knowing the right yet pushed into acquiescence with what he saw to be wrong, appears on the surface of this Old Testament narrative. Over against this we may see emphasized as its exact opposite, how strong and consistent is God's attitude towards sin and the sinner. Never can we imagine God hampered by past mistakes, unsure of what He does. Always He acts solely on His own right principles, never in any sense dictated to by others, answerable to none but all answerable to Him. All that He does He does freely, full of love for the sinful yet acting always according to His own holy nature, consistently fulfilling and holding high His lofty standards of righteousness. **How** He can do this, and yet readily lavish

His grace upon the sinner who bows in real repentance, is the basic wonder of the gospel. God is indeed "a just God and a Saviour," and it is the redemptive work of Christ upon the cross which is the substantiation of this great fact. (Romans 3 : 24 ; Isaiah 45 : 21)

"We must needs die, and are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him." So spoke the woman of Tekoah to David. She probably was unaware of the full content of her words. Though true, it was used to a doubtful purpose. Absalom's return from exile, brought about by this argument, was **not** on the lines of God's righteous means of reconciling men to Himself. We, nevertheless, with the aid of teaching elsewhere in scripture, can admire the full truth of her statement. Its opening words are sombre as well as true, pointing out the inevitable end towards which every life moves; it speaks of the past in our lives, too, regrettable but impossible to reverse. The present reality of God's impartial eye on each life is also stressed. None are really outside the grim mesh of sin and its consequences. But, though all this must be recognised, there is further truth of a glorious kind to counterbalance it. God indeed has **His** means of rescuing men and welcoming them into His favour, and those means are unquestionably right and glorious. His freedom to act like this is indisputable. Christ and His death are its guarantee and its measure. To prove it, the attitudes of repentance and of empty-handedness, not in word only but in reality, are needed. Boasting is excluded, except in the God Who can, and will, greet a humble person in such a magnificent manner.

COMFORT IN TRIAL AND HELP IN TROUBLE

HAMILTON SMITH

(Psalms 36 and 46)

IT is impossible for a god-fearing man to pass through an evil world without meeting trials and afflictions. The devil seeks to engross the believer with the trials, to bring in distance between the soul and God. Faith uses the trial as an occasion for turning to God, and thus, not only triumphs over the enemy, but, gets blessing in and through the trial. In Psalm 36 we have the experience of one who is faced with severe trial, but in turning to God finds deep comfort and great blessing in the trial.

(Vv. 1—4). The first four verses describe the trial. The servant of God is faced with an enemy who acts in such an evil way that it is evident he has no conscience toward God—“there is no fear of God before his eyes.”

Moreover, his enemy is so blinded by his own vanity that, even when his iniquity is thoroughly exposed and found to be hateful, he flatters himself that he is in the right.

Further, in his effort to prove himself right he falls back on guile and, with words of deceit, seeks to cover his iniquity. In malice he devises mischief, and is so lost to a true sense of right and wrong that he ceases to abhor evil.

Thus the godly man is faced with a conscienceless opponent, whose vanity will admit no wrong, who uses guile in his effort to cover his evil and who is in fact a malicious mischief-maker.

(Vv. 5—7). In the presence of this great trial the god-fearing man does not take the smallest step to injure his enemy, or call down vengeance upon him. He finds consolation in turning to the Lord, and counting upon His mercy and faithfulness.

God's mercy can shelter from all the malice of man, and His faithfulness will deal with all the evil. There is, then, no need for the god-fearing man to take up his own cause; his part is simply to commit himself to God, and leave all in His hands.

God's mercy is in the heavens, and His faithfulness reaches unto the clouds. Both are out of reach of the malicious devices of the wicked. Trusting God, and spreading out all our trials before Him, we shall find shelter from the malice of men under the shadow of His wings.

(Vv. 8, 9). Having found comfort and rest in the midst of trial, the soul is set free to enjoy the positive blessings that God has for His people. He learns that those who put their trust in God, not only find shelter under the shadow of God's wings, but that they will be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God's house. There are joys and pleasures that belong to the dwelling place of God, whatever form that house may take in the different dispensations. In God's house, man, and his malice, are forgotten, and everything speaks of God and His glory; so, in another Psalm, we read, “In His temple doth every one speak of His glory” (Psalm 29 : 9). For the Christian the Father's house is where Christ has gone, that home on which no shadow of death will ever come, where nothing that defiles can enter, where love and holiness fill the scene. It is our privilege to find our joy and satisfaction in looking on to the fulness of blessing in the Father's house where we shall be holy and without blame before God in love.

Moreover, if God gives us to feed on the fatness of His house, He also

gives us to drink of the river of His pleasures. Does not this figure of speech speak of the eternal counsels of God, settled before the foundation of the world, which no evil of man, nor failure of the saints, can touch? Through all dispensations, God, in spite of all the power of the enemy and the evil of men, is carrying out his pleasure to have a people for His own glory, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages world without end. This river of God's pleasure flows from eternity to eternity, and our souls are given to drink of its blessedness as we pass through time.

Furthermore, with God is "the fountain of life." Life is the enjoyment of the relationships in which God has set the believer with Himself—the living enjoyment of His favour. God, Himself, is the source of this life, and it is our happy portion to live the life by walking in communion with God in the enjoyment of this favour.

Finally, the Psalmist says, "In thy light we shall see light." Amidst the difficulties of this world the way may often seem dark, but God gives us light, and in His light we shall find light for every step of the path.

Thus, the godly man having committed himself, and his trials, to God finds shelter under the shadow of God's wings; satisfaction in the fatness of God's house; refreshment in the river of God's pleasure; favour and joy in the fountain of life, and light in the midst of the prevailing darkness.

(Vv. 10—12). In the enjoyment of these blessings the soul again expresses its confidence in the loving-kindness and righteousness of God. Those that know God and walk uprightly, can count upon God to uphold them, while the proud and the wicked will finally fall to rise no more.

Two truths of great practical importance, for believers of every dispensation, are brought before us in Psalm Forty-six. In the presence of the upheavals and conflicts of a godless world, we are reminded, first, that God is "a very present help in trouble." Secondly, in order to realise, and obtain, the present help of God, our part is to "be still" and know that God is God (Verses 1 and 10). Only faith can enter into these truths. Flesh can lean upon an arm of flesh; but flesh can neither trust in God, nor "be still" and wait for God to act.

Verse 1 presents the great theme of the Psalm—God, our refuge, strength, and present help in trouble.

Verses 2 and 3 the trouble and confusion of the world through which we are passing.

Verses 4 to 11, the means whereby God sustains the faith of His people so that they are enabled to "be still" and prove God to be "a very present help."

(V. 1). We do well to notice the little word "our" in the opening verse. It is true that God is a refuge; but believers can say, "God is **our** refuge." The world has those to whom it looks for protection, and guidance, in the time of trouble. Believers have in God their refuge from the storms and distresses of life. Moreover, God is our "strength" in weakness, and "a very present help in trouble." The better and more exact translation is, "a help in distresses very readily found."

To realise, however, that God is "a very present help," calls for the exercise of faith, for His present help is not always immediately apparent. Sometimes we have to wait for the manifestation of His present help. Our natural tendency is to endeavour to extricate ourselves from trouble by our own efforts, and

God may, for our blessing, keep us waiting until we have learnt that we are utterly without strength to meet the trial, and there is nothing left for us but to "be still" and learn that God is God.

Was it not thus, in the gospel day, that the Lord dealt with Martha and Mary when faced with the sickness of their brother? They were in sore trouble, and in their distress the Lord was their refuge. They rightly turned to Him and spread out their trouble before Him. They said, "He whom Thou lovest is sick." The Lord was indeed "a present help," though His help was not immediately forthcoming. Having received the urgent appeal of the sisters, we read that "He abode two days still in the same place where He was." Apparently He was doing nothing. He waited until death closed all hope in human efforts, and there was nothing left for the two sisters but to "be still" and learn that God is God.

This was indeed a trial of faith. Martha's faith was not equal to sitting "still," for we read that "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him; but Mary sat still in the house."

Then we see how graciously the Lord revealed Himself to Martha as "a very present help" in trouble. Martha said, "I know that he shall rise again. . . at the last day." The Lord replied, "I am the resurrection." Then Martha's thoughts travel back to what had been counselled in times past as to the Lord, for she said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." Her faith believed the great things the Lord will do in a day to come, and she believed in the Lord as connected with all the counsels of God in times past, but her faith was not strong enough to "be still" and

believe in the Lord as the great "I am"—the present help in trouble.

Have we not to confess that, too often, this is our difficulty. We can believe in the power of God put forth in times past, and that His power will be manifest in days to come, but we are slow to believe that God is so truly "a very present help" that, when there is no duty to be fulfilled, we can "be still" and wait for His help to be made manifest.

(Vv. 2, 3). The second and third verses describe the trouble that necessitate a "refuge," requires strength, and calls for "present help". The world, in which the godly man finds himself, is in turmoil and upheaval. The waters roar, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Often in Scripture the sea, in its restlessness, is used as a symbol of the nations in a state of turmoil (Isa. V. 30). To-day, can we not hear the roar of the waves as, in every part of the world we see the nations in a state of upheaval, revolution, and conflict? As a result, ancient constitutions that have existed for centuries, and established forms of government that seemed as stable as the mountains, are being overthrown by the rising violence, and increasing corruption of men. Little wonder that men's hearts are "failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21 : 26). But, says the Psalmist, "Therefore will not we fear" for "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

What then is the secret that strengthens the people of God to pass through the terrifying conditions of the world without "fear"; that, in the presence of change and upheaval, embales them to "be still", and realise that God is "a very present help in trouble"?

(Vv. 4-6). First, God sustains the faith of His people by unfolding to them the secret of His purpose. In this passage the purpose of God is brought before us in the river and the city of God: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."

Through all time, with its changes, upheavals, and conflicts, there flows the river of God's pleasure. No power of the enemy, no violence and corruption of men, no failure of the saints, can thwart God in carrying out His deep eternal counsels. Dispensations come and go: empires rise and fall; every testimony that God commits to the responsibility of men breaks down in their hands. But, over all, and through all, God is carrying out His purpose for the glory of Christ and the blessing of His people, earthly and heavenly.

Secondly, all the blessing that God has purposed for Christ and His people centres in the city of God. The Psalmist looks beyond the desolations of the actual Jerusalem of his day, and, looking by faith into the future, He sees the city according to the counsels of God. There rises before his vision a city of gladness, a "holy place", a city that "shall not be moved", with God dwelling "in the midst of her". So, too, in the presence of all the turmoil and confusion, in the world by which we are surrounded, and the corruptions of Christendom, the believer walks in the light of the heavenly city. We see "the New Jerusalem"—a city of gladness where all tears will be wiped away, where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. We see, too, that it is a holy city into which nothing that defiles will ever enter; we see that it will not be moved, for it is a city that hath foundations. Above all, we

see that "God is in the midst of her", for we read "the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it." Thus our faith is sustained by the river of God's pleasure, and "the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11 : 10).

Thirdly, the Psalmist sees that though the nations may rage against God's city, yet "God shall help her, and that right early." There is a better, and more beautiful translation that reads, "God shall help her at the dawn of the morning" (N.Tn). So, again, our privilege is to "look beyond the long dark night and hail the coming day." On every hand we see the nations raging, the kingdoms of the earth being overthrown—the waters roar and are troubled, and the mountains shake; but, even as the Psalmist could say, "He uttered His voice, the earth melted," so we wait to hear the voice of the Lord when He shall say "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Then indeed "the dawn of the morning" will come, the day will break "and the shadows flee away."

(V.7). Fourthly, amidst the deepening shadows of the night, until the dawn of the morning, we can say with the Psalmist, "The LORD of hosts is **with us**; The God of Jacob is our refuge." The LORD with all power at His disposal, and the God of grace that can take up and bless a poor failing man like Jacob, is with us, and our refuge. When the day dawns we shall be with Christ in the glory of that day; in the meantime He is with us as we pass through the sorrows of the night. He "died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together **with Him**." Seeing "He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee, . . . we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13 : 5, 6).

(Vv. 8, 9). Fifthly, the Psalmist sees that in due time God, Himself, will deal in judgment with all the evils of the world; and after the "desolations" of judgment, He will bring in the blessings of the reign of Christ, when wars will cease unto the end of the earth. Men, by their own efforts and wisdom, through leagues, and pacts, and conferences, are seeking to bring about universal peace and introduce a millennium of prosperity without God and without Christ. The Christian, who sees that his blessing is bound up with the city of God, and who knows that God will deal with the evil of this world, refuses to be linked up with man's futile efforts to end the world's unrest.

Thus, that we may be delivered from all fear, in the presence of so much that would make the natural heart tremble, we are instructed in the secret purpose of God that cannot fail. We see by faith the city of God shining before us in all its glory and beauty; we wait for the dawn of the day; and, in the meantime, we have the Lord with us to deliver us from every fear, a refuge from every

storm. Furthermore, we know that in due time God will judge the wickedness of men and bring in universal peace.

(Vv. 10, 11). Only as these great truths are held in living faith in our souls shall we be able to "Be still" in the presence of the world's unrest, even as the Lord, Himself, could sleep in the storm. Our danger is that, in the presence of the increasing evils of the world, we may get over occupied with events and lose sight of the city of God, and thus be tempted to join with men in their efforts to combat the evil. To act thus is to leave God out and seek to meet the evil by human wisdom and human power. If such efforts had any measure of success it would only lead to the exaltation of men. Our part is to "be still" and wait for God to act for His own glory, for God has said, "I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."

Only as we are "still," shall we be kept in the blessed realisation that the Lord is "with us," "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

THE CHURCH OF GOD

HERBERT HIRST

IN creating this world as the arena in which He could unfold His divine plans and introducing into it man fashioned in His own image and likeness, God purposed to make Himself known to that intelligent creature of large possibilities and draw him into holy intercourse with Himself, purifying and satisfying the deep longings of man's heart and bringing into being in due time a universe of pure happiness with all its participants overflowing in re-

sponsive affection to the blessed God, the source of its unfading joy.

Powers of evil also at work in the creation very soon procured the fall of man but were permitted in order to further the designs of the Creator by testing man and thereby promoting in him a healthy realisation of his own impotence and the need of continual dependence upon the Creator in all things. In spite of these forces of evil the work of God was clearly successful with individ-

uals, for "the Lord had respect unto Abel" (Genesis 4 : 4) and Abel evidently moved in a path which showed that he knew and had confidence in God (Hebrews 11 :4). Enoch was effectively supported in communion with God for the long period of three hundred years (Genesis 5 : 22) and Noah's fellowship with God enabled him to do "all that God commanded him" (Genesis 6 : 9 and 22).

The inability of the race in general, however, to resist the deceptions of Satan was such that by this time the "wickedness of man was great in the earth" and the earth was filled with corruption and violence (Genesis 6 : 5, 12-13). The need for the Creator to terminate this state of affairs became imperative and the flood took away all but Noah and his family. Despite this solemn judgment, comparatively soon afterwards men were busy with schemes for their own greatness independent of God and idolatry seems to have carried away almost the whole of the race. The plans of God, however, could not be frustrated and they gradually developed. He commenced a new method of dealing with men by revealing Himself to Abraham and calling him out from his country, his kith and kin, and from the idolatry surrounding him, to go into a land to be indicated to him. This man had received from God very remarkable unconditional promises, the most far-reaching of which was "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Abraham departed on this venture of simple faith in God's word and was led into the land of Canaan where he was given further unsought promises of great importance. The land of Canaan should be given to him and his seed for ever. His seed should be as numerous as the dust of the earth, as the stars of heaven and as the

sand upon the sea shore, indeed without number. It is plain, therefore, that when the plans of God mature, plans dependent upon Himself alone for success, He will have gathered around Himself myriads of human beings who are children of Abraham in that they have come to know God and have put real confidence in Him as Abraham did, being counted righteous for that reason (Galatians 3 : 6-7). Perhaps the promises that these faithful souls would be as numerous as the dust of the earth (1), the stars of heaven (2) and the sand of the sea shore (3) foreshadow at least three companies of children of faith—some from the nation of Israel (1), some from the Gentile nations (3) the inheritance of both of these being on the **earth** : and some from both of these sources who are destined for a **heavenly** portion in the ages to come (2). Thanks be to God, our Father, the largeness of His heart is shown in the fact that when His work of love is complete, it will be seen that there are in heaven and on earth numerous families of the redeemed ranged around Him in sweetest fellowship, taking character from Him who is Father and each in its own particular place assigned to it by Him (Ephesians 3 : 14-15 R.V.). It has been pointed out that there is a close and happy connection between the words "Father" and "family" in the original of this passage.

This leads us to the remark that the place of nearness to and intimacy with God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ designed for the Church or Assembly of God is quite unique among all the families of the blest. Indeed it is a place of the highest privilege and favour ever conferred upon created beings. Abraham enjoyed the confidences of God to such an extent that he is referred to as "the friend of God" (James 2 : 23 ;

Isaiah 41 : 8), and this is truly a signal honour for any man. But up to the coming of Christ, God had made only partial revelations of Himself and these of necessity conditioned and limited the nature of the fellowship, communion or friendship with Him into which the faithful of those days were admitted. The advent of Christ brought a change in this respect difficult to overrate. Consider the words "the day-spring from on high hath visited us" (Luke 1 : 78) ; that is, the sunrise of a new day had come, compared with which what had gone before was like darkness and shadow. For now it could be said "No man hath seen God at any time ; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1 : 18). The Son of the Father who had now appeared among men was fully conversant with the beatings of the heart of God and had told out all the Father's love. All His thoughts and plans for the Universe of Bliss would now be made known ; secrets locked up in the heart of God were now to be revealed and the Church of God was the vessel to be prepared to receive this treasure (Ephesians 1 : 7-9 ; 3 : 3-6).

The state of man, however, whether Jew or Gentile, was such that he could not avail himself of this precious revelation of the nature and thoughts of God. He needed to be "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1 : 11-13), in order to receive a new nature of moral and spiritual kinship with God which would enable him to do so. Nothing but the work of God in his soul could produce this ; but those who were the subjects of such a divine work within were prepared by it for the reception of the Lord Jesus, believing on His name, and were given the exalted privilege of

enjoying before God the status and advantages of the children of God. The death of Christ accomplished redemption for them, procured the forgiveness of their sins, condemned sin in the flesh and thus removing from before God by judgment their sinful state of being enabled them by faith to consider it as terminated, a new state and standing having been created for them in Christ marked by complete lack of condemnation and all the acceptability found by God in the person of Christ Himself. The Holy Spirit sent down from the risen and ascended Christ to dwell irrevocably in those thus reconciled to God became, as Jesus had promised before His departure, their divine Teacher and capacity to enter into the wealth of God's gracious gifts.

It has been endeavoured to show that the Christian, in this important era introduced by the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ together with the gift of the Holy Spirit, is far more favoured than all those blessed of God in by-gone days. One saying alone of the Lord Jesus puts this beyond all doubt—"Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist : notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matthew 11 : 11). The next verse establishes that "the kingdom of heaven" has reference to the period inaugurated by the rejection of the Lord Jesus as King, and His departure back to heaven ; and though John the Baptist was the last and greatest of the Old Testament line of prophets (no doubt because of his proximity and fidelity to Christ), the least here on earth now subject to the rule of the King in heaven is greater than John because of the place of inestimable spiritual wealth and blessing, eternal blessing,

into which God has brought him—greater in privilege, even if much less than John in fearless faithfulness in service.

Happily it was not the will of God that individual christians should tread a lonely path to heaven through a hostile world. Caiaphas, the high priest, was used of God to utter a prophecy that Jesus should die for His nation ; “and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11 : 49-52). Jesus Himself spoke of the Jewish fold and how He, as the Shepherd of the sheep, would lead out of that fold “his own sheep,” those who believed on Him, heard His voice and followed Him. Also he said “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold,” i.e. not Jews but Gentiles ; “them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10 : 16 R.V.). One FLOCK, notice, not one FOLD. Whereas a fold is a means of compulsory restraint of those inside, who might otherwise have preferred to wander at will, how lovely to contemplate the willing devotion of a flock to its faithful Shepherd,

following Him because each sheep knows His voice and is unwilling to follow a stranger. When Jesus said “Other sheep I have. . . these also I **must bring**. . . and there **shall be** one shepherd and one flock, is it not evident that the one flock was not at that moment in existence ? And does not the prophecy of Caiaphas make it equally plain that the gathering together in **one** of the children of God could result only from the death of Jesus ?

“Upon this rock I **will** build my church” or “assembly” (Matthew 16 :18). When the Lord Jesus spoke these words the work in question was still future. He claims this assembly as His own ; but He began the building of it after defeating him who had the power of death, the Devil, by rising victorious from the grave ; and neither death nor the powers of the unseen world shall prevail against this impregnable church which He builds. It is also spoken of in Scripture as the “Church of God.” Perhaps we may, on another occasion, look a little closer at what this “assembly” is to the heart of God and of Christ ; and we may reasonably ask ourselves what place it occupies in reference to our hearts.

THE LAST WORDS OF DAVID

COLIN CURRY

2 Samuel 23

THE last words of a person are worthy often of special attention, and there is certainly something outstandingly attractive and profitable about David’s last words. David takes a humble line as he reviews his life and is conscious of its shortcomings. Yet, combined perfectly with this is the attitude of bright

faith which rejoices in Christ and the link with Him which grace has formed.

David is, of course, a prominent figure in Scripture in more ways than one. His name is well-known as a man of God of active and venturesome faith. Destined at an early

stage to rule over the people of God, he ultimately fills that place of honour and sovereignty in a memorable way. Equally, we recall David as musician and Psalm-writer, author of inspired poetry of a special quality, principal contributor to a distinct section of the Old Testament. It seems especially suitable that his last words should be cast in this form, and surely none of the poetic utterances of "the sweet psalmist of Israel" is more moving than this final one. The Authorised Version conveys the beauty and dignity of the original words perhaps more successfully than most other versions do. One must look beyond David to trace the real origin of these striking and effective phrases; and David indicates his awareness of this in verses 2 and 3. The Spirit of the Lord lifted his eyes to Christ and gave him words, few but apposite, in which to describe the splendour of His coming reign. "The Rock of Israel" was his authority and his confidence that these words of his would find their fulfilment.

The setting of the passage is worth noticing. Immediately before it, in chapter 22, is a section often referred to as "the song of David." This belongs to an entirely different period of his life. One effect of bringing together these two utterances is to highlight the differences between them. In the song (which is repeated in Psalm 18) David voices to the Lord his joy and gratitude for deliverance from his foes; he celebrates his victories over all his adversaries. Possibly this was near the time of his accession to the kingdom. A confident sense of the Lord's triumph, in which he had participated, dominates this remarkable song. We catch a glimpse here of David in his heyday, right on the crest of the wave. Things had gone well for him, the Lord having been

behind his successes. He expresses his thanksgiving and his appreciation in confident and buoyant terms.

Very different is his mood at the close of his days. Weaknesses as well as successes had marked his life. There had been shameful episodes as well as bright ones. The earlier stages of his career had in the main been the happier ones; clouds had overshadowed its later parts. Established in the position of eminence and authority intended for him by God, king over Judah and Israel, he had not always carried well the responsibilities which this entailed. Grim and shocking sin had marred his life. Out of deep and protracted humiliation and soul-searching before God came real and wonderful forgiveness. But some of the consequences of his sin were inevitable and distressing; it had its repercussions in his family, amongst his subordinates, within his kingdom. It is true that admirable features can be noted in David's life after these grave happenings; and he was able still to command allegiance from many a loyal subject. Yet it is also clear that his moral strength was by no means unimpaired by these events, and that he himself was well aware of this.

All this forms the backcloth to David's last words. Aware of the weaknesses which had attended his own reign, he sees afar to that great day, often anticipated in the prophetic writings, when God's true King will rule. Beyond the immediate scenes, shadowed by his own failure, he catches a vision of the "morning without clouds" when the reign of Christ dawns. From his own inadequate ways David looks away, with relief and anticipation, to One Who will fulfil all the kingly functions in perfection. "He that ruleth over men must be just" (verse 3), is one of the requirements which he

sees clearly, the more so because of his own inability to meet it. Uriah the Hittite had certainly not been justly treated ! Absalom too, as was seen in an earlier paper, needed firmer treatment than David in his compromised position was able to insist upon. In other actions, also, his adherence to the principle of right in his dealings had not always been flawless. "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness" wrote Isaiah (32 : 1), looking on to the great end-point of prophetic scripture. It is indeed a heartening and a stabilizing thought that **righteousness** will be the first principle of control in the day when the great Son of David rules.

Verse 4 is perhaps the most striking verse of the passage. David's imagination is caught by the surpassing splendour of the day when Christ's sovereignty will be indisputable, and the unheard-of benefit and new vitality it will bring to this earth. Little indication is given here that the darkest of all times will precede that day. Other passages show, however, that this will be so. Only out of a terrible but necessary period when God's judgments are felt in this earth will that day be born. Currently, the general trends are away from God ; attitudes which in the long run can only be dealt with by unsparing judgment are in the ascendancy. Our Lord, in due time, will grapple firmly with every adverse element, overthrowing them all. Perhaps there is hint of this in verses 6 & 7. All judgment is committed to Christ, and He will not fail to use the iron hand when this is called for (see, for example, Revelation 19 : 15). Those who require this kind of treatment will receive it, in a devastating and final way. **Right** will then be re-asserted and all that is offensive to God will be purged out. Then it will be plain

that the mastery of this world still belongs to God and His Christ.

Out of that dark night the day of Christ will dawn. His rule, as well as being firm, will be unbelievably beneficent and fruitful. True and well-founded peace will at last be known. Malachi, who also wrote at a time when new hope was needed, has a kindred verse to this : "The Sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings" (4 : 2). The influence of the sun upon the earth is a remarkably apt symbol here. As this earth responds in complete obedience to the sun's control, so will Christ's universal kingdom be subject to Him. His rule will be absolute. But the sun does more than rule the earth. It serves it too ; it is the source of all its good and fruitfulness. Subjection and response to its true Lord and King will bring halcyon days to this earth. The figures used here, of light after darkness, of growth after rain, are impressive. They bespeak the relief after distress which will then be enjoyed. They indicate the sense of cleansing, and of fresh life and vigour, which will sweep over this earth when all that is corrupt and openly antagonistic to God has been removed. So great and so welcome will the transformation be that life out of death is not too bold a description of it (see Romans 11 : 15).

David's own reaction is expressed in verse 5. He recognizes the imperfections of his own session as God's representative and king. He senses unhappy developments soon to come within the royal house of which he was the head, and within the kingdom under its rule. He feels his unfitness as a forbear of the true Son of David, Whose reign he had been able to foresee. Yet, humbled by all this, the wonderful grace shown to him calls out his deep gratitude. To be given this forview

of the King of kings, and to have a link with Him according to God's everlasting covenant, fills him with responsive faith and confidence even at the close of his days. He rejoices in the sure things which God determines and fulfils ; as a recipient of sovereign grace he responds appropriately. Christians of today, who read these words, will readily stand alongside David in this. What Christ will bring about, despite what we are, and the firmness of the tie with Him which He has sealed, ought continually to draw out our humble admiration and appreciation. The prospect of that coming day, when in every sense our Lord will be supreme, is as welcome and stimulating to us as it was to David. To him it was a far-off vision ; today it must be close at hand.

In conclusion, it is of interest to note how the chapter continues. Appropriately, following his own humble-minded review of his life, a tribute is now made to David. This is not given directly ; it takes the form of a rehearsal of the deeds and devotion of his faithful men. Failures had marked his life, and they had been serious ones. Yet certainly there had been good and attractive qualities too. These were the product of an active and God-fearing life,

lived for the most part in an openly dependent and transparent way. David had been able to lead men, winning their loyalty in a remarkable way. To his credit this is recorded ; and, of course, to the credit of his ardent and faithful supporters. Only in one instance is it revealed how David had reacted to the heroism of his servants. Significantly, and in character with our earlier view of David, he felt his unfitness to be served in such an all-out fashion. The water from the well of Bethlehem, obtained for him by the three daring men at the risk of their lives, he poured out unto the Lord (verses 14-17). Their action moved him profoundly ; he felt unworthy of it. He knew that in the ultimate sense there is only One claimant for such outright loyalty from His subjects. He would more happily give tribute, where it is rightly due, than receive it. The main lesson for us is clear. The crowning favour of all is to see ourselves, like David, as objects of divine grace. David would point us to another, greater than himself. The Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom the kingdoms of this world will soon belong, has already drawn us after Himself ; and He is in every sense worthy of our selfless affection and undivided loyalty.

“BEHOLD YOUR KING”

J. S. BLACKBURN

Echoes from St. Andrews, 1967

4. HIS CRUCIFIXION

Matthew 27 : 33-50

IT was the wife of Dr. Alexander, Bishop of Derry, who was one day sitting in her room at the palace, and her eye lighted on the green hill outside the city wall. She thoughtfully said in her mind, “Yes, there

is a green hill far away, outside a city wall, where the dear Lord was crucified, Who died to save us all.” I am thinking just now of the verse which says, “We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains He had to

bear, but we believe it was for us, He hung and suffered there." I am sure we all recognize that in a superlative degree it is true when we contemplate the cross of Jesus that we have to take our shoes from off our feet, for the ground whereon we stand is holy. Although we try to show attention to the teaching of Holy Scripture, we can never, never hope to understand fully.

In the Lord's prayer to His Father in John 17, He begins with the words, "Father, the hour is come." And the hour on which we meditate this morning is indeed the hour forward to which every voice from God directed those who heard, and the hour backward to which all the praises of saints and angels in heaven will ever turn. It was the hour "So bright with love, so dark with woe, the gracious hour when Jesus died."

In the time available, I can only draw your attention to a few of the salient features of the passage, with implications ranging over the whole of the Old and New Testaments. When we think of the fact that this was the HOUR, then our thoughts are directed to the extent to which this hour was the hour to which all prophecies pointed. For this reason I would like first to give you a simple list of the direct quotations from Old Testament prophecy in the restricted number of verses which we have read.

In v. 30 we read, "And they spit upon him." In this was fulfilled Isaiah 50 : 6. Among the sayings of the Servant of Jehovah is this, "I hid not my face from shame and spitting." He clothes the heavens with blackness : He dried up the sea with His word ; but at this climax of His earthly life, the prophets foretold His utterance : "I hid not my face from shame and spitting."

In v. 34 we read "They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall"

and in v. 48 again, "One of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink." Thus was fulfilled Psalm 69 : 21, "In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

In v. 35 of our chapter we read, "They crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots" ; in this case the prophecy is quoted, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet." Here the writer of the gospel is quoting Psalm 22 : 18, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

In v. 38 we read that there were two thieves crucified with Him. This casts its light on an otherwise mysterious prophecy in Isaiah 53. The body of a crucified person was buried in a common grave, dug immediately there in the place of crucifixion. Thus when Isaiah 53 : 9 talks of making "his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death," it was a direct prophecy that He was to be crucified with malefactors, but in spite of this, His grave was the grave provided by the rich man Joseph of Arimathea.

In v. 43 "He trusted in God ; let him deliver him now, if he will have him ; for he said, I am the Son of God." Once again it is Psalm 22 : 8 that is here fulfilled.

Finally, (v. 46) we have the central cry of the Lord Jesus uttered beforehand through the Spirit in Psalm 22 : 1, "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani ? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?" If we pass for a second beyond the gospel narrative we find there is also a quotation from Psalm 22, in Hebrews 2 : 12, fulfilled by the Lord Jesus after His resurrection : "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in

the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee."

The Old Testament passages quoted are therefore, Psalm 22, (three or four times) Psalm 69, Isaiah 50 and Isaiah 53 and we are directly led to these particular passages to find Spirit-given meditation, prophetic of the sufferings of the Saviour. How fitting a preparation for coming to the Lord's supper, to read one of these particular four passages and linger by the cross of Jesus, so that our thoughts might be formed by the word of God, meditating on the sufferings of Christ.

Now let us look in particular at v. 46 of our chapter, which is so well-known as a quotation from Psalm 22, which begins, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" These words were wrung from the Lord Jesus Christ at this particular point in the narrative, after it is said in v. 45, "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour." We can only stand amazed in the sense of the tremendous battle, the tremendous forces engaged at this moment, but it does seem plain that the words "Why hast thou forsaken me?" refer particularly to those three hours of darkness which were the central feature of the story of the cross. And so I want to dwell upon these words, taking it for granted that they tell us the real essence of what was happening when He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. The real essence of what took place in these three hours of darkness, was that God forsook Him. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

In meditating upon this, directly here in the passage before us, we can draw at least three lessons, which

we may have time to speak about in this short introduction. First, in this forsaking by God of the Saviour, we have the **Love of God manifested**. "In this was manifested the love of God," John says in his epistle, "because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." And this is the moment above all moments, when the work was done by which the Lord Jesus Christ could be and is the Saviour of the world. Let us think of this in the light of Romans 8:32 which says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

Let us reverently gather up the light which Scripture usage casts on these two expressions describing the action of God at Calvary: the negative—"He spared not": the positive—"He delivered him up." 2 Peter 2:4 refers to the fact that God cast down into hell the angels that sinned with the words, "if God spared not the angels that sinned." In the same passage (v. 5) in describing how God brought the flood on the world of the ungodly, we read that God "spared not the old world." When God spares not, not a whit of the penalty is withheld, in contrast to Abraham with Isaac, when, at the last moment, the angel of the Lord called out of heaven, "Withhold!" "God spared not his own Son."

On the contrary, God "delivered him up for us all." The word here used in the original language is seriously obscured in translation. It is the ordinary word for 'betray'—the action of Judas, who gave Him up to the chief priests. It is the ordinary word for 'deliver' when 'deliver to' is meant and not 'deliver from.' Thus it describes the action of the chief priests in giving Him over to Pilate. The same word exactly occurs in some of the words of

Scripture dearest to the Christian heart "Christ loved the church and gave himself (delivered himself up to death) for it" (Ephesians 5 : 25). "The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself (delivered himself up to death) for me" (Galatians 2 : 20). It means that God in love, delivered up His own Son to the utmost extremity of suffering.

The most glorious conclusion is drawn from the premise of this divine logic : If God "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" as the measure of His love, "how shall he not with him freely give us all things." A remark from a recent study on the Temptation, should stand out in letters of fire : The real essence of temptation of all kinds is that Satan drives us to doubt the fact that God has the very best for us. Here, right at the heart of Holy Scripture is the statement and the proof that God has the very best for us, "how shall he not with him also **FREELY** give us **ALL** things." If we try to pluck the bright attractive fruit from the tree of this earthly life and forget the restraints that God by His word has put upon His people, we are ignoring the fact that God has the best for us and He has proved He has the best for us in this moment of darkness upon the cross when in love to us He delivered up His Son for us all.

Secondly, in the cry of the Lord Jesus Christ, "Why hast thou forsaken me ?" we have the **deepest sorrow**, a sorrow so deep as entirely to pass our comprehension. Jeremiah 2 : 13 addresses Jerusalem : "My people have committed two evils ; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." If it be that true happiness is to be with God, then the extremity of unhappiness is to

be separated from Him. Isaiah says "Your sins have separated between you and the Lord," and hell, the flames of hell, the blackness of darkness of hell, is in its essence the fact that that separation from God is fixed and everlasting. And this was what, in this holy mystery, took place in these hours. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?" No word, no thought of ours can adequately weigh the suffering and the sorrow of the Saviour, but He drank the cup of the deepest possible sorrow. And we see the reason why His sorrow was beyond all other sorrows, in that He was bearing our sins in His own body on the tree.

The third point is that He was **bearing sins**, and this meaning is inescapably present in Psalm 22. This cry, would on any other lips be a cry of absolute desperation and hopelessness, "Why hast thou forsaken me ?" The Psalm itself gives the answer to this question in verse three. It was because "Thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." The reason for this dread forsaking was that "He hath made him to be sin for us, who, knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." At that moment He was bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. He was being wounded for our transgressions ; He was being bruised for our iniquities, and concentrated there in a manner entirely inconceivable to us was the load of all the myriads whose sins He bore. The Lord caused to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all. When we come to talk about the resurrection tomorrow we find the proof that this was adequate in the sight of God, that God accepted this sacrifice that has indeed made Him the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.

As one brings to an end this meditation on Psalm 22 : 1, we rejoice to see how the light of joy shines after the darkness of sorrow. If in this Psalm we have first the **sob** (vv.1-21a), then we have afterwards the **song** (vv. 21b-31), in waves spreading over space and time, the celebrating of victory and joy. It was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame (Hebrews 12 : 2).

Many scriptures speak of “the cross” in a way which makes it clear that an aspect of the death of Christ is being in these passages particularly underlined. The quotation just made from Hebrews 12 : 2 gives guidance here in that it connects the cross so directly with the shame. The scorn and shame in the eyes of the world connected with the cross is thrown into lurid relief by Philipians 2 : 8. Christ Jesus laid aside the **form** of God for the **form** of a slave. But this immense stoop from heaven to earth was not the whole story. “Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Surely these words imply that of all the deaths to die that of the cross was the most debased and scorned. Like vermin nailed to a board as is so often seen in the country, so nailing to a cross was the very emblem of contempt and hatred.

The cross has the same meaning for the disciples of a rejected Master. “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross daily**, and follow me” (Luke 9 : 23). Paul explains that if he accommodate himself to the legalists, “then is the **offence of the cross** ceased” and so that it might not be so “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus

Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 5 : 11 & 6 : 14).

It is a striking fact that the only two ordinances of Christianity—the Lord’s supper and baptism—are directly representative of Christ’s death, and the distinction between them is all-important. Each is an action-picture of Christ’s death and the institution of these two distinct ordinances by the Lord Jesus urges most strongly upon us that we must acknowledge both. The Lord’s supper emphasizes the aspect in which it is true that Christ died so that we may never die. “My body ——— given for you——— my blood——— shed for you (Luke 22 : 19, 20). “My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26 : 28). “Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Romans 5 : 9). “Who-soever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11 : 26). Baptism, in sharp contrast with this presents that view of Christ’s death, according to which His death is our death. In His dying, we died, and His dying commits us to death to sin and the world. This we so easily forget. “In that he died, he died unto sin once : but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6 : 10, 11). This word is given in explanation of the question “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death” (v. 3). Let us begin from today, not only to accept the life more abundant, but also to face the challenge of baptism.

Among so many scriptures setting this greatest event in other lights, John 12 : 31/33 clamours for attention. The frequency with which

during our lifetime the words "world crisis" appear in the news suggests a pandemic disease permeating the world. Implicit in the frequent occurrence of this phrase is the fear that someone somewhere will take a step or press a button by which forces will be released which will determine the fate of the world. Will civilisation survive? Will mankind destroy itself? Will some event of today or tomorrow settle the answer to these questions? In John 12:31 the Lord Jesus settles the matter. It is not possible that any event of today or tomorrow can determine the fate of the world. The word translated 'judgment' is in the bible language 'crisis.' The Lord most solemnly affirms that there and then in the death He would die was the world's crisis. By its refusal and crucifixion of Himself under Hebrew and Greek and Latin, the world

settled its own doom. The world's fate has never been in question since the princes of this world crucified the Lord of Glory. It is a doomed world we have abandoned on accepting the faith of Christ. But the same event which determined so appalling a result has been made the means of blessing and salvation to all who will: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (v. 32).

Why and how could consequences of such cosmic dimensions arise from the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ? Surely the answer is that lying at the root and base of all these results is the fact that God was glorified. Never was the well-beloved Son more fragrant and pleasing and glorifying to the Father than when, as the true burnt-offering, He became obedient unto death.

* * * *

CORRESPONDENCE

The following letter has been received from Mr. A. F. Howe of Leeds:

May I suggest two scriptures which appear to be helpful on the question raised in your issue of May 1968? The first is 1 Corinthians 10:16 which says that the bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. Breaking bread is therefore a significant act of fellowship or communion and in practice it must follow that the persons we break bread with locally are recognised by us and by each other as members of the body of Christ, and therefore as converted. This completely rules out the possibility of our saying at the same time

that some are breaking bread on their own responsibility and are not necessarily converted.

Secondly, we are exhorted in Ephesians 4:3 to use diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This is one of my responsibilities as a Christian and it seems to me that one contribution that might be made to that end would be to ensure that ungodly persons do not get into the Christian fellowship unnoticed (a serious danger referred to in Jude 4). The unity of the Spirit cannot in any circumstances include the unconverted and I cannot see how the exhortation concerning this particular unity could be acted on in a mixed company.

TO the student of etymology there may be a subtle difference between wisdom and understanding, but the nuance would seem to be minimal in Proverbs 4 : 7/8, where we read, "Wisdom is the principal thing ; therefore get wisdom : and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee : she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her." If we regard knowledge as the acquisition of the truth, then wisdom and understanding may be regarded as the assimilation of such truth. But how can this understanding be obtained ? Here surely is a question, the answer to which must exercise every true Christian.

Diligent study has its own unfailing reward and indeed is commended in Scripture, yet a warning comes from that same source in the words of the Preacher king in Ecclesiastes 12 : 12, "Of making many books there is no end ; and much study is a weariness of the flesh." Thus **understanding** may elude the most industrious student. We have possibly all known the "book-worm" who is a veritable bore, because he lacks understanding in his communicating with others ! He can quote Scripture and quite likely some of the honoured teachers and writers, and yet he appears to be ineffective in his attempts to teach the truth he knows.

A common experience in reading the Word is to encounter difficulty,

and good it is for us if we hear the challenge of Philip to the Ethiopian (Acts 8 : 30), "**Understandest** thou what thou readest ?" Wise, too, if we reply as the humble learner did then, "How can I unless someone guides me ?" What wealth of understanding presently illumined his heart and mind when the evangelist "began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." How quickly the troubled thoughts and difficulties of the disciples disappeared when the risen Lord, having spoken to them all things in the law, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Himself, "opened their **understanding**, that they might **understand** the Scriptures." Thus we see that **understanding** is something imparted from a source external to and yet inseparable from the Sacred Page.

Five times in Psalm 119, in which the greatness of the Word of God is extolled in almost every verse, the Psalmist cries out, "Give me **understanding**." (vv. 34, 73, 125, 144 & 169.) There can be little doubt that he meant much more than desiring to learn the meaning of the words he wrote under inspiration. Surely what he craved was the spiritual enlightenment and power to assimilate the truth and translate it into action. The ordinary endowment of natural understanding, while of great value, is unreliable in divine things, as again we recall the inspired advice of Solomon, to

“trust in the LORD with all thine heart ; and lean not unto thine own **understanding**.” (Proverbs 3 : 5) From such a source we are well counselled to seek Divine understanding outside of what we may rightly call “our own.”

How constantly the apostle affirmed his concern, not only that his letters might be read by those to whom they were sent, but that the truth they conveyed might be understood by them. In his first prayer in Ephesians (1 : 15/23) he desires ‘that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him : the eyes of your **understanding** (or **heart**) being enlightened ; that ye may know. . . .” Only with such heart-understanding and enlightenment could the full weight of Divine truth here revealed be assimilated, hence the intensity of the apostle’s prayer for those to whom he wrote.

Similarly in Col. 2 : 1, Paul would have the saints know what combat he endured, “to the end that their hearts may be encouraged, being united together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of **understanding**, to the full knowledge of the mystery of God, in which are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” How clearly he saw that the great wealth of truth in this epistle could only be understood, not by the process of exposition, but as the answer to his prayer for them as given in ch. 1 : 9/14, “praying and asking for you to the end that ye may be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and **spiritual understanding**, so that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.” An added thought claiming our notice in this passage is that **understanding** the truth is evinced by its effect upon the walk of the

believer for the Lord’s pleasure. It is not to be acquired as a convenient reference library for the purpose of excelling in discussion.

The boast of gift in the church has often been the cause of deficient spiritual understanding, and this was manifest in the earliest days at Corinth, where the local church was said to “come behind in no gift.” (ch. 1 : 7) Their obsession with particular gifts, such as that of tongues, had caused their trumpet of testimony to give an uncertain sound, and no one gave attention to it because it was not **understood**. The words of the apostle in 1 Cor. 14 might well be underlined in this our day, when tongues are again claiming the attention of many as evidence of spiritual power. In ch. 14 the underlying question is, “What is **understood** ?” For here is the test both of what is received and what is communicated. Thus in v. 9 he says, “So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be **understood**, how shall it be known what is spoken ? for ye shall speak into the air.” How important that the spearhead of our every endeavour should be to understand and be understood. This is seen to be the case both with prayer and singing. How often the most unintelligible phrases occur in petitions and hymns, and are condoned on the grounds that the Lord knows what is meant if nobody else does ! We are thankful this is true, of course, but ch. 14 : 14/16 reminds us that what reaches the human ear should be understood, both by the offerer and the hearer. The remedy, thank God, is clearly stated in these verses, “What is it then ? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the **understanding** also ; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the **understanding** also. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall

he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he **understandeth** not what thou sayest ? ”

In personal practice the apostle always set the pace for what he enjoined upon others. Having the ability to speak with more tongues than all the Corinthians he says, “Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my **understanding**, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.” (ch. 14:18/19) Here is true humility, which disdains ostentation and chooses to pursue only that which will be profitable for the church, glorifying God and not the gift. Such also is the hall-mark of spiritual maturity, for in v. 20 he presses this upon the saints at Corinth in these words, “Brethren, be not children (immature) in **understanding**. . . but in **understanding** be men (mature).” Are these the motives with which we seek to serve the Lord ? Surely such Scriptures would commend this course to us.

In conclusion, a brief reference to one or two more passages may underline the importance of our subject in Scripture, and stimulate our desire for more exhaustive study. It will readily be recalled that Daniel and his three companions had God-given knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom, and “Daniel had **understanding** in all visions and dreams. . . and in all matters of wisdom and **understanding** that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.” (Daniel 1:17/20) The quality of such understanding clearly resulted from their utter dependence upon God in their

exile, and separation from the tastes and ways of those around them.

Anticipating the problems of a young man, Paul writing to Timothy (2 Timothy 2/7) counsels him to “consider what I say ; and the Lord will give thee **understanding** in all things.” And surely every young Christian student feels the need of a greater understanding of the apostle’s writings. Two things may be noted here. First, that careful consideration must be given to that which is written, because given by inspiration from God, but **understanding** comes from the Lord Himself, as we seek it from Him.

The ministries of the apostles Peter and Paul were exercised in quite different spheres, but it is deeply instructive and touching to read in 2 Peter 3:15/16 his acknowledgement that “our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, hath written unto you ; as also in all his epistles . . . in which some things are hard to be **understood**, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest (distort or misinterpret) as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” Solomon again says, “a man of **understanding** is of excellent spirit.” (Proverbs 17:27) And surely Peter, in the verses quoted, showed a magnificence of spirit towards Paul which distinguished him as a man of **understanding**. May we be marked by this excellence of spirit, which is generous and kind towards those whom we may find hard to understand. This would indicate a progress towards spiritual maturity which flows from “**understanding** what is the will of the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:17).

“ BEHOLD YOUR KING ”

J. S. BLACKBURN

Echoes from St. Andrews 1967

5. HIS RESURRECTION

Matthew 28 : 1/20

IN a certain Moslem country, in conversation with a Christian missionary, a Mohammedan was speaking with the greatest pride of the fact that he was in possession of a bone of the true prophet. The missionary replied, “If a single indisputable bone of our Lord Jesus Christ existed, then the whole fabric of Christianity would collapse.” This story is one of the best possible illustrations of the fact that the bodily resurrection of Christ (so much assailed, and so much disbelieved, even by so many who profess the Name of Christ,) is unchangeably vital to our Christian faith.

And however plausible may be the arguments presented, and however great may appear to be the authority of those who bring them, it is absolutely vital to us as Christians that we never let anyone move us from our firm faith in the fact of the bodily resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ. Demythologising is simply infidelity writ large.

This is perhaps most clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 15 : 14 “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain (or empty), and your faith is also vain.” V. 17, “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is empty ; ye are yet in your sins.”

As in our study of the crucifixion we dwelt on the Old Testament prophecies foretelling this great event, so now we ought to note that there is one great verse in the Old Testament to which these early

preachers came back again and again. It is the pre-eminent scripture in which the bodily resurrection of Christ was foretold in the Old Testament and could be expected by those who had read it. Psalm 16, according to the interpretation put upon the words in the New Testament, is to be understood as spoken by the Lord Jesus, relative to His trust in God, as a man dependent upon God when He was here upon earth. Psalm 16 : 10 and 11 : “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (or the grave) ; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life : in thy presence is fulness of joy ; at thy right hand, there are pleasures for evermore.” Other scriptures are mentioned by the apostles in the Acts, as bearing upon this matter of the resurrection of Christ, but this is the central passage. In 1 Corinthians 15 : 4 it is made plain that the resurrection also, in addition to the death and burial, is the subject of Old Testament prophecy. This fourth verse continues the apostle’s review of the essentials of the message they preached, “and that he was buried, and rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

I think I should spend a few seconds on the subject of the evidence for the resurrection of Christ as historical fact. We do not depend upon this for our faith, but the apostle Paul makes quite a lot of it in 1 Corinthians 15 and we are entitled to do the same. Read the pass-

age in which he gives us the evidence (vv. 5-8). “He was seen of Cephas (Peter), then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.”

Now there is nothing directly spiritual about these verses. They deal with the historical evidence for the resurrection of Christ from the dead. I will do no more at this moment than remind you of the fact that the evidence for the resurrection of Christ, as a concrete historical fact is absolutely indisputable. None of those historical events from approximately the same period, which is universally accepted, has evidence as good as that for the resurrection of Christ.

I draw your attention to the remarkable story of Frank Morison’s book, “Who moved the stone?” It is not written exactly from the point of view of an evangelical Christian. It is written from the point of view of a man who is looking at the Gospels and the Epistles as documents which might be produced in a court and used as evidence. He does not always take the point of view that we would take since we believe in the literal, verbal inspiration of scripture. In his student days, he was willing to go to church and repeat the creed up to the point where Jesus “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried”—stop. Whatever anybody else said he would not go on to say—“The third day He rose from the dead.” “I used to stop dead at this point,” he says “set my teeth tightly, and refuse to utter another word.”

He conceived the idea of writing a monograph examining the last week of the life of the Lord Jesus, in a state of mind steadfastly withholding belief in the resurrection. But as he carefully sifted the evidence available, so by this evidence he was quite converted, and the book that he was going to write was called “the book that was never written,” and instead he wrote this book, which is one of the most monumental and closely reasoned reviews of the reliability of the evidence that our Lord Jesus Christ did indeed rise from the dead.

Now to believe the evidence that Christ rose from the dead will not make you a Christian. We are not Christians because we have capitulated before unanswerable evidence. We are Christians because we have “met the Man of Galilee.” We have heard His voice speaking to our hearts. He has spoken to us with love and forgiveness, and we are His forever. Nevertheless, in the face of the kind of attitude we have to face in the world and even in the church today, it is a good thing for us to realise that the historical evidence, even as such, and even on this level, is absolutely unassailable.

With that I will leave behind the subject of the evidence for the resurrection, and spend the time that still remains, to speak about the **meaning** of the story that we have read in Matthew 28. In the grey dawn of the first day of the week (the very first, the origin of SUNDAY, the Lord’s day), these women were hastening to carry out the ministrations that their love dictated to the body of the Saviour. In spite of all that He had said, they expected to find it there; they expected to do the loving service that they had gone to

perform. In the gospel of Mark we have at this point a touch which is so essentially true to ourselves and to women and to life as we know it, that it breathes truth. As they hurried along, bearing their precious burden of spices for the body of the Lord, they said to each other "This is all very well, but who is going to move the stone?" We are told it was "a great stone"; it was "an exceeding great stone"; and for all that they were willing to do this work, this labour of love, not for a moment could they imagine how they were going to move the stone. But in fact, unknown to them (v. 2) there had been a great earthquake and the angel of the Lord had descended from heaven, and had come and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. The Lord Jesus Christ had risen, and He had left the tomb. This angel had a "countenance like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." (There is just that word referring to the fact that the tomb had been guarded. There were witnesses here to be brought forward, if they could have confirmed the official story.) "The angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead: - - - And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word." This is the simple story, and then we have in various parts of the New Testament the record of the appearances of the risen Saviour to these few men and women who loved Him.

We must consider briefly not only

the fact of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ but also its meaning for us as Christians, and its meaning in the scheme of divine truth. I want to point out first that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was **victory**. He who was raised from the dead, and whom we confess as our Saviour and Lord, has been victorious over the grave.

In the catalogue of David's mighty men there is a brief reference to Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, mentioned for the rather curious fact that he went down into a pit and slew a lion in time of snow. Behind these brief words, we can sense a story of tremendous human interest. Here is a lion abroad in a time of snow. (I read about a chemical factory in India the other day. They were all going about their jobs, day shifts and night shifts, making explosives for mining, when everyone was electrified by the report that there was a Bengal tiger about. From the managing director to the humblest operator everyone was apprehensive of seeing the glaring eye and the shining stripes of a Bengal tiger. And sure enough it was there, and the story went on to say that somebody actually went out and shot it and paraded it through the factory, setting everybody's mind at rest). Now if there was a lion abroad in time of snow, it would be a terror to the neighbourhood and something must be done about it. Then the story circulates that now the lion is in this pit, and somebody is found brave enough to go down into the pit. Everyone is watching; it is impossible that it should be otherwise. It is a time of snow. It is very easy to see what is happening on the surface. Doubtless there would be roars and screams, and the clash of metal on claws and teeth. But one great question remains. **Who** will come

out ? Will it be the lion ? Or will it be Benaiah ? At last they see that the person who comes out is Benaiah the son of Jehoiada ; and the very fact that he comes out is the proof that he has won the victory in the battle that he went to fight, and he has destroyed the enemy.

The fact that our Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead is the proof of His victory over the foes that He went into death to fight and to defeat. He is the victor over sin and death and the devil, and since we are His, we are able to share the fruits of His victory. “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is thy victory ? - - - But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the second place, let us refer to Romans 4 : 23 “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him : But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead ; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” The resurrection of Christ was the **acceptance by God of the sacrifice** there offered. “He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father ” (Romans 6 : 4), and therefore His rising from the dead was the proof of the acceptance by God of His sacrifice. This is the meaning of the statement that He was raised from the dead “on account of ” our justification, and this is the reason why, if Christ be not raised from the dead, “our preaching is vain,” “your faith is vain ; ye are yet in your sins.” Since Christ is raised from the dead, we can be sure of God’s acceptance of the sacrifice He offered and we can be sure of our justification.

In the third place, read Romans 6 : 10 and 11 “For in that he died,

he died unto sin once : but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but **alive unto God** through Jesus Christ our Lord.” A great mass of New Testament truth converges upon this point, that the fact that He became alive from the dead is indeed our life. It is because of this that we are alive unto God. The new life we have received from Him is a life on the resurrection side, because it has been imparted to us by the Lord Jesus Christ, who has been raised from the dead. So that the life that we now live, the life that we live unto God, is a life of a resurrection kind, and it is a life therefore, which if we only permit it to do so, partakes of the magnificent power and victory of His resurrection.

Lastly, we learn in 1 Corinthians 15 : 20 that His resurrection is the proof that **our resurrection is coming**. Here is a most powerful affirmation. “Now is Christ risen from the dead.” A few verses before, there had been the supposition of a possibility that Christ did not rise from the dead, “If Christ be not raised ” Paul repeats more than once. But in verse 20 we come to the positive side, “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, 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.” Let us seize on this : Christ in His resurrection, the firstfruits : afterward, in **their** resurrection, they that are Christ’s at His coming. This takes us immediately to 1 Thessalonians 4 where in a very remarkable way all is made to depend on the fact that Jesus died and

rose again. 1 Thessalonians 4 : 14 is sometimes misunderstood. "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." This does not mean, as it might appear at first sight, that it is because of our faith ("if we believe") that we are saved and will be raised. The argument really runs thus. If the dead are going to come when Christ comes, they must have been raised from the dead. And what an enormous obstacle it is to believe that the dead can be raised. But what the apostle is saying is, if it be true that **Christ** died and rose again, then **these** who died shall rise again. So that the fact that Jesus died and rose again is the emblem and the power and the proof that they that are Christ's and have died **will**, in fact, rise again. So the resurrection of Christ is the pledge of our resurrection at the moment when "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first."

In conclusion, I would like to make a remark on the subject of the bible miracles. I would suggest to you that we might have in our minds difficulties about understanding, and even about accepting the miracles of which the bible speaks in its different parts, especially the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ. But I suggest that there are two miracles in the bible the acceptance of which makes everything else easy. There are two miracles great enough to engulf all the rest. These two are the miracle of the first creation of all things, and the miracle of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from amongst the dead. The resurrection of Christ from the dead as the master miracle, as the master stroke of God's inter-

vention for man's deliverance from sin and death, is a miracle which is absolutely incapable of disproof. It is a miracle proved by the most rigorous methods as well as accepted by faith. If once we see that this, so substantially demonstrated from every point of view is the master miracle, then we shall the more easily see all the other things fall into their place.

And yet of course, as I have said, we do not become Christians by accepting the logic and the proof of the historical fact of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We become Christians by knowing Him, and the proof of His resurrection for us, is not primarily a matter of documents and evidence, but it is the fact that we know Him alive from the dead. No married man needs to turn to the marriage register to prove that he is married. Why? Because he knows his wife, she is there all the time. And for the true Christian the reality of the resurrection of Christ is not merely a matter of evidential documents, because he himself and all the generations of faith that have gone before have lived and triumphed in the power of the fact that Jesus rose from the dead. His victory is our victory and His life is our life.

Let us remember that faith in the resurrection is a part of the faith of the church universal. There is a story from the Eastern church of an official Russian anti-God lecture which was timed for the Easter celebration. The lecturer's task was to disprove the resurrection. At the end of the lecture, without other comment or question, a man rose and gave the traditional Easter greeting "Christ is risen." As one man the congregation rose and gave the traditional answer, "Christ is risen indeed."

“THE SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH”

HAMILTON SMITH

(Psalm 91)

TO enter into the blessedness of this beautiful Psalm, it is important to notice its structure. The first verse gives us the theme of the Psalm—the **blessing of One who dwells in the secret place of the Most High.**

In the second verse we hear the voice of Jesus, taking this place of secret communion with God. This we know from Hebrews 2. 13, where the Apostle Paul quotes the words, “In Him will I trust,” as being the words of Christ.

Then from verses 3 to 8, have we not the testimony of the Holy Spirit to the blessedness of the One who dwells in the secret place ?

In the following verses, 9 to 13, we hear the voice of a godly man,—one who can speak of the LORD as “my refuge”—bearing his witness to the blessedness of Jesus.

Finally, in verses 14 to 16, the Psalm closes with the witness borne by Jehovah to the blessings that form the portion of the One who sets his love on God and dwells in the secret place.

(Vv. 1, 2) What then are we to understand by “dwelling in the secret place,” to which such blessing is attached, as witnessed by every voice in the Psalm ? To use our New Testament language, does it not speak of the inner life of secret communion lived with Divine Persons ? Is it not this life to which the Lord’s words refer when He says, “If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me;” and again when He says, “Abide in Me” ? Does not the apostle John

bring before us this secret life, when he writes, “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” ? (John 13 : 8, 15 : 4-7, 1 John 1 : 3). To have part with Christ, and abide in Him, is to live in communion with Him where He is. To live such a life is to dwell “in the secret place.”

It is not the **outer life** lived before men of which the Psalm speaks, but the **inner life** lived in secret before God. Further, it is not occasional communion of which the Psalm speaks, but rather the constant experience of the soul, for it speaks of one that “**dwelleth** in the secret place.” We know that there has been only one Man who lived this life of unbroken communion with God—the Man Christ Jesus, Who, when on earth, could speak of Himself as “the Son of Man which is in heaven” (John 3 : 13). He walked on earth but lived in heaven. While, the experience of the Psalm is only fully realised in Christ, it, none the less, presents a perfect **example** for the believer.

All the **outward life** of Christ on earth, marked by perfect obedience to the Father ; grace to sinners ; faithfulness in testimony ; holiness in walk, combined with meekness, lowliness, gentleness and love, was the outcome of the **inner life** lived in communion with the Father. With the most spiritual saint such a life will only be in measure ; with Him it was lived in absolute perfection. Have we not to own that, too often, we may have been very careful of our outward lives before men, but careless of the secret life known only to God. Has not all the ruin

of the church in responsibility been traced back, by the Lord, Himself, to failure in living this inner life? In the church at Ephesus, while there was much that the Lord approves in their outward zeal and refusal of gross evil, yet He has to say, "Thou art fallen." This fall is traced back to loss of first love. They had broken down in living the secret life of communion with Christ.

In the promises to the overcomer in the midst of the church's ruin, Christ is presented both as the Tree of Life in the paradise of God, and as the Hidden Manna. As the Tree of Life we have Christ brought before us in the home above—the Man in the glory—as the **Object** of our souls. As the Hidden Manna we think of Christ in His path on earth—the lowly Man as our **Example**. Does not the apostle present Christ as the Tree of Life when he says, "Looking steadfastly on Jesus" Who "is set down at the right hand of the throne of God"? Then, immediately, he reminds us of Christ as the Hidden Manna, when he says, "Consider Him that endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself" (Heb. 12 : 2-3 N.Tn).

In this Psalm we are invited to consider Christ as the Hidden Manna—the One who passed through this world as a stranger, amidst trials and dangers, in unbroken communion with God, and thus found in God His "refuge" and "fortress"—a refuge from every storm, and His defence from every enemy.

(Vv. 3-8) Passing on to consider the blessings of the One that walked in secret communion with God, as unfolded by the Spirit, we learn :—

Firstly, that such will be **delivered** "from the snare of the fowler, and from the destructive pestilence"

(N.Tn.). Does not a snare represent evil hidden under a fair exterior? The apostle Paul warns us against being beguiled with "enticing words" (Col. 2 : 4), and tells us that in the professing Christian circle some will be caught "in the snare of the devil" (2 Timothy 2 : 26). Again the apostle Peter warns us that among the saints there will be found those "who privily shall bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2 : 1 N.Tn). Was it not a "snare" the Lord had to meet when wicked men sought "to catch Him in his words," by approaching Him with flattery, saying, "Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man. . . but teachest the way of God in truth"? Was it not a "destructive pestilence" He had to meet when the Sadducees sought to argue there is "no resurrection"? In keeping with the secret life set before us in this Psalm, the apostle Peter sets before us the secret life of "godliness" as the way of deliverance from snares and destructive pestilences (see 2 Peter 1 : 3, 3 : 11). We may think we can escape snares and be preserved from heresies by our own intelligence and knowledge of the truth. But whatever our knowledge and gifts, unless we are in secret communion—abiding in Christ—there is no snare into which we cannot fall. The Corinthian saints found that though they had all knowledge, it was not sufficient to preserve them from the destructive heresy which denied the resurrection.

Secondly, the one walking in secret communion will be kept from every assault of the enemy by the word of God. Of such it can be said, "His **truth** shall be thy shield and buckler." Was it not so with the Lord when He met every temptation of Satan with the words, "It is written"? The Lord can say, in the

words of another Psalm, “By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer” (Psl. 17 : 4). Let us beware of seeking to meet the attacks of the devil by human argument. Error can only be met by truth. But to rightly use the truth we need to be living in secret communion.

Thirdly, of the one living this life of secret communion, it can be said, “**Thou shalt not be afraid.**” We live in a world of terrors by night, and dangers by day. A world in which there is lurking evil and wasting destruction. Though we may have to face these things on every side—as the word says, “at thy side,” and “at thy right hand,” yet, if walking in secret communion we shall “not be afraid.” We shall be preserved in the trial, and in due course see the governmental judgment of God upon the wicked.

(Vv. 9-13) Furthermore we are reminded, by the witness borne by a godly man, that the One who dwells in the secret place of communion—Who makes “the LORD . . . even the Most High” His “habitation,” will pass through the world under the escort of angelic beings, and overcome every wicked spirit. At every stage of the pathway of the Lord we are permitted to see the attendant angels. An angel announced His birth to simple shepherds, and a multitude of the heavenly host united to tell His praise (Luke 2 : 8-14). In the wilderness, when tempted by Satan, “the angels ministered unto Him” (Mark 1 : 13). In the agony of Gethsemane “there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven strengthening Him” (Luke 22 : 43). At His grave the angel of the Lord was on guard (Matt. 28 : 2). And in that last scene that closed His path on earth, when He was taken up to

heaven, two angels were standing by (Acts 1 : 10). Moreover, of the Lord’s people it is still true that the angels are sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation. But may we not say, it is the one who follows the Lord’s example, and walks in secret communion with Christ that will have the consciousness of divine protection and overcome the power of the devil whether it be in his might as a roaring “lion” seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5 : 9) ; or in subtle craft as the serpent (2 Corinthians 11 : 3) ; or as the persecuting dragon (Revelation 12 : 3) ? We thus learn by the perfect example of Christ that, if walking through this world with all its dangers and terrors, in constant communion with God, earthly evils will not overcome us, Heavenly hosts will wait upon us, and Hell’s forces be subdued beneath us.

(Vv. 14-16) Finally, we are privileged to hear the witness of God, Himself, to the blessedness of the One who walked through this world in a life of unbroken communion flowing from love to God. In Christ God has at last found a Man in wilderness circumstances of Whom He can say, “He hath set his love upon Me” ; “He hath known my Name” ; “He shall call upon Me.” In this perfect Man, God can find all His delight, and to His perfections God can give a perfect answer, as He says “I will” bless Him. When God says “I will,” who can gainsay ? So we hear God saying of Christ :—

“I will deliver Him” from every snare ;

“I will set Him on high,” above every power ;

“I will answer Him,” when He calls upon Me ;

“I will be with Him,” in trouble ;

“I will deliver Him, and honour Him ;

I will satisfy Him with length of days" in glory ;

I will "shew Him my salvation" in the coming kingdom.

When once His word is passed,
When He hath said "I will" :
That thing shall come at last,
God keeps His promise still.

Such then is the blessedness that flows from "dwelling in the secret place" and thus living the inner life of communion. If, in any measure we are to follow the perfect example of the Lord, as set forth in this Psalm, we must be ready to put our feet into His hands that everything in our thoughts and words, walk and

ways, that would hinder communion may be judged and dealt with by the washing of water of the word.

May we hear His voice as He says "Abide in Me," and respond in the words of the disciples who said, "Abide with us : for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." Opening the door of our hearts to Him, shall we not know something of the blessedness of His words, when He says, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3. 20). Will this not lead to the blessedness of dwelling in the secret place ?

ABRAHAM

ROBERT THOMSON

A FALSE STEP CORRECTED

IMMEDIATELY following the account of the covenant of the Lord with Abram, chapter 15, Sarai appears again in chapter 16. The background is set by the sentence, "Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children." Nevertheless, Jehovah's promise was to have its glorious fulfilment at His own appointed time, and in His own divine way. However, as is the case on many occasions, the natural mind in Sarai began to work suggesting plans for the accomplishment of the word of the Lord, which had been given for faith. Sarai was willing to offer Hagar, her handmaid, to her husband, Abram, in order that Sarai might have children by her. Thus Abram acquiesced in a course which involved severe discipline for himself, before the purpose of God would be fulfilled in suitability to His own mind and will. It has often been remarked that the natural mind has no room for patience ; but

faith has long patience, according to the word, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (James 5 : 7).

"And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai." What a sad departing from the principle of the previous chapter, where it says, "And he believed in the Lord ; and he counted it to him for righteousness." Long ago he had been commanded by God to leave his country, his kindred, and his father's house, in obedience to His word. He was now turning back again to the natural mind instead of waiting for God. Obeying the suggestion of Sarai, he took her handmaid ; and when Hagar saw that she had conceived, Sarai was despised in her eyes. This was a complete collapse of faith, bringing along with it a

trail of sadness and sorrow, and Sarai immediately sets in motion those unhappy results by turning with bitterness against Abram.

From hence, we see a remarkable picture of divine goodness toward Hagar, who, feeling her sense of guilt under the stern and harsh dealings of Sarai, had fled into the wilderness. Here the eye of God was upon her with His compassion and care, and she was found by the angel of the Lord beside a fountain of water, on the way to Shur, (a place of refuge). Greeting her by name the angel asked her two personal questions, "Whence camest thou?" and "Whither wilt thou go?" The answer to the first question is readily given, "I flee from the face of my mistress, Sarai," but she has no answer to the question, "Whither wilt thou go?"

We must remember that God was regarding Abram as His friend, and the position of Hagar was intimately associated with His servant-friend. Therefore the angel was sent to Hagar with gracious, searching words, "Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." Exceeding multiplication of the seed of Hagar was promised, but this must not be confused with the true seed which had been promised to Abram (chapter 15 : 4). The angel prompted the name of Hagar's child, which was to be Ishmael, (God shall hear) because the Lord had heard her affliction. This child was declared in his character even before he was born, giving us a clear description of the flesh. Ishmael would be a wild man, untameable; always at variance with others, and others with him. He would dwell with his brethren, but would not be of them; perhaps a picture of the present-day Arabs with the Jews.

It is beautiful to see Hagar rising

up in her appreciation of the Lord Who spake to her, declaring Him to be the One Who had seen her, "Thou God seest me." Like Jacob at a later date, (Genesis 32 : 30) she exclaimed, "Do I live after seeing God?" which is the meaning of, "Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" The well in the wilderness too was given a name suited to the momentous occasion, "Beer-lahai-roi." This signified "The well of him that liveth and seeth me," and it stood between Kadesh and Bered. The birth of Ishmael took place in its due course, and he was named by Abram, not Hagar. Had the Lord revealed this to His friend? The age of Abram at this time is recorded as eighty-six years, so we can gather that it was six years after the giving of the promise relating to Isaac that these events occurred. And the course of testing had still to continue for another thirteen years, preparing Abram and Sarai for further blessing in accordance with the promise of God Who works all things after the counsel of His own will.

Truly the activities of the natural mind, rather than waiting upon God, can lead us into very awkward conditions and positions; but we can rejoice in the knowledge that the Lord is able and willing to bring His own out of all distressing circumstances, with a readiness to serve Him after the lessons have been learned.

When a new section of the narrative begins in Chapter 17, Abraham was ninety-nine years of age. At this particular time God appeared to His servant and friend to assure him that he was not forgotten. The God who had watched over him in all his pilgrimage now reveals Himself to Abram as God Almighty. This moment marks a most significant step in God's revelation of Himself through all Scripture and

culminating in the final revelation by Jesus the Son, of God's true Name, the Father. The key-verse is Exodus 6:3. "And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the Name of God Almighty, but by My Name Jehovah was I not known to them." The name here revealed to Abram, El Shaddai, is the special Name under which the patriarchs knew God. It declares His power to sustain, and to bring to a glorious conclusion everything He has promised.

With the revelation came the command to walk before El Shaddai in sincerity and truth, a high and holy walk in keeping with the Name. Power was available for this as, step by step, Abram went forward in communion with God. Coming after the collapse of faith in connection with Ishmael's birth, this would be most welcome to Abram, confirming his faith in the God who had called him and was willing to sustain him. He who lays hold upon the living God is strengthened by Him, for He delights to engage the heart with Himself. The encouragement lies in the fact that He is able to do all that He has promised, on the ground of His sovereignty and purpose.

Let us notice the seven "I will"s of God in 17:2 to 8. They represent an advance on the "I will"s already noticed in Chapter 12. In them God declares what He will accomplish, bringing out the covenant, the exceeding fruitfulness of Abram, the possession of the Land, and also a people for God. In keeping with this, Abram received a new name, Abraham, father of a great multitude. How becoming to see Abraham fallen on his face as God talked with him (v. 3). Holiness and reverence should mark all who draw near to God, and this same attitude is beautifully seen in others such as

Moses and Joshua who were commanded to take off their shoes, for they were standing on holy ground.

The covenant was to be an everlasting one, and the land of Canaan an everlasting possession. This is still of great interest in view of the centuries which have passed, for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. Circumcision for Abraham and his household was to be the token of the covenant. By this means, obedience to the covenant was enjoined upon Abraham and his seed after him. In figure, "the body of the sins of the flesh" is by circumcision put away. The obedience involved in circumcision was renewed by Joshua at Gilgal, where by this means "the reproach of Egypt" was rolled away. There was to be no reliance on the fallen nature of man, but rather, implicit trust in God's promise and in His power to fulfil.

God also pronounced a blessing on Sarai, and her name was changed to Sarah, which means Princess. The son and heir was promised through her in a two-fold blessing. First, she would bear Abraham the son of the promise and of the covenant; and also she was to be a mother of nations, with "kings of people" coming in her line. We rightly exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and His ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33).

For the second time in the chapter, (v. 17), it is recorded that Abraham fell on his face; but not this time with reverence and faith. He laughed, and from his heart came thoughts of doubt, as expressed in the words, "Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" He was finding it

difficult to rise above the hopelessness of nature to bring forth the promised heir. His deep attachment to Ishmael was a reality, and he pleaded with God, "O that Ishmael might live before Thee!" Ishmael was certainly to be blessed, but God had ever Christ before Him, the Seed of Abraham through Isaac. This is of the greatest importance, and we note that no covenant was made with Ishmael; the covenant was established with Isaac.

The whole of Abraham's house-

hold was thus included with him under God's command, and as soon as God "left off talking with him," and went up from him, they were all included in the covenant circumcision.

What a privilege to be the friend of God, to hear the words of El Shaddai, in sustaining grace and power, promising unconditional blessing to Abraham and to his posterity, through Isaac, and above all through Jesus Christ, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham.

SEEK YE FIRST

J. S. BLACKBURN

7. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE MILLENNIUM

BEFORE continuing in detail with the real theme of these pages—the Kingdom of Heaven between the first and second comings of Christ—one or two questions about the Millennium might briefly be considered. Certain evangelical Christians cannot escape from looking at this in terms of the currently developing social and political conditions, and in some subtle way such thoughts constitute an objection to the whole idea of an earthly reign of Christ. Such a Kingdom presents to their minds something unworthy to succeed the reign of love in a spiritual Kingdom now realised through the gospel.

What (they demand) kind of television programmes will be broadcast? How fast will aeroplanes fly? What will be the voting system?

The first revulsion against the Millennium in the centuries before Augustine was itself a revulsion against mistaken expectations unrestrainedly indulged. A section of the Church manifested undue enthusiasm about the imagined de-

lights of the Millennium—especially fleshly delights. There is an obvious parallel between the two points of view. If we imagine Christianity superficially accepted by a Muslim society or an American Indian society, and this acceptance were to be followed by a slipping back, then the former degenerates would naturally think of the Millennium in terms of the harem and the latter in terms of the "happy hunting grounds." In our contemporary society the same positions are in some cases taken by the present state of evolution of scientific and political development. It is almost too obvious to point out that we must avoid reading into the Bible picture of a Millennium what might appear desirable or necessary to modern man.

The sample questions just quoted refer to conditions either highly transitory on any count (television and the speed of aeroplanes) or naked expedients for lack of better (democratic rule by the popular vote). Regarding communications, although by contrast with so little

as two hundred years ago, television and the jet aero-engine appear stupendous marvels, they are in themselves but clumsy and bungling contrivances. We may soberly expect that millennial communications will represent perfection, and not just some arbitrary stage in the development of human powers without God.

Still more inconceivably foolish it would be to imagine that the processes of democratic election will be involved in the perfect government promised for the millennial earth. Reflect on governmental failures in the field of disarmament, and compare Isaiah 2 : 3, 4. "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people : and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks : nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." Let anyone go out and look at and listen to electorate in any land. Will anyone soberly maintain that the person or the policy wanted by most people is best or wisest ? The ballot box is a good thing because it permits change without a blood bath, but very few can really believe that it chooses even the best men available, let alone the perfection of wisdom and power promised for the reign of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

It is also necessary, if extremely sobering, to remember that there will not be continuity between the development of human society as we know it today and the Kingdom of God in the Millennium. If one thing is clear from the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments, it is that the judgements of God, destructive of man's world, will plough a deep furrow between what is now

and what will be in that day.

That is not a just view of Scripture which regards the Kingdom of God in the Millennium as unworthy to succeed the reign of grace now realised in the Church through the preaching of the gospel. So far as the Church is concerned, what succeeds the present period of the Church militant is the church glorified with Christ. "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. . . For now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face : now I know in part ; but then shall I know even as also I am known." So far as the world is concerned, the Millennium will not be a descent from something higher to something lower (that is, from the spiritual reign of grace to the earthly reign of power), but nothing less than life from the dead.

It would be very unwise to attempt, on the basis of Scripture language, the construction of the social and political conditions of the Millennium, but the basic facts are so plain everywhere that we cannot fail to see them. Justice and Peace are the two great characteristics, and it is just here that the human governments of the world have so conspicuously failed. "The government shall be upon His shoulder : and His name shall be called. . . The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end. . . to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever." (Isaiah 9 : 6,7). Under these banners mankind will enjoy happiness and fulfilment without sin. "He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence. . . all nations shall call Him blessed. . . and blessed be His glorious name for ever : and let the whole earth be filled with His glory ; Amen, and Amen." (Psalm 72 : 14, 17, 19)

8. THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

ON a certain now famous day in the later part of the sixteenth century, there was some kind of service proceeding in the Cathedral at Pisa, and whether by homily, Missal or Breviary, the Word of God was being proclaimed. But this, one of the greatest influences ever invading the world, was quite lost on one person present. The young Galileo was otherwise engaged. Present in body, his mind was intently and eagerly occupied with a huge bronze lamp slung from the vaulted ceiling. Like many another before and since, he saw that it was slowly swinging, but unlike them, he was making this observation the subject of measurement as exact as the means immediately at his disposal permitted. He used his pulse to time the oscillations, and came to the most unexpected conclusion that the number of swings per minute was independent of the length of the swing, and was indeed constant for that particular lamp. It was one of the conspicuous moments in the history of scientific discovery, and this fact rather intensifies than diminishes the impact of the story as an illustration of the meaning of the parable of the sower. The Lord gives in a sentence the precept, for the hearer, to which the parable leads: "Take heed therefore how ye hear." (Luke 8 : 18) When the Word of God is preached, many are the enemies resisting its effect on the hearer; let nothing, however important in itself, interfere with your hearing the Word.

The paramount lesson of the parable is that the appointed instru-

ment of increasing the Kingdom in its present form is the preaching of the Word of God. The effect of the Word in individual cases is limited and constrained by hostile influences, as well as by the preparedness of the hearer, but the Word contains in itself all the power needed to effect what God desires. This truth can be illustrated in detail from the Acts, where the Word is often almost personified as the agent achieving results for God as it works in the world. No lesson can be of greater importance than this for "seeking first the Kingdom," whether we consider what can effect the changes so much needed in ourselves, or the means by which we can be of service to God in affecting others. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2 : 15).

The general lines of interpretation are clear, and indeed are supplied by the Lord to the disciples apart. The seed is the Word, the Word of the Kingdom, or the Word of God. The sower is not named in the explanation of the first parable, and from this we may conclude that although the Son of Man is at first the Sower, as in the parable of the Tares, all who preach the Word before the second coming of Christ will be sharing in the work of sowing. The ground on which the seed falls represents the hearts of those who hear, but we should be quite clear that this includes all who hear the Word of God, and not only the unconverted. In at least one of the four examples

described, the plant springing from the seed shows life and then dies. (Matthew 13 : 5). This fact should surely lead us to think, not so much of those who receive the Saviour and thereby pass once and for all from death unto life, but of those who do in fact obey Christ for a time—(that is, form part of His kingdom)—and then cease to do so. It is only too sadly true to experience to see people living as Christians for a time, and then falling away. The fruit, when it appears, is not only the salvation of the soul received, although this is always involved, but lives lived under the authority of the Lord. The fruit is the kingdom of God, the authority of Christ, deepened and spread.

The practical consequences of this distinction are very great. If we read the parable with the assumption that a successful result means primarily a soul saved from death and judgment, then once our own calling and election are sure, we can, so to speak with a little exaggeration, fold our arms on this point, and think only of the salvation of others. Whereas we only rightly read this parable when we are alive to the fact that the enemies named are active to sap away our acceptance of the authority of Christ today, and tomorrow, and every time we hear the Word of God. It is not less true in the subjective sense, that the fruit is "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Every Christian reader should therefore read the parable with watchfulness on two fronts. On the one hand we should be careful to learn about the use of the Word as the instrument for spreading the kingdom. On the other hand we should take heed how we hear, since we are also the subjects in that kingdom. The spread of the Kingdom relative to myself is the deepening establishment of the authority of

Christ in my life. This means that I obey Him more simply and fully. In an ideal situation, when a child obeys its parents, such obedience is the child's link with the parents' mature experience and knowledge and the plans which flow from these. When the disciple obeys Christ in the details of life, then this obedience links the disciple's actions with all the breadth and length and depth and height of all that is in the heart of God and to which He is working. Surely this is the reason for the prominence given to the Kingdom of God from beginning to end of the New Testament.

Permeating the whole parable and the interpretation is the idea of conflict. The seed is immediately and always working and urging towards the production of fruit, but enemies are ceaselessly active and directed towards bringing to nothing the inherent fruit-producing power in the seed. Every time and by whatever means we are exposed to the influence of God's Word, the parable of the sower is re-enacted. The enemies are busy, and they are here identified so that we might be warned and prepared and pray against them.

Here is the first example contained in the parable, together with the interpretation. "And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up." "When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side." (Matthew 13 : 4, 19). In this case the heart is trodden by the everyday concerns of living. Whether these concerns are elevated or degraded is totally irrelevant in this context. Whatever may be their quality they render the heart im-

pervious to the seed : it lies on the surface, and never makes any kind of entrance. One example is quoted in Luke's account. "Those by the way side are they that hear : then cometh the devil, and taketh the word out of their hearts, lest they should hear and be saved." (Luke 8 : 12). The story of Galileo and the discovery of the principle of the pendulum is a perfect illustration of such a case. But which Christian does not recognise himself at times in this picture of the good seed of the Word of God falling by the way side ? In every such case, it is desolating to reflect that this particular fragment of seed does nothing towards effecting its quota of kingdom fruit, of fostering obedience to Christ, and hence of righteousness, joy and peace. How often must we all confess, "alas ! what weakness within myself I find : no infant's changing pleasure is like my wandering mind."

The enemy is in this case most distinctly identified : the wicked one, Matthew 13 : 19 ; Satan, Mark 4 : 15 ; the devil, Luke 8 : 12. If every hearer is oblivious, this enemy is awake to the immensity of the issues at stake when anyone is exposed to the action of the Word, and is ever ready to catch away the seed from the trodden heart.

In case two, the defect is shallowness, and the enemies are tribulation or persecution, (Matthew) ; affliction or persecution, (Mark) ; temptation or trial, (Luke), represented by the scorching power of the sun. Evidently in this case the story is taken a little forward from the time of immediate hearing of the Word. There is time for a period of enthusiastic response. But soon the enemies do their work and it all comes to nothing. It is important to recognise that the enemies are not in

this case the critical factor, since they include much that is the common lot of man. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man : but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Nevertheless we are here warned that these experiences are potentially capable of reducing to nothing the effect of the Word, if we are not prepared against them.

Affliction is indeed often permitted by God to come upon His children for their good, and this recollection stresses the main lesson of this section of the parable, that shallowness, lack of root in ourselves, is the real cause of the withering. "It is true that the light and warmth of the sun are more often used to set forth the genial and comfortable workings of God's grace ; but not always. As that heat, had the plant been rooted deeply enough, would have furthered its growth, and hastened its ripening, fitting it for the sickle and the barn—so these tribulations would have furthered the growth in grace of the true Christian, and ripened him for heaven. But as the heat scorches the blade which has no deepness of earth, and has sprung up on a shallow ground, so the troubles and afflictions which would have strengthened a true faith, cause a faith which was merely temporary to fail. When these afflictions for the truth's sake arrive, 'he is offended,' as though some strange thing had happened to him : for then are the times of sifting and of winnowing ; and then, too, every one that has no root, or, as Matthew describes it, 'no root in himself,' no inward root, withers away. . . As the roots of a tree are out of sight, while yet from them it derives its firmness and

stability, so upon the hidden life of the Christian, that life which is out of sight of other men, his firmness and stability depend ; . . . Compare 2 Corinthians 4 : 17, 18, where faith in the unseen eternal things is the root, which, as Paul declares, enables him to count the present affliction light, and to endure to the end. Demas, on the other hand, lacked that root. . . Paul's condition at Rome at the moment when Demas forsook him was one of extreme outward trial and danger. It would seem probable, then, that the immediate cause of his going back was the tribulation which came for the Word's sake." (R. C. Trench)

In case three, some seed "fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprung up and choked them." "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word ; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." (Matthew 13 : 7, 22) "And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful." (Mark 4 : 19) Yet again in Luke, "when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection." (Luke 8 : 14) The new group of enemies now introduced are even more evidently long-term and insidious in their action. In other contexts these three might never be joined together, but here they stand unmasked as the foes which, after the Word has been heard, and the hearer has "gone forth," choke it. They are likened to assailants who silently take hold ; secure the hold against the victim's struggles ; and slowly but surely bring resistance to an end in death.

Care, in the strict sense of anxiety

or worry, has already come under the spotlight in an earlier chapter as something to be excluded altogether from the life of the disciple. In that place, we surveyed some of the warnings against worry spread so widely in Scripture, together with helps to overcome it. The role assigned to anxiety in this parable of the sower is even more positive and sinister than in the passages there considered. It is found in evil company as one of the influences which, if not vigorously dealt with at an early stage, will surely bring fruitfulness in the Kingdom to an end. It is never out of place to repeat the antidotes : faith, child-like yet mighty, in our Father's care : prayer, bringing the peace of God to garrison our hearts : positive action, seeking first the Kingdom.

Riches are not in themselves marked as evil or inconsistent with fruitfulness. Right back to Joseph of Arimathaea, a rich man, but also good and just and one who waited for the Kingdom of God, there has followed a noble succession of the few men of wealth who yet sought first the Kingdom. The warnings are against the love of money and the **deceitfulness** of riches. In this place it is surely the false appearance that riches so often present that bears the emphasis. The will to be rich does not reside in all. Indolence is in many cases stronger. But the urge to lay up treasure for oneself, where it exists, is responsible for so many resounding casualties, because it is so specious and plausible. In many things we all fail, but we must not fail for lack of the clear statement that the will to be rich is to be utterly excluded as motive or aim so far as the disciple is concerned. In its place the disciple acts on this : "and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men ; knowing that of the Lord

ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance.” (Colossians 3 : 23, 24) Let us simply hear the Word of God on this theme, in addition to the admonition concerning covetousness in Luke 12. “Ye cannot serve God and mammon (riches).” (Luke 16 : 13) “They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all evil : which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. . . Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy ; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Timothy 6 : 9, 10, 17-19)

Pleasure has always assumed an immense importance in human life, not only because, and at the level, that the natural man always seeks pleasure (and at this level we are alive in one of the distinctly pleasure-loving societies,) but because from the earliest times there have been serious thinkers who have been hedonists, that is they have equated the Good with pleasure. One of the most widely known of these, for the reason that he is mentioned in the Bible, (Acts 17 : 18) is Epicurus. This is not a place to enter in an attempt at a critique of the philosophy of hedonism, but to see with what plainness Scripture in all its parts forbids the disciple’s permitting earthly pleasure as a motive or aim. There are many things which will rightly give him pleasure, but

pleasures pursued for their own sake are among the enemy’s hands choking the good seed. The greek word from which the hedonistic philosophy took its name occurs in Scripture in the following passages in addition to Luke 8 : 14 which is at the moment under consideration. “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.” (Titus 3 : 3) “From whence come wars and fightings among you ? come they not hence, even of your pleasures that war in your members ? Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your pleasures.” (James 4 : 1-3) “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be. . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” (2 Timothy 3 : 4). No reader of the English Bible could forget two related passages. “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter ; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” (Hebrews 11 : 24, 25). The second is the trumpet resurrection voice of Psalm 16 : 11, showing where true pleasures lie : “Thou wilt show me the path of life : in Thy presence is fulness of joy : at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

Thus throughout our lives these three, cares, riches and pleasures are always at hand, in ground where they are native and flourish, that is our natural hearts, ready to strangle the Word, and bring to nothing its intended effect in the Kingdom of God.

In the last case study of this parable, the immeasurable powers of the Word of God when unhindered

are demonstrated. "He that received seed into good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." (Matthew 13 : 23). It is not easy to be sure what is intended by the hundred, sixty and thirty. In Mark, the order is reversed, and in Luke, only the hundredfold is mentioned. In this hundred, sixty and thirtyfold, some have seen fruit for God in the Church, in Israel, and in the nations. There seems to be, however, little warrant for this, and it is perhaps most natural to take the figures as true to experience, but unimportant for the purpose of the parable, possibly referring to different capacities of individuals. In this case there would be a parallel with the later parable of the talents, where the words occur, "to every man according to his several ability."

In the case just mentioned, there might be some indication of degrees of 'goodness' in the good ground. But it would be much more natural to concentrate attention on the essential facts of the parable, according to which good ground would be defined as ground not trodden hard like the way side, not mixed with stones and so shallow, and not containing thorns as either plants or seeds allowed to grow undisturbed. This would rightly concentrate attention on the practical lesson that good ground is prepared and tended ground.

In one sense the preparation of the hearer is the work of God, and we see this most extensively illustrated in the Acts. In another sense, especially for the disciple, preparation for hearing the Word, and the tending required after hearing the Word are our responsibility. It is open to the disciple never to read or to hear the

Word without lifting the heart to God, recognising the possibilities open, and praying that the Word may on each occasion accomplish within us what God desires. In the daily exercises of godliness we can give root and depth to the growth which is of God, even in the presence of affliction; we can root out the native shoots of cares, riches and pleasures.

The parable of the sower is of immeasurable importance to the lives of those who are seeking first the Kingdom. As a kind of extension to the parable itself rather than its interpretation, Spurgeon said: "You may omit, O recording angel, the fact that a warrior went forth to fight; it is far more important that you should record that "a sower went forth to sow." You may even forget that a man of science went into his laboratory, and made a discovery, for no discovery can equal in importance the usual processes of husbandry. Do you hear the song of the harvest home? Do you see the loaded wagons follow one another to the farmer's barn? If so, remember that there would be no harvest home if the sower went not forth to sow. As the flail is falling upon the wheat, or the threshing machine is making the grain to leap from among the chaff, and the miller's wheels are grinding merrily, and the women are kneading the dough, and the bread is set upon the table, and parents and children are fed to the full, do not forget that all this could never happen unless "a sower went forth to sow." On this action hinges the very life of man. Bread, which is the staff of his life, would be broken, and taken from him, and his life could not continue did not a sower still go forth to sow."

When the time was fulfilled, and God turned to do a new thing in the

world, and set about the introduction of the long-promised Kingdom, the action taken was that the Son of Man went forth to sow the Word. And the first great character stamped upon that Kingdom in the form it takes between the Comings is that the appointed instrument for its beginning and its progress is the preaching of the Word of God. To seek that Kingdom is to hear and to use that Word aright. Every time the Word of God is read, preached, or heard, the parable of the sower is being re-enacted in microcosm. The same evil one is at work ; the same sinister and baleful influences are found ; but the Word of God received and understood, is powerful

to form the Kingdom, to bring every thought into subjection to Christ.

It is at first sight a strange and unexpected thing that the Word should be less than universally successful, but it is true to experience, and not more strange than the existence of evil in the world. Thanks be to God it is also true to experience that the Word is extending its triumphs throughout the world, and for the purposes introductory to the New Testament epistles, it is plain that the reason is that the whole power of the grace of God and the operations of His Spirit are included in the concept of the Word at work in the hearts of men.

"THE CROWNED CHRIST"

J. STODDART

Impressions from Ripon, 1968.

1. HIS JUDICIAL GLORY

Revelation 1 : 10/18

FOLLOWING our earlier study of the earthly pathway of the Lord Jesus in Matthew's Gospel, our thoughts were led to a consideration of His place as glorified at God's right hand. The basis of this study was taken from the book of The Revelation and in the first place from ch. 1 : 10/18. It would not be surprising if in reading the various passages selected we encountered a number of difficulties in the language of this book. It is generally admitted to be less easy to understand than other parts of the New Testament because of its apocalyptic character, so different from the more familiar writings. One cynic remarked that the study of The Revelation "either finds a man mad or leaves him so." But this need not deter the diligent student who desires to learn all God's

mind, for at once he is met with the wonderful promise of v. 3 "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein : for the time is at hand." This would ensure that the resulting "madness" would be much to be preferred to the insanity so much in evidence all around us to-day !

It is perhaps more surprising to find that men of faith have found it hard to regard The Revelation as the language of inspiration. Martin Luther did not entirely repudiate it but along with James, Hebrews, 2 Peter and Jude he gave it a separate place at the end of his New Testament, because of his difficulty in understanding its meaning. Likewise Zwingli adopted a hostile view of the last book of the Bible. But there

have always been those, and I trust we are among them, who have learned to love The Revelation and who have found more than adequate proof of its authority and profound value as the fitting close to the inspired record of man's history and God's grace.

The intention of these studies, however, is not to embark upon a detailed examination of the vast prophetic schemes of the book, but rather to see all these in relation to the crowned Christ in certain passages which present Him to us in this way. The book opens with the announcement that it is, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass." Thus it all belongs to Him and underlines the greatness of His glory as the One to Whom all judgement has been committed, "that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." Keeping this in mind, we shall find it to be one of the most valuable keys to the understanding of the whole book. We would also readily see that the editorial title, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," is wholly unacceptable. This is not part of the inspired text, and the writer would have been the first to repudiate the erroneous ascription. On the contrary he humbly refers to himself as "your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." The fact that John does not even call himself an apostle here (or indeed in any of his writings) has evoked a question with some as to its authorship if not its authority. But we have every reason to believe that the writer is none other than "the disciple whom Jesus loved," and the author of the fourth Gospel.

Now John tells us that he was "in the isle that is called Patmos, for the

Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." Was he there as a missionary? or was he there by some special commission of the Lord to carry the Word of God there? or was he, as the bulk of evidence seems to suggest, there in exile because of his faithful testimony and witness to the Lord Jesus? One third century commentator on the Revelation tells us that the emperor Domitian had banished John to the mines of Patmos because of his witness for Christ. This indeed seems most likely, and as we know that Patmos was a rocky, barren island some forty miles off the coast of Asia Minor, there was clearly nothing in such a circumstance to inspire the magnificent pictures portrayed throughout the book. Christians became criminal outlaws when the Roman emperors demanded that every man throughout the empire should confess that Caesar is Lord! This was intolerable to those whose vital confession was that Jesus Christ is Lord and none other. Hence the cruel venom wreaked upon such, including John, by the power of Rome.

But in v. 10 the seer of Patmos says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Geographically he was still in that barren island with its unrelieved harshness, but empowered by the Spirit to be abstracted above its frustration and cruelty. He could enter into another world, the realm of the Spirit, where the voice of man is silenced and only the voice of God is heard. Are we not too often engrossed with what is immediately around us, when the Holy Spirit would lift us above the things of time and sense and engage us with the view point of heaven? This could provide us with the secret of a clearer understanding of the contents of the Revelation. But John was given to hear a great voice behind

him, as of a trumpet. Ezekiel, too, heard this voice behind him (ch. 3 : 12) when similar prophetic visions were given to him. It would seem to suggest that even in a spiritual condition the voice of God can come to us from a direction from which we least expect it.

An interesting question arises as to the expression, “on the Lord’s day,” this being the only time it is used in the New Testament. From the context it cannot be equated with the more general term, “The day of the Lord” which was and is still future. Evidently it was an expression understood in those days, since the Latin Calendar referred to the first day of the week as the Dominical Day, hence our justification for speaking of the Lord’s Day in this way. This may well indicate John’s preoccupation with the triumph of the Lord Jesus on the day that He rose from the dead. What comfort and strength this must have afforded him in his frustrating situation—to know that Jesus had triumphed and that everything was in His all-powerful hands.

A little more must be noted as to the expression, “in the Spirit.” This significant phrase occurs no less than four times throughout the Revelation and is used in connection with each of the main visions, ch. 1 : 10, ch. 4 : 2, ch. 17 : 3, and ch. 21 : 10. These are clearly designed as contrasting pairs, since the first two contrast the place of Christ in the midst of the churches on earth (chs. 1, 2 & 3) with the acclamations of heaven witnessed by John as he is invited to “come up hither” through the opened door (ch. 4 onwards). Then the second two contrast the judgement of Babylon on earth (chs. 17 & 18) with the true Bride, the Lamb’s wife, reigning with Him over the millennial earth. (ch. 21).

Now we must consider what John

saw when he turned “to see the voice that spake with me.” We don’t see a voice, do we ? But John was anxious to identify the voice with the speaker and doubtless he did not expect what he saw. The seven golden candlesticks (or rather lampstands) unlike the candlestick of pure gold in Exodus 25 : 31, are seven separate entities united only by the presence of Him Who is in their midst. His description seems to combine the characteristics of both the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man in Daniel 7 and it is possible that the imagery is borrowed from that source. There can be no doubt that He is a Judge of great distinction and majesty, with His head and His hair white like wool, as white as snow ; and His eyes as a flame of fire. With His venerable character and burning discernment nothing could or would escape His notice. His voice as the sound of many waters, like Niagara Falls would silence all others. His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace, would suggest His power to stamp out in judgement every rebellious element. The seven stars in His right hand are interpreted for us as the angels (or messengers) of the seven churches, already represented as the seven lampstands. The sharp two-edged sword that went forth from His mouth must surely be (as in Hebrews 4 : 12 and Revelation 19 : 13/15) the Word of God, the divine instrument of judgement in every situation. The shining of His countenance as the sun shines in its power was enough to prostrate John as though dead at His feet, as its brightness had once done for Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus road (Acts 9 : 3/4).

But Who is this terrifyingly glorious Person and in what relationship does John exist before Him ? What would our attitude be to such a Being ? We must surely take our

place along with John and fall at His feet as dead. And there would both he and we have remained had that gentle right hand not been laid upon us and His tender voice (not now the thundering of many waters) been heard saying "Fear not, I am the First and the Last : I am He that liveth and was dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen ; and have the keys of hell (hades) and of death." Now recognition is complete, now fear is dispelled, for it is the touch and the voice so well known—none other than that of Him upon Whose bosom John had reposed, and Whose visage was so marred more than any man (Isaiah 52 : 14) when He died at Calvary, but now radiant with all the glory of God. But we may still say, "How unlike the lowly Jesus of the Gospels ! And why this great difference ?" Let us imagine ourselves in the High Court, the Supreme Court of Justice and we are most impressed with the appearance and dignity of the Judge attired in the strange robes of his high office and all the paraphernalia of his profession. But it may happen that we know this man in the intimate circle of his own home, his wife and his family. So we are not afraid, being members of the jury and not the

criminal, but we are glad to know this man in the other, happier circle of family affection. Thus with our Lord Jesus, we know Him in more intimate circles than witnessed in Revelation 1 where we are privileged to see His judicial glory.

How thankful we must be that in His judicial character in the midst of the churches ("for the time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God." 1 Peter 4 : 17) the Lord Jesus announces Himself as "He that liveth, and was dead and am alive for evermore." He Who suffered the ignominy and shame of Calvary and wrested victory from the grave is alive, and He alone holds the keys of every situation to-day. Whether considered individually as light-bearers, luminaries in this dark world (Philippians 2 : 15) or collectively as assemblies, lampstands in a given area, we come under His surveillance, while at the same time knowing His unchanging love for us.

So let us pursue these studies in Revelation with the object of knowing better the present and coming glories of the Crowned Christ, and our lives will shine the brighter as His Lordship is acknowledged in all our ways.

THE COMFORTS OF THE LORD

HAMILTON SMITH

(Psalm 94 : 19).

THE Ninety-fourth Psalm very blessedly sets forth the way in which a godly man can experience the comforts of God in the midst of suffering, and find "rest from the days of adversity" (Verses 13, 19).

The suffering, of which the Psalmist speaks, arises from living a godly life in the midst of a godless world,—a world in which for the time being "the wicked triumph"

(3) ; in which they "speak hard things" against God and His people (4) ; in which they exalt themselves (4), crush God's people, and afflict God's heritage (5), act with violence towards the defenceless (6), and defy God (7).

The circumstances in which the Christian finds himself may be very different to those of the Psalmist, but the comfort and instruction of the

Psalm still applies, for it ever remains true that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3, 12). Moreover, we may find that the most painful form of suffering will come from the professing people of God. So the Apostle found when, on account of his pious life, he was deserted by all in Asia, opposed by false teachers, and insulted by malicious individuals (2 Timothy 1, 15 : 2, 25 : 4, 14).

Nevertheless, whether in the day of the Psalmist, or in the last days of Christendom, the one who seeks to walk in obedience to God will find that the time of suffering becomes a season of blessing. If, however, we are to obtain the blessing in the time of suffering, we must, in the first place, give up all thought of taking our case into our own hands and seeking to revenge ourselves upon those who unjustly oppose and abuse us. Whatever the suffering, the believer is to refrain from taking vengeance. When reviled the flesh is ever ready to revile again, and when suffering unjustly it is ready to threaten, and would delight in taking vengeance upon all who oppose and insult us with their hard speeches. But the godly are not to render evil for evil, or railing for railing. The LORD cannot trust the believer to deal with those who oppose. Vengeance belongeth to the LORD (Verse 1).

Are we then, as believers, helpless and resourceless in the presence of those who "speak hard things" against others, while boasting in themselves (v. 4). So far from being helpless the Psalm shows that we have the greatest possible resource. The LORD, Himself, is the resource of the godly. Faith falls back on the great fact that nothing escapes the LORD. He hears the hard speeches ; He sees every wrong act ; He knows every secret motive. "He that

planted the ear, shall He not hear ? He that formed the eye, shall He not see ?" "He that teacheth man knowledge, shall He not know ?" (Vv. 8-11).

The maliciously disposed may speak hard things about the godly, and slander them in secret, but the LORD hears, the LORD sees, the LORD knows.

Moreover, in making the trial an occasion of turning to the LORD, the believer will find great blessing. He will learn that all the trials and sufferings that come upon us are permitted of the LORD, and are part of His chastening. Receiving blessing through the chastening, he will be able to say "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law" (v. 12).

The devil would seek to occupy our thoughts with the trial to bring in distance between our souls and the LORD. He would seek to engross our minds with the hard speeches and unjust acts of our opposers and thus lead us to "fret," and "grieve," and complain in bitterness of soul, like Hannah of old (1 Samuel 1.6, 8, 10). Faith, making the trial an occasion of turning to the LORD, not only triumphs over the devil, but, gets blessing out of the trial.

Turning to the LORD, our opposers and their hard speeches cease to engross our thoughts and, alone with the LORD, we learn that He is allowing the trial for our blessing. Thus we keep the LORD between ourselves and the trial, instead of allowing the trial to come between ourselves and the LORD.

We learn that if the LORD allows men to "speak hard things" and act maliciously towards us, He will use the trial to correct much in our thoughts, and words, and ways, that He sees to be inconsistent with Himself. He does not chasten

willingly ; He sees there is a need be for the trial. Thereby we discover the unsuspected evil of our own hearts, that we may judge the flesh, and say with Job, "I abhor myself." It is one thing to admit the truth of the doctrine that in the flesh there is no good thing ; it is quite another to learn this truth experimentally in the presence of God.

Further, looking beyond the immediate trial, and seeing the LORD'S hand dealing with us for our blessing, will lead to rest and calmness of soul. Instead of fretting and bitterness of soul, we shall find "rest from the days of adversity." (v. 13). Even so, Hannah found in her sore trial, when she turned to the LORD, "poured out her soul before the LORD," and was "no more sad." Her circumstances were not changed, but she was changed, for, by pouring out her soul before the LORD, she passed from bitterness of soul to rest of soul (1 Samuel 1. 15, 18).

Moreover, in the loving chastening of the LORD, we not only learn to detect and judge the evil of our own hearts, but, we also discover the goodness and grace of the LORD'S heart. Thus, in the portion of the Psalm that follows, verses 14 to 20, the godly man is occupied with the LORD and all that He is on behalf of His own.

First, he realises that though the LORD may chasten, He "will not cast off His people, neither will He forsake His heritage" (14). So the Apostle, in his day, can remind believers that the Lord has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13. 5).

Secondly, he finds that the LORD is his helper. If I am not to take vengeance upon my enemies, "Who will rise up for me against the evil doers ? or Who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity ?" Experience answers these questions,

for, says the Psalmist, "Unless the LORD had been **my help**, my soul had almost dwelt in silence." So again, the Apostle, realising that the Lord will never forsake the godly man, can boldly say, "The Lord is **my helper**, and I will not fear" (Hebrews 13. 6).

Thirdly, the godly man finds that he not only requires **help** because of his enemies, but, he needs to be **held** because of his own weakness. So he can say, "When I said, my foot slippeth ; thy mercy, O LORD **held me up**" (v. 18).

Thus the Psalmist, very blessedly realises in trial that the LORD will not forsake us, the LORD is our help, and the LORD will hold us up. So too the prophet Isaiah links these three things together when he says, "Fear thou not ; for I am **with thee** : . . . I will strengthen thee ; yea, I will **help** thee ; yea, I will **uphold** thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isaiah 41 : 10-13).

Bringing then our sufferings to the LORD we not only obtain "rest from the days of adversity" but we find the "comforts of the LORD." We learn that He is with us, to help us in all our sufferings, and hold us in all our weakness. Thus the "anxious thoughts," which would distract the soul, give place to the comforts of the LORD that delight the soul (V.19 N.Tn).

With the LORD before his soul as an Object, and the comforts of the LORD filling the soul, the wicked are no longer feared. As the Apostle can say, at a later day, "In nothing terrified by your adversaries" (Philippians 1. 28). They may "gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous," but the LORD is his "defence" against every assault of the enemy ; and his "refuge" in every storm. Never will the LORD cast off His people, though, in due time, He will cut off the wicked. (Vv. 20-23).

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

COLIN CURRY

1. INTRODUCTION

KNOWING this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man : but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost " (2 Peter 1 : 20, 21)

The context of these words shows that Peter as he wrote them had particularly in mind the prophetic parts of the Old Testament. But in the light of other passages it is fair to extend their application to the whole bible. The passage then becomes one of several which indicate the divine origin and authority of scripture. Though this is an important subject, it is not the intention to consider it more than briefly here. For the purpose of this short sequence of articles it will be accepted with a minimum of discussion. The issue we wish to consider is concerned more with the reception and understanding of the message which scripture contains. The first of the sentences quoted appears to say something about this : it suggests that an approach to the meaning of scripture requires discrimination and care. Using this as our starting-point we shall consider the general question of the interpretation of scripture. It should, however, be noted that, as in verse 21, the main stress in verse 20 is probably upon the fact that the prophets did not really originate what they wrote. They did not voice their own private thoughts ; nor were their words related solely to their particular circumstances and historical setting. Rather, their contributions were made under the Holy Spirit, and not always within their own understand-

ing (as, for instance, 1 Peter 1 : 10-12 makes plain). These contributions are to be understood as fitting into the broad prophetic scheme of scripture, which has as its great theme and end-point the kingdom and majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The passage quoted at the head of this paper has, therefore, its main emphasis upon the source of the scriptures, and consequently upon their authenticity and scope. But this also clearly affects the lines on which we should seek to understand them, and verse 20 may also have this in view. Paul, too, in his final letter of all, stressed to Timothy the importance of "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2 :15). What principles should be followed in doing this ? What indications does scripture itself give about a proper approach to its meaning and teaching ? What warnings about possibilities of distortion and misunderstanding ? These are questions which need to be faced, even though we may be agreed and assured as to the God-given nature of the holy writings.

An outline of the way in which we plan to pursue this subject may be helpful. We hope to devote the next paper to a discussion of **attitudes** towards the word of God which make for discernment of its

teaching. This is an important part of our task. We shall see that much depends on the spirit in which the bible is approached. A great deal turns on our readiness, not only to read and study, but also to hear and to obey its voice to us. Purely natural faculties will be insufficient here ; we shall need to depend on that perceptiveness and illumination which the Holy Spirit alone can give. Humility and absence of self-confidence must mark our approach ; though that approach should be no less keen and diligent on that account.

Next, it will be important to pick out **principles** to be followed in seeking to gain a balanced understanding of the teaching of scripture. There are pointers in scripture itself as to the main objects of its existence, the main lines along which its structure and its substance develop, the main thrust of its message. Though every detail is of value, confusion can arise if minor matters and side-issues are too prominently in mind before a feeling for broad outlines of biblical teaching has been gained. There are also passages in scripture which warn about distortion of its contents, against misrepresentation of what it says, and against those who so misrepresent it. If we seek a proper understanding of its message we must give special weight to these parts of its teaching : we must be alert to our own susceptibility to the false emphasis, to the closed mind, to the over-imaginative interpretation. This attempt to outline key features of the scriptural content will naturally form the major part of our whole theme. Some subdivision will be necessary here.

Then, some of the **problems** which

arise in the interpretation of scripture will need to be faced. At this point, however, it should be said firmly that much in the bible is **not** problematic. It would be unfortunate if this series of articles gave the impression that the general understanding of scripture is difficult. Granted the willingness to accept it on its own terms, its central message is clear. Scripture does not generally present obstacles to its readers ; but rather "the entrance of thy words giveth light ; it giveth understanding to the simple" (Psalm 119 :130). The simple believer, not looking for difficulties, rejoices in its straightforward teaching. He readily finds food for his soul there ; he allows it to guide his actions and thoughts. At a secondary level, however, there **are** problems which need to be brought into the open. Questions arise in some contexts as to the validity and limits of certain methods of interpretation. **Examples** of how scripture interprets itself will help us in this study, and it may be desirable to deal with some of these in a separate section. Differences of viewpoint on allowable ways of understanding some types of passage will remain, even after a full discussion. On such matters flexibility, and absence of dogmatism, together with respect for other views, will be the wisest attitudes. A free and (so far as possible) impartial discussion of such questions ought to be helpful, and will not be avoided.

Finally we shall endeavour to gather up the lessons of our study. With these in mind we hope to suggest some **guidelines** of a practical kind which may help towards a fruitful and personal reading of the word of God.

COMMUNION WITH GOD

THE last words of Genesis 18 describe the contents of this chapter. God was communing with Abraham. It is a lesson most holy to learn in what consists communion with God. This communion takes three forms.

As the chapter opens we find Abraham dwelling in the place of fatness (Mamre), and being visited there by the Lord. This is very sweet to the pious soul, for God delights to make Himself known to those who are well pleasing to Him. Three men drew near to Abraham who are recognised by him as being worthy of reverence, and he straightway bowed himself to the ground before them. Taking the place of servant, he gladly offered to serve them, having found favour in their sight. First of all he brought water and washed their feet, thereby refreshing them; and also bread to satisfy their hunger. These lovely features are brought to light in all their perfection by the Lord Himself, when as the Servant of God in this world, He washed His disciples' feet, and fed the multitude with loaves and fishes. Also, a delightful godly order is observed in Abraham's household. He asks Sarah, his wife, to prepare quickly three measures of meal and make cakes for the visitors, which she does readily. Then one of his young men is requested to dress a good and tender calf, and thus a meal worthy of the company is presented to them. Abraham stayed with the men while they ate, finding joy of heart in their company, and later accompanied them on their journey toward Sodom.

Thus, in the first eight verses God is in communion with Abraham by receiving refreshment at his table.

Why did the three men come to see Abraham? Doubtless it was to

confirm the promise of God to him and his wife, that Sarah should have a son at the appointed time. Upon hearing this announcement from the heavenly guests, she, reasoning from the standpoint of nature, laughed within herself. It was indeed true that which was of the natural order had run its course with both Abraham and Sarah, leaving the ground clear for God to work by His own power, and in blessing. Sarah was afraid as the men remonstrated with her, for that which was given for faith must not be questioned. Then a question was raised by them, which would bring glory to God, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" The believing heart can answer in the energy of faith and say, "Certainly, nothing is too hard for Him, especially so when it is for blessing." The activities of faith are incomprehensible; for faith sees the invisible, it knows the unknowable, and can perform the impossible. For Sarah, her faith was soon to have its full reward in the birth of a son, and then she would really laugh, being filled with unbounded joy. The promised son was born at God's appointed time, and given the name 'Isaac,' which means 'laughter.'

What a sad story is connected with Sodom! The hour for God's judgment upon the wicked cities of the plain was drawing near, and He would have Abraham to be in the knowledge of what He was about to do. The question therefore was asked, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?" (vv. 17, 18). The true spirit of friendship is now made manifest, for was not Abraham the friend of God? "The secret of the

Lord is with them that fear him ; and he will shew them his covenant" (Psalm 25 : 14). Again in John 15 : 15 "Henceforth I call you not servants ; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth : but I have called you friends ; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Thus, in verses 9 to 22 God communes with Abraham by letting him into the secrets of His intentions.

The remainder of the chapter records how God communed with Abraham by bending His ear to Abraham's intercession.

Immediately the knowledge of coming judgement upon Sodom was revealed to Abraham he began forthwith to intercede before God for the people who dwelt there. God beholds the good and the evil : the good in Abraham, bringing upon him blessing through faith and the promised seed of Isaac : the evil in Sodom and Gomorrah calling for His judgment because of their wickedness. How great is the longsuffering of God ! Although He knew all the evil of the two cities because of His omniscience, yet He purposed to come down to them to see if the wickedness was according to the cry that had reached His ear. Then the divine messengers turned towards Sodom, but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. In Genesis 17 : 1 Abraham was called to **walk** before the Lord and be perfect ; here in Genesis 18 : 22 it says that he **stood** before the Lord : two very beautiful features of communion and fellowship : a godly walk and the enjoyment of the presence of the Lord.

Abraham now becomes an intercessor before God on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom, and in boldness of faith asks a very momentous question, "Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked ?" This could never be ; but how can a righteous and merciful God act ?

Would He avert the judgment if fifty righteous men could be found in the city ? Abraham then fell back upon the justice of God, and rested assured that in judgement He would do that which was right. Yet Abraham will prove Him in the exercise of mercy by his importunity in intercession. How touching to see a man of God pleading and interceding for others at the throne of grace ! What power there is here to turn the very hand of God ! The word to us in this day is given in 1 Timothy 2 : 1 "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men ; for kings, and for all that are in authority ; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Do we avail ourselves enough of this privilege ? "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5 : 16).

How long it took Abraham to come down from fifty to ten righteous in his intercession, we are not told, or how patiently the Lord listened to His servant ! Perhaps Abraham was confident that ten righteous persons could be found, and the cities spared of the coming judgment. Yet, alas, the Scriptures bare witness that Lot alone could be described as righteous. "For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds" (2 Peter 2 : 8).

The time of Abraham's intercession for Sodom eventually came to an end, and the Lord went on His way. The Psalmist tells us that His way is in the sanctuary, and also in the sea. (Psalm 77 : 13, 19). Abraham returned to his place in Mamre, the place of the sanctuary, and the Lord went forward to execute His judgement upon the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah.

2. ATTITUDES

“If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God” (John 7 : 17)

“The things of the Spirit of God. . . are spiritually discerned”
(1 Corinthians 2 : 14)

“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)

OUR basic premise for this series of papers represents a first attitude towards Scripture which is essential to its understanding. To follow the rest of this discussion, even to read the bible itself, will be of little profit unless we humbly agree with the account of itself which the bible gives. In brief, it claims to be an authoritative and complete body of revealed truth, originating from God Himself, perfect in all its details ;* its teaching is binding and final for all who would respond to God’s voice to them. Christ Himself fully held and confirmed this view of Scripture. It is well, no doubt, to remind ourselves at the outset that our Lord Himself is our ultimate authority for such an attitude to Scripture ; and that this kind of respect for the written word necessarily goes hand in hand with a real faith in Him.

Given then that this book is from God, and having in mind the God it shews Him to be, such a book could not come to us without claiming the sort of response that it does. Our bible does not apologise for itself ; neither does it seek to justify itself. Instead it confronts its readers with its own searching challenge, in a living and direct way. It asks for our faith ; it requires from us a humble and unquestioning reception of the

communications that it brings from God. Teachableness, readiness to believe its truth, to search out its relevance to ourselves and to follow its guidance, are among the key attitudes involved in its understanding. To approach it not as learners but as critics, or even as mere analysts, with no sense of the need to be committed to its claims upon us, is to shut off ourselves from its meaning. To presume to stand in judgment upon God, or to querie what is from God, is to reverse the divine and human rôles. Rather, the word of God judges us, and our reaction to it is a sure sign of our state in relation to Him. In the words from the fourth gospel, quoted at the head of this paper, our Lord pointed out to closed-minded and antagonistic Pharisees the real reasons for their blindness to the truth which He embodied. There is a warning in these words, too, for interested but uncommitted persons. Christianity makes little sense to those who attempt to view it from the sidelines. Personal involvement is an essential part of a true approach to the things of God. Commitment to Christ, and readiness for active response to Him, substantiate in a person’s experience all that He offers and claims. The bible, too, is self-authenticating if there is humble submission and response to its teaching.

*We do not discuss here the question of minor imperfections in transmission and in translation. The statement made remains substantially true of the bible we have in our hands today.

Furthermore, a close and real reliance upon the Holy Spirit of God, the author of Scripture, will be needed if we are to grasp its message for us. Spiritual truth requires spiritual discernment. The reception of the word of the living God is a living, spiritual process ; the natural human faculties alone are quite incapable of this. To the Christians at Corinth, confident in their own ability to judge issues, Paul had to point out their small progress towards a really spiritual outlook. The whole of chapters 1 to 4 of the first epistle is concerned with this, but see especially 3 : 1, 2. The true wisdom is gained on altogether different lines, dependent, not on human abilities, but upon God Who both reveals His mind and gives understanding of it by His Spirit. A careful reading of this passage indicates how closely the attitudes we have already discussed are tied up with a spiritual understanding of God's written revelation. Willingness to recognise God in the writings we are privileged to study ; readiness to give Him His place as the One Who graciously communicates His mind to us ; a dependent, receptive approach, reliant on illumination which we do not possess ourselves, but which He will flood into our hearts and minds by His Holy Spirit ; the desire, not only to be informed, but also to obey the truth which He will impart to us ; these, according to this passage, are essential characteristics of the spiritual Christian, of the spiritual student of Scripture.

The section which occupies chapters 12 to 14 of 1 Corinthians is also helpful in distinguishing further characteristics of a spiritual and effective involvement in the things of God. This part of the letter

is particularly concerned with audible contributions during the assembled gatherings of the Christians at Corinth. Several of the believers there had undoubted gifts for speaking in the Christian assembly. Paul emphasizes the principles which should be in mind in order to achieve a truly spiritual and profitable usage of these gifts. The points made have their relevance to any spiritual activity and we draw attention to them here with bible study (and bible exposition) particularly in view.

First, the opening verses of chapter 12 lay stress on a matter of prime importance. Any contribution which is according to the Holy Spirit of God gives due recognition to Christ ; it will be fully aware and in support of the supreme place which He fills in the divine scheme of things, and of His sole and universal authority and worthiness. This too will be the first and continual finding from a study of Scripture which is on spiritual lines. To displace our Lord Jesus Christ from the centre of the picture, to give Him less than the unique place which is properly His, is a dubious procedure. Study of our bibles, however extensive and painstaking will miss the mark if as the outcome Christ does not increasingly fill our vision and command our subjection and loyalty. Ardent bible-exponents who fail to acknowledge the absolute pre-eminence of the person of our Lord are not lacking in our day. We must not align ourselves with these in the smallest degree. Respect for the bible, without allowing to Christ the high and unique place which it gives Him, is inconsistent and misguided ; as indeed is the profession of loyalty to Christ without a full respect for the bible. As we have

already indicated, the two attitudes go hand in hand.

Chapter 14 also has important lessons in the present context. One cannot fail to note how Paul in this chapter presses certain down-to-earth criteria by which activities which purport to be spiritual may be tested. The importance of actions which are "with the Spirit and . . . with the understanding also" is stressed. It is well when the mind of the biblical exponent (and of the bible-student) is fully engaged in what he does. What will characterize a real message from God will be its high value to hearers, the distinct and pointed nature of what is said, its unpretentious straightforwardness, not the human speaker but God's voice being heard, convincing and convicting the recipients of the message. There is emphasis here upon orderliness, deliberately sought after, as a mark of Spirit-controlled ministry in a Christian assembly. Plainly the same characteristics and restraints which should mark the passing on of God's word should not be absent in our personal searching after its meaning. Ample support is therefore to be found in this chapter for the belief that system and discipline in our approach, and the absence of what is diffuse and fanciful in what we discover (and perhaps seek to pass on) are among the marks of what is really of the Spirit of God in a true seeking for God's message in the bible. Not a few verses from entirely distinct parts of the bible could be adduced to reinforce this. The Psalms, for instance, have many choice expressions commending (and demonstrating) a purposefully directed and devoted evaluation of the written word of God. Nehemiah 8 : 8 supplies an excellent watchword for those who would spell out for themselves and

for others the message of the Scriptures ; " So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

Returning to the section in Corinthians, chapter 13 comes centrally within this passage, and draws attention to another vital matter. It shows that Christian love is an indispensable component in any activity which is truly spiritual. Our bible study will have missed the essential kernel of what is available to us if it does not touch and feel the love of God ; it must surely have lost its way if it fails to produce some reflection of that love in ourselves. The beautiful characteristics of divine love are here described. Nothing has value without it. Features like these should become increasingly evident in the manner and ways of those who absorb the teaching of the sacred pages. We must certainly be on guard lest our learning of the truth leaves us lacking in these qualities. Biblical truth as expounded can sometimes seem to be well-docketed yet inanimate and dry-as-dust ; it can be accurately phrased yet lacking in power ; it can even be held and presented in an overbearing or strident manner. The effect of sitting at the feet of the Master, having our hearts warmed by His gracious instruction, ought surely to be of a different quality. The faithful disciple of our Lord will pass on his findings graciously and modestly, in a way more in tune with the love of Christ, more full of His life and Spirit, more truly impressive and genuine. May our manner of approach to the biblical teaching, and the outcome of our assimilation of it, have these commendable and distinctively Christian attitudes as their prominent features.

LOT IN THE GATE OF SODOM

IN Genesis 19 we see the great difference between Abraham and Lot in the manner of their lives. The offer by Abraham of refreshment was readily accepted by the visiting angels, but not so the offer by Lot. Sitting in the gate as an administrator of the city of Sodom, Lot also dwelt in a wicked place. Abraham was separated to God; Lot had separated himself from God by his associations with the wicked city. When he offered hospitality to the angels, they refused at first, saying, "Nay; but we will abide in the street all night." Lot pressed them greatly to come inside, but it was perhaps fear for their safety that prompted him. Then they went in and partook of the feast which he had prepared. It is noticeable that there is no mention of his wife, as with Sarah in the previous chapter.

There followed a night of terror as the Sodomites gathered around the house demanding the surrender of the men to them. Both old and young were there, shewing how the evil had prevailed in Sodom. Lot seems to have lost the divine remedy of turning to the Lord in his extremity, and took the appalling step of seeking to appease the lusts and passions of the riotous mob by offering them his daughters. Ignoring this offer, they would be satisfied with nothing but surrender of the men. In Romans 1 : 25, 26 we learn that determination in such evil marks the fact that God had already given them over "to vile affections," and now a greater judgment awaits them. Haters of that which is good,

they practised evil and unbridled sin, and would not tolerate any attempt to alter their pernicious ways. Thus Lot and his words were received with mockery, his place in the gate failing of any restraining effect. Rather he had been vexing his righteous soul every day with the filthy conversation of the wicked. (2 Peter 2 : 7, 8) What a sorry position for a man of God, thus to be dwelling in the place already condemned, having no fruit for God, and shortly to be saved so as by fire.

The two heavenly messengers there and then manifested their power in a two-fold way; firstly in preserving Lot from the violence of the people, and secondly, in smiting the assailants with blindness, so that they could not find the door. This was but the beginning of God's judgment upon them, for the inescapable fire from heaven was soon to follow. Immediately the messengers prepared for this by seeking to urge Lot to hasten to bring his family and possessions out of the doomed city. How great must have been the cry of wickedness and sin, rising up to the throne of God and before His face, calling down His swift judgment upon them. The messengers reveal to Lot that they had been sent to destroy the city, and they now give him the opportunity to warn his sons-in-law of their immediate danger, to urge them to escape from the city with great haste, for the Lord was about to destroy it. His message was unavailing, because the manner of his life, empty of communion with God, robbed his witness of any power.

Here is a great lesson for us. We cannot link ourselves with the world and its evil and think that all will be well., Christ has given Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world. (Galatians 1:4) His last earthly word concerning the world is : “Now is the judgment of this world : now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” The Judge has been commissioned : “ And the Father hath given authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.” (John 5 : 27) The day of judgment has also been appointed. “ He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained ; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.” (Acts 17 : 31) There can be no effective testimony for God to the world from one who is engulfed in the world. This is surely one of Scripture’s saddest texts : “ Lot seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law.”

The morning of wrath surely dawned, and the angels were in haste that Lot, the head of his house, should lay hold upon his household and bring them out from the city under destruction. He lingered in the performance of this most urgent matter, and the messengers had to take hold of his hand, and the hand of his wife, and the hands of his daughters, to pull them out of the city. One sweet note sounds through it all, “ the Lord being merciful unto him.” (v. 16) Truly, “it is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not.” (Lamentations 3 : 22)

Once they were outside the city, a new and pressing instruction was given. “ Escape for thy life ; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain ; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.” (v. 17)

God’s way of deliverance was to the mountain. The plain was the scene of judgment, and must be left quickly, and no backward look of disappointment, or even of curiosity, must be allowed. The mountain, great in elevation, is a fitting picture of where Christ has gone, beyond the reach of judgment. Lot was not equal to this, and the parting with Sodom was proving to be a terrible wrench for his soul. The utter confusion of his mind is demonstrated in that with the same breath he magnifies the grace and mercy of God, and is overcome by fear that evil and death should overtake him. What a contrast with Abraham, who was able fully to acquiesce in God’s condemnation of the evil through having a close walk with God, and was soon to learn that Jehovah is the source of true life, after the offering of Isaac !

Lot was contented to stay in Zoar, a miserable place indeed, very close to the site of the burning. Of Demas it is said that he loved this present world, and forsook the company of Paul, whose whole life and service was to be engaged with Christ in glory. Let us seek to have our minds engaged with the things which are above, and not on things on the earth. The Lord acceded to Lot’s desire for a place in Zoar, for He will not force us to things for which we have no desire. Another point of immense importance which we should learn from this inspired history is that the sentence could not be executed upon the wicked in Sodom and Gomorrah until righteous Lot was taken to a place of safety. This is certainly a picture, for our assurance and comfort, of the fact that God’s wrath will not fall upon this world before the Lord Jesus removes His redeemed by the Rapture of the saints at the moment of His Coming, to be with Himself in glory.

The day of wrath did come upon the cities of the plain, as the early morning sun shone upon Lot's entrance into Zoar. With awful suddenness the fire and brimstone came down on the unexpected citizens, and everything perished in the overthrow. How terrible is the thought of judgment from God! It is truly His strange work, and His mercy makes it of short duration. Lot's wife disobeyed God's commandment, and, looking back on Sodom, she became a pillar of salt.

A very sweet interlude is given concerning Abraham. His intercession for Lot and others had not gone unanswered, for God remembered Abraham, and "sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow." (v. 29) He too rose up early in the morning, not to escape the fire, as with Lot, but rather to commune with the Lord, as was his wont. He stood before Him, ready to hear and ready to speak. Everything is in beautiful moral order here. From the presence of God, the place of safety, Abraham is allowed to see the result of the overthrow of the cities, the smoke of the country rising as the smoke of a

furnace. This moment in the story should be a great encouragement to us to continue in our intercession for kings, and rulers and all in authority.

The end of the story of Lot is dark indeed, and forms no small part of the warning to us not to turn aside from the life of faith as Lot did when he parted from Abraham so long before. (chapter 13). In the end he was driven by his fear to leave Zoar, with his two daughters, and to dwell in the mountain. There is no record of any turning to God on the part of Lot, in thanksgiving for his wonderful deliverance. There follows a wicked plotting by his daughters involving the worst form of immorality, and the results were to be in evidence for many centuries to follow. From the children born sprang the Moabites and the Ammonites, two races who were to be the avowed enemies of Israel for all time. Even with such a beginning, the mercy of God shone with a special brightness when, long centuries afterwards, Ruth, a Moabitess, obtained mercy from the God of Israel, and took her place in the line of the promised Messiah.

SEEK YE FIRST

J. S. BLACKBURN

9. EVIL IN THE KINGDOM

THE parable of the tares among the wheat covers a defined period of time which plainly and obviously embraces the entire interval between the first and the second comings; and it is the only one of the seven parables to do so. It is also the first of the seven to be explicitly described as a likeness of the Kingdom. The parable begins with the Son of Man sowing the good seed, and ends with the end of the age. Embedded in this disclosure of the apparently

invincible rise and spread of the devil's work, is the assurance of One who knows the end from the beginning. The same Son of Man who begins the good work will unravel the tangled growth in His own time, and make the crooked straight; and then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

At first sight there is a substantial difference between the meaning of the seed in the parable of

the sower and in this parable of the tares. “The good seed are the children of the kingdom.” The attempt has been to interpret this literally, by saying that the good seed and the tares are not messages preached and spread, but persons providentially scattered here and there over the same areas of the world. It seems to me more natural to take the seed in the same sense as in the first parable, and thus, by a familiar figure of speech, give the name of the effect to the agent producing the effect. If this view be accepted, then verse 24 together with its interpretation in verses 37 and 38 places the hearer alongside the sowing of the Word of God in the parable of the Sower, and the children of the Kingdom are the fruit it produces.

The new light provided by the Lord in this parable is that an enemy, the devil, took occasion by the lack of watchfulness in the Kingdom to sow the seeds of positive evil. In a later parable of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Ten Virgins, our attention is drawn to this same sleep. “While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.” We are here brought face to face with the fact that the enemy’s work is in our midst. “Many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1) The sombre fact has to be faced; the damage has never been undone; to the end of the chapter we have always to reckon with the presence of evil among us. Efforts directed to rooting out the evil are expressly forbidden; and how true it has been that when, in the hands of the Inquisition, it was claimed that the attempt was made to do just this, they did indeed root out and burn many thousands of the true children of the Kingdom. It is ordained that

once the tares have been sown, both shall grow together until the harvest and only by the personal intervention of the Lord will all things that offend be gathered out of His Kingdom with burning and with destruction. As always, we need the light of prophecy, as a light shining in a dark place, to give the certainty that the tangled mass will be unravelled when, in the time of harvest, the Son of Man shall send forth His angels.

Putting together the parable and the interpretation, we can distinguish three events which will bring to an end the mixed condition of the Kingdom. These are, first the gathering of the tares and binding them into bundles; second, gathering the wheat into the barn of its heavenly home; and lastly gathering out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and burning them. The outline sketched by these revelations leaves many details to be added in the later parts of the New Testament. The essential revelation is that the transition from the present mixed condition to the yet future form when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, will not be gradual, or by the eventual triumph of the Word itself, but by the catastrophic intervention of the Son of Man. He is indeed the Star of the coming day, and with the rising of the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings, will be seen an earthly Kingdom from which all offence and iniquity will have been purged, and a celestial family shining forth “as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.”

The parables of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven are not interpreted by the Lord and we are accordingly confined to the light

given by the Spirit of God in other Scriptures to enable us to seize their meaning. In the former of these the evil to be introduced into the Kingdom is seen in another light. Whereas in its beginning it would not be such as would make much stir in the world, in its result it was destined to astonish by its greatness. Here we have a clear addition to what has been learned from the parable of the tares. It might have been thought that the evil in the Kingdom would continue to occupy an insignificant position. We are here let into the secret beforehand that on the most public platform and on the scale of the powers of the nations, the evil element would be the one to assume a dominant rôle.

The imagery employed by the Lord in this parable contains two elements which can easily be identified, and there can be little question that we are intended to make use of these parallel Scriptures to enable us to understand the tree. In Daniel's fourth chapter, there is found the account of one of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. In it he saw a tree, which by a decree from heaven, was cut down, but eventually permitted to grow again. Daniel, being called in to interpret the dream, does so in the following words. "The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth ; whose leaves were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all ; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation : it is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong : for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth." (Daniel 4 : 20-22) From this we learn that the symbol of a tree means a great political system,

which by its spreading harbours evil. It has already been made clear from the interpretation of the parable of the sower that the 'birds of the air' represent the activities of the Evil One.

The other Scripture bearing on the interpretation of the parable of the mustard seed is Revelation 17 and 18 dealing with Babylon the Great. There are two notes in chapter seventeen which make it absolutely certain that this Babylon is Rome or is centred on Rome. "The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth." (v. 9) and, "The woman. . . is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth." (v. 18) These two marks of identification could not conceivably, in the reign of Vespasian when they were given as the chapter itself records, point in any other direction than Rome. The pertinent verse is 18 : 2, "Babylon . . . is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." A description having its final meaning after Babylon's fall, this yet provides a striking parallel with the developed condition of the great tree arising from the mustard seed, where evil birds have their lodging.

I think we have to see the fulfilment of this prophecy in the present state of Christianity in the world, reckoned to be an influential part of the Establishment. We have to review in thought the patronage of Christianity by Constantine in the fourth century ; the development of the Papal States and the temporal power claimed and exercised by the popes in the Middle Ages ; and on to the secure position of Christianity as part of the modern Establishment in the West and in the lands developed from the West. A modern ecclesiastical historian has illustrated the

development in the Middle Ages by a comparison of the achievements of the Popes Gregory I (A.D. 590) and Gregory VII (A.D. 1073). “Gregory I claimed the spiritual primacy which descended to the vicar of Christ, the successor of S. Peter, but he wrote to the emperor at Constantinople in humility as a subject. Gregory VII was to claim not merely supreme spiritual but supreme temporal power, to declare an emperor deposed, and to plunge Germany and Italy into war to enforce his will.” (Deanesley). Passing over a millennium and coming to discussions of the contemporary scene, how often the sentence is heard, “Christianity has failed.” In this familiar sentence, what meaning is implied for the word “Christianity”? Certainly not the lowly and humble body, in the world but not of it, and single-mindedly devoted to bearing the Name of a Christ in reproach and spreading His Word in the world. This is what is envisaged by the Church in the New Testament. Rather, in the contemporary dialogue, Christianity is the name given to an imposing and important part of the Establishment, and most obviously tending to be centred on Rome through the ecumenical movement. When it is said that Christianity has failed, the meaning implied or explicit is that it has failed to prevent war, to effect disarmament, or to solve the racial problem. A great deal might be said about what Christians have effected on these points and many other aspects of the human problem, but at the moment the point is that these objectives, in the political sense, were not included in the charge given to the true Church by Christ and His apostles, so that in its power they turned the world upside down. When we spread the Word of the Lord, then, as at the beginning, great joy follows its

reception, and those who believe enter the only real good, both for this life and for that life which is to come. Are our aspirations and efforts directed to eventuate in the fruit for God and man produced from the good seed, or are they beamed towards this monstrous tree, and to the tares, whose end is to be destroyed?

In approaching the parable of the leaven in the meal, the moment is perhaps opportune to take note of a feature which has caused difficulty. The parable begins, in v. 33, “The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven.” Is the Kingdom likened to the leaven only, as distinct from being likened to the ensemble of meal and leaven, or indeed, to the whole action and its result? The question might well be widened. Is the Kingdom likened to the man who sowed the good seed, or to the entire processes and the result? (v. 24) And the same question arises as to the grain of mustard seed, (v. 31) the treasure, (v. 44) the merchant man, (v. 45) or the net (v. 47). Many have racked their brains to reconcile the detail pinpointed in each case, but I am sure that the answer lies elsewhere. We might imagine brackets as follows: “The kingdom of Heaven is like unto (leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures, till the whole was leavened).” If this be the correct view, then the object (grammatically) of the verb and preposition “likened unto,” is not the leaven, but the whole process and result as set out to the end of the parable, and similarly in the other parables.

The parable presents the process of diffusion throughout a mass in the guise of three measures of meal entirely permeated by leaven or yeast. Our method of study, as with the previous parable, is to look for light

given by the Spirit of God in other Scriptures. It is soon discovered that preparing three measures of meal for food is by no means uncommon in the Old Testament. When the LORD, under the form of three men, visited Abraham, he "hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth." Numbers 15 : 9 is one of many allusions to the Meat (or better, Meal) Offering. "Then shall he bring with a bullock a meal offering of three tenth deals of flour." This direction in Numbers 15 is distinguished by the increasing amount of meal, from one measure in v. 4, to two measures in v. 6, and finally three measures in v. 9. Thus, three measures of meal is the full provision for God and His priests. (Leviticus 2 : 2, 3) The woman's field of action is therefore the true bread for God and for His people, a matter of literally vital importance. What meaning was intended by the Lord for this leaven, put into the meal and then permeating the whole? If we wish to allow Scripture to interpret itself, we need only look at three passages to encompass the whole. The turning of a few pages will bring us to Matthew 16 : 12. "He bade them beware not of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." Galatians 5 : 7-9. "Ye did run well; who did hinder you

that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of Him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." These show that leaven is uniformly **doctrine**, and exclusively evil doctrine. The one remaining passage is 1 Corinthians 5 : 6 to 8. Here the phrase, "the leaven of malice and wickedness," presents the character and behaviour resulting from evil in doctrine. He is much less than a scribe instructed unto the kingdom, who thinks that doctrine does not concern him.

Who or what is represented by the woman? It would be difficult to avoid the force of Revelation 2 : 20. "I have this against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and seduceth My servants to commit fornication." This brings us again inescapably to Rome, probably enlarged by the ecumenical movement, as the source of this most desperately sinister of all the aspects of evil in the Kingdom brought together in these three parables, that of corrupting the pure meal for the saint's nourishment. How thoroughly the devil's work in this respect has been performed, every true Christian knows. It is therefore all the more heartening to turn in the next parables to learn what there is for the heart of God, and therefore for His people in the field where the Word has been sown.

THE CHURCH OF GOD

HERBERT HIRST

IN the first direct reference to the church in the Holy Scriptures (Matthew 16 : 13-18) the Lord Jesus, by speaking of it as "My church," shows us how valuable and precious it is in His estimation and marks it out as His own peculiar pos-

session. In harmony with this, He raised with His disciples the truth as to His own Person, for apart from His Person **there is no church nor could be any.** It is of all importance that we should know with certainty who He is, for the character of His church depends upon this.

The question addressed to His disciples in verse 13 brings into prominence the awful fact that among the people of Israel dismal uncertainty prevailed as to who He really was. And uncertainty in the soul concerning the Lord Jesus Christ is the product of a lack of consciousness of real need within, a need which permits of no rest until it has assurance God alone can give. Did He not say " My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me. If any man will do his will, **he shall know** of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself " (John 7 : 16-17) ? If my heart's desire is to do the will of God, light from above concerning the Saviour is guaranteed to me, and His word becomes everything to me. His second question drew from Peter the assertion remarkable, in the midst of such uncertainty, for its unqualified assurance, "**Thou are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" This enabled the Lord to impart instruction of incalculable value, not for Peter only, but also for all His disciples of this dispensation during which the church is being called out of the world.

Firstly, Peter's confession of faith in Christ meant that he had been greatly enriched by the blessing of God, for his knowledge of the true identity of Jesus had not been acquired by any of his natural gifts as the " son of Jonas," or by instruction in the best schools of men. That identity had been revealed to him by " My father who is in heaven."

Secondly, the name " Father " is a name of perfect grace, as seen in that lovely passage Matthew 11 : 25-27 ; and the revelation given to Peter was given from heaven—it was a heavenly matter now being made known to those willing to take the place of babes in God's school,

abandoning the self-confident sagacity of the " wise and prudent " for the child's teachable spirit in reference to the things of God. This is indispensable according to the principle in Psalm 25 : 8-9, " The meek will he guide in judgment : and the meek will he teach his way." And how important are the Lord's words—" No man can come to me, except **the Father** which hath sent me **draw him**. . . they shall be all taught of **God**. Every man therefore that hath **heard and learned of the Father**, cometh unto me " (John 6 : 44-45). Clearly He is still telling us that **nothing** can replace the Father's teaching concerning Himself. Jesus Himself was the subject, the heavenly subject of the Father's revelation—He was the Christ, the Anointed One, the Son of the living God, and the church is a heavenly company because of its association with Him.

Thirdly, "the Christ" is the Son of the LIVING God ; that is to say, He possesses the life of God which is entirely superior to death.

Fourthly, the truth as to His Person is the immovable **rock** upon which His church is being built and Peter (the new name given by the Lord to Simon to indicate what he now is as a result of a divine work in his soul) is a **stone** (petros) built upon the **rock** (petra) and thus an integral part of the building to be reared. It is still the same to-day—none but those who confess the Lord as Peter did can form part of His assembly. Such a church is instinct with life, it cannot be overcome by the " gates of hades " or the adverse forces of death and the invisible world ; for He who is constructing it of living stones, imperishable material, could say " I am He that LIVETH and was dead ; and behold I am ALIVE for evermore, Amen, and have the

keys of hell and of death." Splendidly superior, this, to any lifeless, inanimate building ! It is one which is capable of responding intelligently and affectionately to the God who dwells in it ! To those who compose this assembly the Father reveals who Christ is—the Son of the Living God, and what He is personally to the Father, "My beloved Son" ; and what the Father is to Him is made known to them only by the Son—"My Father which is in heaven." Thus are God-fearing souls admitted into a sphere of divine love and this favoured company is being prepared to hold and enjoy this heavenly treasure while exhibiting in this dark world the grace and character of a Saviour God. When the powerful work of God, now operating "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us," has completed its task, the moral and spiritual beauty of the church will be so lustrous in its divinely wrought excellence that there will "to Him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages" (Ephesians 3 : 20-21). There will be nothing less than the features of Christ seen in it. Verse 10 of chapter 2 of this Epistle has it—"we are His workmanship," and of course all the credit belongs to the author of it. This word "workmanship" occurs in the original language in only one other place in the New Testament (Romans 1 : 20) "things that are made," where it has reference to the creation of the world which speaks so eloquently of the power and divinity of the Creator. Our word "poem" is derived from it ; and indeed it may be said that God has produced two great masterpieces which testify to His skill. The physical universe is one, and awe-

inspiring it is. But the greater of the two is His living church, calling for workmanship of more painstaking quality and resulting in glory to God throughout all eternity. Cold is the heart or uninstructed the mind of the Christian not deeply stirred at the thought of sharing, by the grace of God, in this exalted destiny—of having a part in an assembly which is for ever an expression of Christ, to the joy of the heart of the blessed God.

Peter, having received revelations from the Father concerning the Son, and from the Lord Jesus concerning His assembly, was inspired, after the death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord, to write to those Jews who had newly believed on Christ, to instruct them concerning the church, their part in it and the manner of life it called for. He shows the necessity for these young Christians to leave behind the characteristics of the sinful human heart. Henceforth they were to desire the pure word of the Lord (which **endures for ever**, i.e. never needs bringing up-to-date) just as the newborn babe desires mother's milk, for healthy growth (I Peter 1 : 24-25 and 2 : 1-5). Do not let us fail to accept this instruction ! In coming to Christ, they had come, he says, to a **living stone**, rejected indeed as undesirable by men, but chosen by God and precious, and they, as **living stones** were being built up to form a spiritual house. This house, as Ephesians 2 : 22 informs us, is built "for an habitation of God through the Spirit" and it is the house in which God dwells on earth to this day.

Besides being formed into a spiritual house for God to dwell in, all those who, like Peter, had personal faith in Christ were constituted "an **holy priesthood**" for

the service of God in His house. The necessity for holiness in those so highly privileged needs no stressing, the function of this holy priesthood being to “offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Does the Christian reader prize his place in this living house and in this holy priesthood equipped to draw near to God and offer up spiritual sacrifices of thanksgiving, praise and worship? Only those who exercise this privilege can tell what joy it brings.

The Greek word translated “church” means “that which is called out.” Those who compose this assembly of God have been called by Him out of the world of unbelievers since the world rejected His Son. They have been the subjects of the Father’s teaching and have turned to the Lord Jesus, believing on Him.

Raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus has sent down the Holy Spirit to take up His residence in them, as He promised His disciples before He died. All thus called out and sealed by the Holy Spirit, from the day of Pentecost when the Spirit first came until the last one is added before the Lord comes again for them as described in I Thessalonians 4 : 15-18, comprise in its entirety this treasured church or assembly of God and of Christ which is to play such a conspicuous part in the eternal purpose of God. May our thoughts of this company coincide with His thoughts about it and may our hearts rejoice that, in spite of the failure that may mark it while it is here on earth, nothing and no-one can prevent the blessed God from bringing it at last to the destiny designed for it by Him.

“THE CROWNED CHRIST” ————— J. STODDART

Impressions from Ripon, 1968.

2. THE LAMB IN THE MIDST

Revelation 5 : 1/14.

PURSUING our present study of the glorified and ascended Christ in the Revelation, we come to chapter 5 in which every believer in Jesus must find himself joyfully at home. Here is the inspired, authentic picture of Heaven as we would most like it to be, and where, as the children’s hymn has it, “everyone is happy, nor could be happier there.” But it would be quite wrong to regard it as a simplified version adapted to immature minds. For here is that which so touches the spirit when we read it that we are made to feel that we are one with

the heavenly company and gladly join in the song of the redeemed. *Truly this is Heaven as it is !*

Let us look at events which lead up to the dramatic scenes of ch. 5. Already we have considered the vision, given to John, of the judicial glory of the Lord Jesus in ch. 1 and with him have fallen at the feet of One so great and glorious, but have rejoiced to hear His well-known voice say, “Fear not.” The exiled apostle is then commanded to “write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter.”

(1 : 19) The things he had seen were contained in the vision of Christ in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. "The things which are," therefore would refer to the seven churches actually existing in Asia at the time, and represented by the lampstands. Chapters 2 and 3 are thus occupied with the messages written respectively to these churches, each commencing with some facet of the glory of Christ seen by John in his vision. "The things which shall be hereafter," clearly relate to the beginning of ch. 4 and onwards to the end of the book.

The churches on earth are now lost sight of as John is invited through the door opened in Heaven to be shown "things which must be hereafter." (ch. 4 : 1) Summoned by the trumpet-like voice, he had already heard, he says, "Immediately I was in the Spirit," (the second use of this significant expression, as previously noted). Thus the seer was ready to turn away from the things of earth and glimpse the things of Heaven—and indeed, the very Throne of God. A description of that glorious Throne and of Him that sat upon it, and of those who surround it then follows. What a sight, and what a privilege accorded to John! And how remarkable to find him at home in the midst of it all.

So ch. 5 commences with John saying, "I saw in the right hand of Him that sat upon the Throne a book written within and on the back sealed with seven seals." The right hand of God is invariably associated with His power in Scripture, and the book would suggest the authority to exercise that power in accord with the will of God and the character of His Throne. But there follows the challenge loudly proclaimed by a

strong angel, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?" But when worthiness comes into the question, who can answer the challenge? To open this book (or scroll, as it really is) and to break each seal in succession would demand the highest moral competence. Evidently the angel himself had no such competence, and when the serried ranks of men in heaven and in earth and under the earth were reviewed (doubtless including greatly honoured servants of God throughout history) it was found that none was qualified to open the book or even to look upon it. What an indictment of the unworthiness of man, even the best of men, to take up the will of God and to administer it for His glory!

Little wonder that at this moment John shed copious tears even amidst the joyous scenes of Heaven. The record of man's unworthiness must always cause sorrow. But surely this was an incongruous occupation in such surroundings, and we must remember that John himself was not yet in a glorified state and so had much to learn as regards conditions in Heaven. His tears were not in character with that happy place, and it is instructive to see that it was not an angel who came to comfort him, but one of the twenty-four elders (representing the whole redeemed company) who said, "Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David hath prevailed to open the Book, and to loose the seven seals thereof." His place of nearness to the Throne gave him that intelligence which banishes all sorrow, because it focusses attention upon Christ and disengages the mind from occupation with man's failure. What comfort this announcement must have brought to the distressed

John—to learn that a Man descended from the tribe of Juda through David had proved Himself to be the victorious Lion, strong enough to vanquish the foe, to prevail in battle and thus entitle Himself to take the scroll of God’s will from His right hand.

But Who could such a Person be, and how would John identify Him ? Isaiah 11 : 10 had said that, “In that day there shall be a root of Jesse (father of David), which shall stand for an ensign of the people”. From this and other Scriptures the Jew could rightly expect a mighty, conquering Messiah, and surely this could be none other than He. How strange, then, to hear John say, as he dries his tearful eyes, “I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the Throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as it had been slain.” Could contrast be more acute than this, that in one Person there should be seen the ambivalent characteristics of the strong Lion and the little Lamb newly slain ? Yet such is divine wisdom, for not only did Isaiah speak of Him as the powerful root of Jesse, but in ch. 53 as the Lamb led to the slaughter. “Here are portrayed the majesty and meekness of Christ.” (Swete) However, as the Lamb once slain He bears unique features, for He has “seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.” Both omnipotence and omniscience are thus seen to blend their perfections in Him (seven horns and seven eyes) and the seven Spirits of God would indicate the manifold and varied exercise of His administration of God’s will for the earth. Seven distinguishing features of the Spirit of the Lord resting upon Christ are given in Isaiah 11 : 2. Thus John witnesses that the alone worthy One,

embodying in His Person, the perfection of power, wisdom and sacrificial love, came and took the scroll out of the right hand of God. And at this moment of tremendous significance there is no voice to demur or to contest His right. Momentous silence, and then all Heaven is moved into unanimous acclaim and harmonious worship before the Lamb. Jacob in blessing his sons (Gen. 49) said of Judah, “Thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise : thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies ; thy father’s children shall bow down before thee.” The Lion of the tribe of Judah could now be seen as the Lamb once slain, and the scroll of God’s will now securely in His hands, all Heaven can now rejoice and praise Him.

At this point the music of Heaven begins, and let us remember that Heaven is the homeland of music. If we are unmusical here we shall certainly not be in glory ; but how good for us to learn the harmonious strains of that day here and now, and not to “hang our harps upon the willows,” as Israel did in exile (Psalm 137). The taking of the book from the right hand of God is the symbolic action which accords with the words of the Lord Jesus in John 5 : 22, “The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son,” and in v. 27, “He hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.” This action, therefore, is the signal at which, “the four living creatures and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of incense, which are the prayers of saints.” Music, worship, praise and prayer are the appropriate accompaniment to acknowledged worthiness, and all ascends, as sweet-smelling incense to

the Throne. The song begun on earth, the melodious strains of praise, the prayers so often offered through tears, are now seen to fill Heaven with fragrance. In Psalm 84 we read of those "who passing through the valley of Baca (the present vale of tears) make it a well." "They go from strength to strength, every one of them appearing in Zion, before God." (v. 7)

Doubtless it is the redeemed from every corner of earth who sing the new song (v. 9) saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation: and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on (or over) the earth." We cannot, however, overlook the fact that there are mentioned three distinct companies who participate in this universal paean of praise. First, there are the four beasts (or living creatures) who seem to be akin to the four living creatures of Ezekiel ch. 1 and the seraphims of Isaiah ch. 6. A related study of these passages would lead to the conclusion that they are the custodians or guardians of the Throne itself, and the constant upholders of the holiness of the Lord God Almighty (ch. 4:2). They prostrate themselves along with the twenty-four elders, who are the next company seen in the picture, representing, as already said, the whole assembly of the redeemed. Next come the myriads of angelic voices to swell the loud chorus, and evidently their number is beyond computation, for to ten thousand times ten thousand (100,000,000) is added thousands of thousands, which could mean millions of millions. No slide rule magic could assess such numbers.

The angelic refrain extols the worthiness of the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Such then is the mighty choral symphony of Heaven, such is the uninterrupted employ of the assembled hosts who are there.

But the echoes of Heaven extend to earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them (v. 13) who are heard to say, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Thus will come to pass the divine decree of Philippians 2 that "at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The last five Psalms, winding up the ways of God with men, each begin and end with "Hallelujah" (Praise ye the Lord) and lead up to the grand climax of all in Psalm 150, invoking such praise in every corner of the universe, and finally calling, "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." Meanwhile our training and education for that scene continue, and until we all with John pass through that door opened in Heaven we shall sing with increasing fervour:

"Worthy the Lamb that's gone on
high

To be exalted thus;"

"Worthy the Lamb that died," we
cry,

"For He was slain for us."

"Jesus is worthy to receive
Honour and power divine;
And blessings more than we can
give

Be, Lord, for ever Thine."

Introductory

THE concern of Evangelical Christians is, very correctly, to present the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ to every man. Very properly, societies within Universities and Colleges are formed in order to bring these claims before non-Christian students. The need for this activity has not lessened, nor has the need for devoted servants of God to work within societies, but it is not and never has been the sole concern of the Christian.

Regrettably, many Christians see no urgency, perhaps even see no need for this evangelistic work. Equally regrettably many students tend to assume that this is the only activity which is, properly speaking, a Christian activity.

What other activities should a Christian become involved in? Obviously there is need for study of God's Word: need for prayer on behalf of evangelistic work, on behalf of those who suffer in war-torn areas, on behalf of the needy. There is also need for action, christian action which will bring relief in a positive material way, and which has at root a positive spiritual concern.

The question may occur: is all christian activity concerned with bringing God to our fellows? There is one activity which only a Christian can enjoy, and which is not only a primary responsibility, but is most obviously a privilege. The following ideas are put forward in an attempt to encourage those in faithful service to think for a few hours about something which cannot in itself be seen, but which is fundamental to the purpose of God for His children.

The aim of this paper is to engage in a specific activity, namely, conceptual analysis. The concept thus analysed is worship, which is seen as containing within it, praise, thanksgiving, adoration, devotion, homage and service. While it is clear that praise, thanksgiving and adoration are eternal elements of worship, devotion, homage and service, are also the proper occupation of the Church Militant, as well as of the church in heaven, and motivate each individual who enlists in the service of the Lord.

Worship. . . What is it?

To enter a large church or cathedral; to look around and admire the treasures of art and antiquity; to appreciate the vibrant music of the organ; to wonder at the magnificence, the richness—is to miss the main principle of worship. To enter a small room, note with satisfaction the absence of art treasures or other aesthetic sense stimuli; to appreciate the fresh voices of eager singers; to accept the plainness, the austerity of the room: is to miss the main principle of worship.

Worship is not concerned with ritual acts, or outward forms, which do nothing more than symbolise the attitude of the worshipper. Indeed worship itself is a disposition, or attitude. If the high churchman worships God, he does not do it by the burning of incense, nor by incantatory repetition of the liturgy. He worships God when, deep in his heart he says that God is worthy, that God is the true and correct object of man's allegiance. If the evangelistic or low churchman

worships God, he does not do it by preaching an evangelistic sermon, nor by expressing dissatisfaction with the liturgy. He worships God, when deep down in his heart he acknowledges the worth-ship, or entire worthiness of God.

The act of worship is an inward action. In the act of worship there is no room for self-glorification, nor for pride, nor for aesthetic titillation; when one's heart is filled with the glory and majesty of God, and a sense of His holiness, then is the self transcended. Hence, although worship is an inward action, it is not self-centred, for that too would hinder appreciation of God, and of Who and What He is.

Clearly if worship is correctly analysed in terms of attitude, then the quality of worship will be determined by the quality of one's attitude. It is equally clear that one's attitude is entirely governed by one's appreciation of God. Where people worship God there must be appreciation of God; there must be knowledge of God; there must be experience of God. Appreciation of God is therefore governed by His revelation of Himself.

The Father Revealed

"God spoke in times past by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son." (Hebrews 1:1) † It is thus essential to pay heed to Jesus Christ and what He has said and done in order to begin to understand what God seeks from His people. Said Jesus to a Samaritan woman, "The Father seeks worshippers to worship Him in spirit and in truth," (John 4:23, 24) that is to worship Him in the right attitude, based upon a correct appreciation of His character revealed to men. It is important to see that it is the spirit of the worship that is central; worship is now to be

offered neither on the mountains of Samaria, nor in the Temple at Jerusalem; what does matter is the attitude of spirit.

To worship the Father, however, one must be a child of God. One cannot worship God if one is the servant of another master, for to worship is to acknowledge that He is worthy of all our allegiance. "As many as received Jesus Christ, to them He gave the authority to be the children of God." (John 1:12) He is it who has opened the way into the Holy place where we can approach God. What stupendous significance there is in the violent tearing of the veil from top to bottom, when the Lord of Lords gave His life upon the cross! He it is who has revealed the heart of God as the loving Father, for in the prayer, prior to the crucifixion, Jesus said, "I have manifested Thy Name to the men whom Thou gavest Me." (John 17:6)

In discourse with the disciples Jesus explained the miracle of the revelation of God, and of the possibility of communion with God. Philip asked Him to show who the Father was. Jesus said, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you do not know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?" (John 14:9, 10) The final and complete revelation of God as the Father of the children of God, is seen when Jesus says to Mary, "Go to My brethren and say to them I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to My God and your God." (John 20:17)

Worshipping the Father is surely acknowledging Him as such and acknowledging His absolute worthiness as our Father, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, "and because

† All Bible quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

we are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba ! The Father !’” (Galatians 4 : 6)

Expressions of Worship

Two words commonly associated in discourse with the word ‘worship’ are ; ‘praise’ and ‘homage’. Perhaps these concepts are best understood as being forms of expression of the worshipping heart. Although used rather loosely as words expressive of acts of worship, they can be distinguished, and the distinction is important and helpful.

It may seem presumptuous for a mortal to offer ‘praise’ to his Creator and Redeemer. We may praise our fellow men, and we may receive their praise. In praising someone we recognise a quality in them or in their work which pleases us, and we tell them this. When we praise God we are recognising in Him and in His actions qualities which are praise-worthy. This does not simply mean that these qualities please us, but that we recognise them to be good. The criterion for good qualities and actions is that they are pleasing to God. Hence it would appear that in praising God we are extolling qualities that are pleasing to Himself. This is by no means a circular and pointless activity, but it is at heart, an act of worship, born of our appreciation of God, and is possible only because He has put His Spirit within us.

To praise God we must acknowledge His worthiness, we must acknowledge Him worthy of praise : this involves a realisation of what is for His glory. In this sense, when we praise God, we glorify Him, we give Him glory ; it is His by right, and this we acknowledge. “To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only

true God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.” (1 Timothy 1 : 17)

The worship of our hearts becomes praise upon our lips and we join with others who also are His children to offer Him the praise of which He is so worthy.

Praise is also to be coupled with **thanksgiving**. In worshipping God, we praise Him for Who He is, but we should also thank Him for His disposition of love toward us, and for His redemptive work on our behalf. The story of the single thankful leper ought to stir us to be willing to return our thanks to God for His love to us. (Luke 17 : 11-19) Perhaps the most magnificent scene in all of Scripture is the vision of the *adoration of the Lamb*. Here the worship of the heart of those who see the Lamb, bearing the marks of the slaughter, gives us an insight into the songs of praise which will reverberate throughout eternity. (Revelation ch. 4-5)

One of the most profoundly stirring moments in Handel’s “Messiah” is the chorus : “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour and glory and blessing. Blessing and honour, glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.” (See Revelation 1 : 6-7, 4 : 11, 5 : 9-14)

It is clear from this chorus that to worship God is not to add anything to Him, it is simply to say that He is worthy and to express appreciation of Who He is and of what He has done. This is indeed as J. N. Darby has said, “heavenly converse”* and it is evident that one who does not know Him Who sits upon the throne cannot worship Him.

*“Heavenly converse” is a phrase used by Darby in a poem, “The Endless Song,” 1835. See p. 103.

If the language of worship is the language of heaven, it is when one is occupied with the worthiness of the Lamb, and the glory of Him that sits upon the throne, that one is most aware of the fact that eternal life begins in the 'here and now.' For truly the hymn-writer, H. Allen has said :

"We now behold Him crowned
above,
Eternity's begun."

"And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17 : 3), said Jesus in a prayer prior to the crucifixion. Again we come to the conclusion that our worship of God is entirely governed by His revelation of Himself to us by His Son, Jesus Christ : a revelation which has as its basis the love of the Father, "For God so loved the world that He gave. . ." (John 3 : 16). What possible response can such love evoke ? We could never love Him to the extent that He has loved us, and yet, "We love Him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4 : 19). Hence, of the same order as worship, praise, and thanksgiving, is the concept of adoration. To adore means to admire and to love ardently. The love with which we love God is a love surpassing human relationships, and yet is best illustrated by the 'family relationship' into which, by His Son, we are brought. Says John, "I write unto you, children, because you know the Father. . . see what love the Father has given us, that we should be called the children of God" (1 John 2 : 13, 3 : 1). Brought to know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are brought to know His character of fatherly love, and as children we reciprocate this.

"Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John 13 : 1). The love

which the Lord Jesus has for His own is shown by Paul to find expression in the figure of the love of a husband for his wife and of a bridegroom for his bride. (See Ephesians 5 : 29-33). Our love for our Lord and Saviour ought to be fitting to our position thus symbolised as the bride of Christ. Christians do well to ponder the Song of Solomon, the greatest bridal song of all literature. The bridegroom can be regarded as a figure of Christ and the bride as a figure of His loved ones, the church. Such love as our Lord has shown can only be met by our saying : "My beloved is mine, and I am his. He pastures his flock among the lilies. Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, turn, my beloved, be like a gazelle, or a young stag upon rugged mountains" (Song of Solomon 2 : 16-17). The supreme moment in the life of the Christian is when he remembers His Lord, in participation of the breaking of bread. Confronted with a fresh insight into the depths of sorrow and the heights of love connected with the work of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, the response is one of wonder and prostration, and yet also of sheer adoration. The act of remembrance is not in itself worship, but stimulates worship, and is indeed performed by worshippers.

When we pour out our hearts in love and adoration of the Lord Jesus who has done all that was necessary to bring us into the circle which can best be described as the 'circle of divine affection', then indeed we worship. For He is worthy of adoration and so we tell Him.

The Royal Priesthood

We may justifiably extend our analysis and point out that neither while the church of Christ is upon earth, Church Militant, nor when it will be in heaven, are praise, thanks-

giving, and adoration the exclusive constituents of worship. It is evident in Scripture that these are the elements that constitute the song of praise which begins on earth and will be, in heaven, more sweet and loud. There is however the practical aspect of Christian service, “ And whatever you do, in word or deed do everything to the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father, through Him.” (Colossians 3 : 17)

Stemming from the concept of adoration is the concept of devotion. Love results in action. The poignant scene where Peter learns what it means to say that he loves the Lord is an example of this concept. After Peter has three times avowed his love for the Lord he is given the charge “ Feed my lambs. . . feed my sheep,” and at the end of the account, John records, “ And after this, he said to him : Follow me.” (John 21 : 15ff)

In the days of feudalism, when a king accepted the allegiance of a vassal there was a picturesque ceremony. The vassal came before the king and touched his hand saying : “ Je suis ton homme.” It is before Christ, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, that we come. We touch His nail-pierced hands and we say : “ Je suis ton homme.” This stems from a worshipping heart. In paying homage to our Lord, we acknowledge that He is worthy of our allegiance. Those who utter their allegiance should be aware of what it is that they are doing. To swear allegiance is to make a statement of commitment to the cause of the person to whom allegiance is sworn.

The word is not enough. Homage is an act. The words of commitment can only have significance if there is an engagement in the interests of the Lord. To acknowledge that Jesus

Christ is Lord of all is to acknowledge that He is Lord of each individual Christian. Individual acknowledgement of the lordship of Christ is an act of homage.

A classic expression in the literature of the Christian church, of what is involved in the act of homage is Francis Ridley Havergal’s poem : “ Who is on the Lord’s side ? ” The constant reiteration of the refrain :

‘ We are on the Lord’s side ;
Saviour we are thine ! ’

is an example of commitment to Christ, the Lord. Words such as ‘ loyal,’ ‘ true,’ and ‘ bold,’ all show the spirit in which homage is paid . . . “ Let us go forth to him, outside the camp,” says the writer of the letter to the Hebrews.

“ Chosen to be soldiers in an alien
land.
Chosen, called and faithful for
our Captain’s band.
In the service royal let us not
grow cold,
Let us be right loyal, noble, true
and bold.

Master Thou wilt keep us
by Thy Name divine,
Always on the Lord’s side,
Saviour always Thine ! ”

Homage is an action or the words are empty, and there is no homage. Homage involves a presentation to God of one’s body. This, as Paul indicates in the letter to the Romans, is a living sacrifice, and as the body is so dedicated, it is holy and acceptable to God. (Romans 12 : 1) This act of giving is not an action that leaves room for any self-glorification, but is an abdication of the control of self. Confession of Jesus as Lord is the basis of our acceptance by God. “ If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has

raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). This statement of the apostle Paul is parallel to that of John: "To them that received Him. . . He gave the authority to become the children of God" (John 1:12). All children of God have acknowledged the Lordship of Christ: so to do is to receive Him. But this is not merely to be regarded as a single and final act. The child of God must continually acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ, and it is clear that verbal assent is not the only assent that is required. Trees are judged by the fruit they bear. If a tree bears apples, it is known to be an apple tree. So if a man is loyal to Christ, displays Christ in his life, he is known to be a Christian. A tree may be an apple tree yet bear no apples: a man may be a Christian yet show no sign of his allegiance. (Matthew 12:33). Paul therefore urges that each individual who confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord should present his body as a living sacrifice; should actively show that Jesus Christ is Lord of his life. "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:6-8)

Here then is a very practical expression of worship, for if we do all things in honour of the Lord, then in our very actions we worship Him. It is important, however, to stress that the actions are not in themselves worship. It is in our actions that we worship the Lord, that is to say the underlying motivation of the action must be the desire to honour Him; in honouring Him we worship Him. The action is perhaps less important than the motive if it were in any sense possible to separate the two. In this sense then we can say that God is to be worshipped in the preaching of an evangelistic sermon. But God is

not worshipped in the rhetoric, but in the state of heart in which the preacher speaks. A vain orator does not worship God, but one who serves the Lord does indeed worship. So Paul was able to speak of the "priestly service of the Gospel of God." He looked for no glory for himself, he looked for glory for God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. (See Romans 15:16).

Not everyone is called to the "priestly service of the Gospel" to quite the extent that Paul was, but all are called to worship the Lord, to render homage to Him. We may learn something about the nature of homage if we study what Paul said to the Christian slaves at Colosse. A slave was expected to serve his master as his lord. He was owned by his master and all that he did was to be for the benefit of his owner. How then could he acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ? In dispute with the Herodians, Jesus said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (Mark 12:13-17). Paul does not incite rebellion against temporal authority. A slave may not refuse to serve his master on the pretext that to do so is incompatible with his convictions. "Whatever your task," Paul said, "work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men." (Colossians 3:22-25). The nature of the work may not change, but there is a change of master when one accepts Jesus Christ as Lord: and the reward is changed too. No longer does the praise of a fickle taskmaster motivate the deed, but the reward is from the Lord Christ Himself. George Herbert, one of the well known group of religious poets of the seventeenth century thus summed up the idea of paying homage to the Lord in everyday activities:

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE ————— COLIN CURRY

3. KEY FEATURES

“**H**E expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24 : 27)

“God, who. . . spake in time past. . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son” (Hebrews 1 : 1, 2)

“All scripture. . . is profitable, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3 : 16)

An outline of some of the main themes and objectives of the biblical teaching must now be attempted. In this way we may hope to indicate lines to be followed in seeking to obtain a proper feeling for the content of Scripture. By any standards this is a forbidding task ; and to think that it could be done at all adequately would be naive. Even in picking out a few headline verses to indicate the general aims and coverage of Scripture, the difficulty of making a selection from several which are appropriate is immediately felt. Omission of what may be vital could leave the rest unbalanced. Knowledgeable persons will certainly have scope for criticism of the present section for what it omits or fails to emphasize. We can only draw attention, very broadly, to a limited number of key features of Scripture which are of the first order of prominence ; some other important lines of teaching would no doubt fall within these categories if it were possible to develop them ; others will inevitably be passed over altogether. However incomplete our discussion may be, we shall at all events draw attention to the principles which the bible itself deems to be critical ones for its understanding. Here at least are some principles which ought not to be missed. We shall not be misled in following these lines, though much else may be needed to supplement and round out

the picture we shall present.

Christ is its principal Theme

First, we recall the experience of a substantial group of Christ's disciples, in Jerusalem, late on the day of the resurrection. What occurred is described in Luke 24 : 45. “Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scriptures.” Two of their number had known a similar experience a little earlier, as He conversed with them on the walk to Emmaus. The old scriptures were filled with new meaning for them, and we are not left in doubt as to how it was done. To look closely at this will help us here. The key to their new understanding lay in grasping, with His help, the fact that all that had been written (in the law, the prophets, and the psalms) was closely connected with Himself. Here then is an absolutely central feature of Scripture, drawn attention to by our Lord Himself. **Scripture is about Christ.** He is not only central in the picture ; He is first and last in the story which the bible unfolds, and in the teaching which it yields. With the New Testament in our hands, as well as the Old, we learn in the fullest way of the absolutely supreme place which our Lord fills in the total scheme of things. Of all created things He is the author and upholder ; He is also the end for which they exist, the goal towards which all

events converge. Eternal in His being, He became man ; and, through death, has passed on to His present place of eminence and supremacy. He is foremost in everything and from every point of view. The purpose and pleasure of God focus upon Himself, involving others for His sake. He it is Who fulfils and establishes that purpose, too. Time and history centre around Christ ; His cross is the decisive event of history ; His return and the unveiling of His glory will be the crowning events of all time. Christian behaviour, too, finds its spring and its power in Him. Christian morality is more than a mere set of rules ; Christian character and actions find their root in the living Christ. His love moves those that know their debt to Him ; His life can be manifested by those He has drawn and linked to Himself ; His glory may be reflected by those who are attracted and absorbed with Himself. The obligation of a true response is continually felt by those who have received His grace and are learning to appreciate the magnificence of the revelation of God which finds its embodiment in Himself. The bible will certainly everywhere point us to Christ if we learn its message aright.

The Old and The New Testaments

A second feature, important to keep prominently in mind, is the fact that a decisive turning-point occurs at the break between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament all is forward-looking ; the hopes that these old passages raise are yet to be realised. As we pass into the New Testament much, though not all, has already been fulfilled. Latent in the Old Testament is the expectation of the two advents of Christ ; this becomes explicit as we read on into the New Testament writings. If we refer again to our

Lord's post-resurrection teaching to His disciples we can see that this is one of the points He stressed. He made it plain to them that, for the One Whom the earlier writings anticipated, the path to glory lay through suffering. His rejection and His sufferings were as much upon the pages of the earlier Scriptures as were His kingdom and glory. Our Lord had not failed to fulfil the hopes which the Old Testament kindled. He had in reality answered in detail all those foreshadowings of His suffering and death contained therein. He had also fully shown His title to glory which the same Scriptures foresaw, though the day of His full entry into it might yet be postponed. In every sense He had given His disciples cause, not for disappointment, but for joy and confidence in Himself. And this was confirmed strongly, if almost unbelievably, by His appearance to them alive again from among the dead. Their response, when this was clear to them, was a fitting one : nor did they keep to themselves what they had discovered. Within a few weeks they were heralding it abroad, vigorously and effectively, equipped and supported by the newly-descended Spirit of God.

We shall read the Old Testament aright, therefore, if we take note of its forward-looking character. In a multitude of ways the Christ, the coming One, is expected, and His features are delineated. **Individuals** in some of their characteristics, or in their actions, show features which He would later exemplify in a perfect way. Moses, David, and others, are quoted in the New Testament as reflecting Him in certain senses. The **moral law** revealed the shortcomings of every member of the human race ; but One would come, a perfect man, Who could in all

truth use the words "thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40 : 8 ; quoted in Hebrews 10 : 7). The ceremonial law too had much which foreshadowed His sacrifice and His mediatorial ministry. The Hebrews epistle makes this evident, though it also builds much of its teaching (when it compares the picture with the reality) upon differences as well as well as similarities. **Historical events** in the Old Testament, and miraculous interventions here and there, are referred explicitly in the New Testament as running parallel (in some aspect or another) with features of Christ's great act of redemption. One example out of many which might be chosen, is the deliverance from bondage in Egypt which the people of God experienced under Moses. In the poetical books, the forward view to Christ finds its expression in several ways. The unanswered **questions and needs** of the human mind and heart, the voids which Christ alone can fill, are made plain in graphic fashion in such books as Job and Ecclesiastes. In the Psalms, many an **inward feeling** expressed by David, or by some other God-fearing spokesman, reflects a deeper experience which the Lord Jesus passed through. Sometimes, as in Psalm 22, it is harder to see the immediate author than the Lord Himself in the experience so feelingly related. Elsewhere in the Psalms the future exaltation and glory of Christ are more in view. Psalm 110, for example, is very direct about this ; and our Lord Himself understood it this way. All enemies will in due course be under His feet, Who is David's Lord as well as his son. Often, of course, His sufferings and His triumph appear in the same passage.

Then again the prophets frequently foretell the day of His coming

reign on the earth. Often this is done in quite direct terms. Here and there, too, are indications of a less royal reception, of scorn and spitting, of rejection and the cross. The passage in Isaiah which centres around chapter 53 is deservedly well-known in this sense. The New Testament alludes to this many times, and applies it unquestioningly to Christ. Furthermore, the passage puts His coming glory alongside His sufferings, measuring the one by the other in a remarkable way.

From the start of the New Testament, the changed character of the material to be presented is apparent. **Fulfilment** of long-promised events is a repeated theme of its opening pages. The content of the gospels in many ways takes the central place in the whole scriptural scheme. Here is an account, from a range of viewpoints, of that unique visitation from God which took place in Christ. Here is also described the life of that one perfect Man Who pleased God in every thought and act, Who honoured and vindicated God when all other men had failed. This four-fold picture of the life and work of our Lord presents its graces and perfections in a wonderful way ; it is exhaustless in its fulness and magnificence. The ancient scriptures looked ahead to the events here recounted ; all that follows in the bible springs out of these same events. In a particular way this is true of the closing events which the gospels relate. The most decisive happenings of all, the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of our Lord, constitute not only the climax of the gospel narratives but also provide the real turning-point of the whole story which the bible unfolds. The book of Acts follows with the ensuing historical developments. It tells how the first witnesses heralded the

news of what Christ had done, and of how God had honoured it, to a widening circle of hearers. It speaks of responses to their message, too; many received the benefit of it, though there were other reactions also. A major feature introduced here is the present work of the Holy Spirit, the power in which these developments for good are effectuated. His presence here, following the ascension of Christ, is in itself one of the tremendous consequences of the completed work of redemption, and of God's approval of the Man Who accomplished it.

Apart from the last book of all, the remainder of the New Testament is composed of letters, some to churches and some to individuals. Here again, in a whole variety of ways, the consequences of Christ's work for those who depend on Him are worked out, and proper responses to it are pressed. Converts, imperfectly aware of what they had entered into, are here enlightened, instructed and (where necessary) warned. Our Lord had spoken to His disciples on the eve of the crucifixion of a deeper understanding they were to receive, of truth and teaching they could not possibly assimilate until He had departed and His immediate work was done. He had likened His teaching (while with them in person) to proverbs, pregnant with meaning in germinal form, but not yet easy to grasp. He had spoken of fuller, plainer, teaching after His departure (John 16:25). In the epistles we see these anticipations substantiated. From heaven, by His Spirit, through His chosen instruments (apostles, and others), our Lord continued and completed His instruction to His people in a way which had new character and fullness. The range of teaching in the New Testament letters is of course very extensive. Doctrinal teaching as

to the status and the blessings into which the believer is brought, the links with Christ and other believers which have been formed, passes over in many of these letters into practical teaching as to what is consistent and expected from those who are in this favoured position. It is important to note carefully the remarkable balance maintained in these letters between these two modes of teaching.

These letters also differ in character from the gospels in the sense that their recipients are assumed to stand in relation to God upon an entirely new footing. It is taken for granted that those addressed possess a new power to assimilate and respond to this teaching, that they are conscious of a newly-formed relationship with God, that in their vital link with their Lord they possess a new life which can be appealed to, and which can show itself in the manner suggested. Their responsibilities as Christians are plainly recognised and pressed, while teaching which can draw out these responses is also provided. Again, this feature of the epistles is a consequence of the stage at which their teaching was given. Coming as they did after the completed work of redemption and the indwelling within the believer of the Holy Spirit, this distinctive status for their (genuinely Christian) readers can be confidently assumed, and these kinds of responses fostered.

The book of the Revelation has its own special character. The whole of the biblical teaching is wound up here, in a highly distinctive way. The vast span of events which the bible covers is seen through to its consummation. The book has necessary instruction for the present period; but much of it provides a preview of coming events. This, at all events, is its own construction upon its

contents (see 1 : 1, 19). The Old Testament expectations of the coming kingdom and glory, though unfulfilled yet, are not for ever in abeyance. Many passages in the New Testament also speak of the day of consummation ; of hopes yet to be realised, though not uncertain. Here the seer looks ahead to these times of fulfilment. God's rule will be established, and all adversaries overthrown. Processes of judgment, over which Christ will hold complete control, will bring this about. The title of the book "the revelation (or, the unveiling) of Jesus Christ" leaves no doubt about its principal theme. This is heartening reading for all who welcome the prospect of full recognition and public acclaim for their Lord. It also has considerable value in advance in fostering right assessment of movements and attitudes of our day, in the light of His ultimate dealing with them.

Israel and the Church

The Old Testament history centres largely upon the nation of Israel. It speaks of their calling as the earthly people of God. Promises of a particular kind were made to them ; they were destined to a position of national eminence, and to function as a channel for His blessing to the nations around. There is no lack of passages which make this clear ; a few examples are Deuteronomy 14 : 2 ; 26 : 18, 19, Ezekiel 37 : 21-28, Micah 4 : 1-3, and Zechariah 8 : 20-23. The bulk of the Old Testament is, however, a long story of their unresponsiveness to God, Who had so signally favoured them. Despite this, His promises are not in any sense revoked, but will certainly yet be fulfilled. Romans 11 makes this very clear (see especially verse 29).

Other great things are afoot in the

meanwhile, however. Following the gospels, the New Testament speaks of a sovereign work of God of a separate and distinct kind. The beginning of the calling-out of the Church of God is described. It is made clear that this new start was no afterthought with God ; His eternal plan was being fulfilled. Individuals from all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, were (and are still) the subjects of His gracious call. Baptized by one Spirit into one body, the people of God of the present era are destined for the unique place of bride and consort for Christ in the coming day. Their calling and their promised inheritance have a heavenly character (as distinct from an earthly one), according to the scriptural description of it (Hebrews 3 : 1 ; 1 Peter 1 : 3, 4, for example).

There are, of course, parallels to be seen in God's elective grace in the choice of Israel and in the call of the Church. But, if confusion in understanding is not to arise, the important **distinctions** which scripture makes here must not be glossed over. The destinies, too, of Israel and the church are very different in character if the direct statements of Scripture are accepted. The interpretation which sees all the Old Testament promises fulfilled in the church can hardly be squared with a plain and undistorted reading of what it says. It loses and by-passes much that the bible indicates regarding the whole scheme and trend of the ages, the restoration of Israel, the reign of Christ, and the coming day when His splendour will be undeniable and acknowledged by all. We do no more than draw attention here to a distinction which is necessary for a well-focussed reading of the bible in many of its parts.

Impressions from Ripon, 1968.

3. THE MARRIAGE IN HEAVEN

Revelation 19 : 5/19

Our last study was from chapter five, and I would like to look briefly at one of the appearances of the Crowned Christ in the intervening chapters. I think that everybody has a fair idea of the meaning of chapters 1 to 5 and chapters 19 to the end, but between chapters 5 and 19 there lie the sections where difficulty in understanding the book arises. In the passage just read we began a series of events, generally speaking chronologically arranged, of which almost every student of scripture has a fair understanding. The first is celebrated in the verses we have read : it is the marriage of the Lamb ; secondly, the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, with the armies of heaven behind Him to overthrow all evil (19 : 11-17) : thirdly, the establishment of the earthly reign of Christ for a thousand years when His saints shall reign with Him and Satan is bound (20 : 1-6) : fourthly, the end of the millennium and the last great judgment of the white throne (20 : 11-15) : and in the first eight verses of chapter 21, almost all that Holy Scripture gives us about the eternal state, when God shall wipe away all tears from all faces and God will dwell with men and they will be His people and He will be their God.

The Lamb is the Shepherd

Now it is the first of these events, the marriage of the Lamb, that is immediately before us, but I beg your patience to look at one passage which presents to us personally the Lord Jesus Christ in the difficult

chapters. Turn to chapter 7 and read only the last verse, verse 17 "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed (or shepherd) them and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Now to my heart there is a most lovely presentation of our Lord Jesus Christ in these verses.

The Lamb is the centre of worship in the chapter we studied yesterday. Here we see the Lamb as the Shepherd ; in chapter 14 we have the Lamb as the King, and in the chapter we read this morning, we have the Lamb as the Bridegroom.

Let us pause to think of the Lamb as the Shepherd. We frequently sing the hymn, which in our version reads "Our Shepherd is the Lord, the living Lord Who died." In its original version it is a comment on this particular verse and reads : "My Shepherd is the Lamb" and what unites us here today is that we can all say this "My Shepherd is the Lamb." The company of people described here are an innumerable company out of every tribe and nation : "A great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes."

It must be readily conceded that this is not a church company. This is not the church of God ; it does not represent ourselves as believers in the Lord Jesus in this present dispensa-

tion. Nevertheless, if we can derive all the comfort that we do derive from Psalm 23, why should we be withheld from deriving the comfort that is in this verse? If we can say "The Lamb is my Shepherd" then He is our Shepherd in the sense that He is the Shepherd in this verse just as much as He is in Psalm 23, notwithstanding the obvious dispensational differences. And so I propose unashamedly that we should think of ourselves as under the Lamb Who is the Shepherd in these verses. "The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them."

Let us take particular notice of this expression "The Lamb that is in the midst of the throne." The Lamb speaks of the deepest depths to which He has gone, of the infinitely deep degradation into which He stooped when He was made poor that we might be rich. The Lamb, Who by His precious blood has redeemed us, speaks of the love which has reached so low in order that we might be His and that He might be our Shepherd. But now He is the Lamb on high, in the midst of the throne; He is a person with all power in His hand; He wields the power of the throne from which the very universe is directed; the sceptre of all things is in His hands. What wonders of love and power might we not expect from a Shepherd Who has plumbed the depths and reached the heights as He has, Who is the Lamb in the midst of the throne. Let us not miss one ounce of the strength and comfort there is in these two ideas, the Lamb Who has been to the very depths in His love, and the One Who is now in the heights. All power is now in His hands. We can expect every element of love and power to be combined in the hand of the One Who is the Lamb in the midst of the

throne. The Lamb in the midst of the throne shall be their Shepherd, and the Lamb Who is in the midst of the throne is our Shepherd.

"For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." I know no lovelier expressions in Holy Scripture than these two, "Shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." I might be hard put to it to expound the matter grammatically in any language, but I cannot escape the impression that what is implied in that expression is that He shall lead them unto the fountains of the water of life, the very fountains, the very origins, the very sources of that stream of living waters of which the end of this book speaks so much.

The verse ends with one of God's greatest promises, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." These words are quoted from Isaiah 25:8 and finally reach their climax in chapter 21, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." The great end towards which God is working, an end which will most certainly be reached, is that God will have a world without tears, a world without sorrow, a world without sadness, a world without death, because the Lord God makes all things new. This is our Shepherd now. He is now able to lead His own to the very fountain of the water of life, the very source of all that completely satisfies the hearts of men and women. He shall lead His own to the fountains of living waters, and He is able to bring to His own the comfort that shall fill the world of that day when God "shall wipe away all tears from off all faces."

The Lamb is the Bridegroom

The great beauty of our study this morning is that we have reached a character of the Lamb—the Bridegroom—and an association with the Lamb entirely new so far as these visions are concerned. The kind of outward governmental outlook of the book of Revelation so much involved in judgment, is not such as to include an actual representation of this most intimate scene ‘the marriage of the Lamb’, but it is celebrated. After the celebration of the judgment of the false woman, we come to verse 7 “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” One of the great reasons, it seems to me, for the use so repeatedly of the lovely figure of the Lamb, a little Lamb, a helpless Lamb that had been slain, in this book of the Revelation is that it joins together two things we have in Isaiah 53, the suffering of the Saviour and the fact that He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. And if this be so then, more abundantly than all we see in the marriage of the Lamb how He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied. The fact that it is the marriage of the LAMB indicates to us the price in His precious blood that He has paid so that He might possess the church suitable to Himself. “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”

“Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb” (v. 9). There is a certain externality about this idea of the blessedness of being a **guest** at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and one’s thoughts are inevitably taken to the words of John the Baptist. There was not a greater born of

women than he, but in the context of which we are now thinking, John said, (John 3 : 29, 30) “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom : but the friend of the bridegroom, - - - - - rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice : - - - - He must increase, but I must decrease.” I suppose that in the rest of scripture John the Baptist is the great picture of those who are called with rejoicing to the marriage of the Lamb without themselves being part of that company which is His body and His bride.

It is very easy for us to lose all humility when we come to think of the church, (being nurtured in the tradition which perhaps tends to think this way) but if we stop to enquire what right we have to think that this moment is a moment of supreme joy to the Lord Himself, then there is abundant scripture to indicate that this is the moment of His joy ; this is the moment when He is seeing of the fruit of the travail of His soul, and it is when this great moment of the marriage of the Lamb is come that He is being satisfied.

How do we know this ? In the parable of Matthew 22, God made a marriage supper for His Son. There is no doubt about the person who was to be made happy ; there was no doubt about the person whose delights were in view when this marriage supper was arranged. The very King of Heaven has made a marriage feast and it is for His Son. He is to see of the travail of His soul and He is to be satisfied. There can also be no question who and what is the bride, the Lamb’s wife (Ephesians 5 : 25) “Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not

having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." The bride, the Lamb's wife, presented to Himself in this chapter we have read, is none other than the church, which is also His body. The church is the one pearl of great price for which He gave all that He might have it: the church in its unity, all-inclusive from the first moment when the church was formed by the descent of the Holy Ghost to the moment when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout; this is the bride, the Lamb's wife.

The Fine Linen

What does all this mean to us in terms of our practice and our love at this present moment? I want to finish on two things that are an answer to that question.

Verse 8 "To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness (or the righteousnesses) of saints." Everyone knows that it is a very special thing when a bride makes her own dress, as part by part and stitch by stitch she is preparing this dress for the moment of her marriage. Now that is something like what we have here. The bride is clothed in fine linen. What is this fine linen? It is the righteousnesses of the saints. And it is being formed by the lives of the people of God, here and now. It is everything that they are doing which is pleasing to the Lord now, which will all be displayed when the time of the marriage of the Lamb is come. This may not appear very glamorous. Recreational activities are not life but it is day by day and week by week and year by year, in the factory and in the office and in the home, that the righteousnesses of the saints are worked out. Everything that is done in obedience to Christ and under His mastery is part of the righteousnesses of the saints. Whatever you do, not because you like it, not because it is popular, but because

the Lord tells you to do it, because it is right that you should do it, this is one of the righteousnesses of the saints. From such statements as 'Lie not one to another', 'Let him that stole steal no more,' right to the other extent of that lovely fruit of the Spirit, love and joy and peace—all these acts and thoughts and words that please the Lord are the righteousnesses of the saints and they are stored up against that day. They please Him now and they will all come out for His pleasure when the marriage of the Lamb is come.

Finally I would draw attention to the fact that when we talk about the church, as the bride of Christ, we mean that the church will be the bride of Christ after this event which we are now speaking about. The marriage is still future; it awaits the coming of Christ for His own; it predates the coming of Christ in power and great glory. But the present situation is described in 2 Corinthians 11:2, 3, "For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve, through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." The church is now espoused; the present is the time of her betrothal to Jesus Christ, and what is called for in the church and its members in the absence of the person to whom she is betrothed is single-hearted devotion and faithfulness. Never let our eyes stray to another. It is the world that is the great rival of the Lord Jesus Christ for the love of His own. Our reactions to its seductions are the things that really mean something to the heart of Christ. What is now called for from us is single-hearted faithfulness to Him, the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ, the absent One to Whom the church is betrothed.

IT is our intention to make a general review of prophecy and in the course of doing so we shall be examining three great subjects, namely the Church, the Nations, and the Jews. In pursuing this study we shall find a full development of the perfections of God under two names or characters, according to which He has revealed Himself in relationship to men. To the Jews, it is as Jehovah that He makes Himself known (Exodus 6:3) : to the Church it is as Father. In other words, just as what is prophesied about the Jews gives us the character of Jehovah—His faithfulness and all His attributes ; so also what is prophesied about the Church opens out to us the name of Father. Jesus, in consequence, is presented to the Jews as the Messiah, Who is the centre of the promises and of the blessings of Jehovah to that nation, whereas to the Church He appears as the Son of God (gathering to Himself His “many brethren” and sharing with them His title and privileges, especially as “joint-heirs with Christ. . . the firstborn among many brethren”), Who is the expression of all the glory of His Father.

Then, in “the dispensation of the fulness of times” (that is, the millennium), when God will “gather together in one all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1 : 10), there will also be realised in its fullest sense the name in which He revealed Himself to Abraham, that name under which He has been celebrated by Melchizedek (a type of the Royal Priest Who will be the centre as well as the assurance of the common blessing of the united earth and heavens), the name of “the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth.” In

that day “all nations shall serve him.” (Psalm 72 : 11)

The Church and its glory— Ephesians 1.

Our first subject introduces us to the name of Father, the character in which God has revealed Himself to us, whence flow to the Church the fruits of grace, and all the circumstances of its state of glory, as everything flowed to Israel from the name of Jehovah.

“The Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into His hand.” (John 3 : 35) This is the first great truth we desire to set out from. And as the Son has glorified the Father, so the Father will glorify the Son. Our second point is that we shall participate in the glory of the Son, as it is said in John 17 : 22— “. . . and the glory which thou gavest me I have given them.” This is expressly said to be in order that the world may know that the Father loves us as He loves Jesus Himself. The glory that we shall have will be the public manifestation of this precious and astonishing truth.

Now the Father would have us to enter into the full knowledge of this glorious purpose even now and has given us an earnest of it by the presence of the Holy Ghost in all those who are saved.

Turning then to the chapter before us for this instruction we find that in the very first lines God presents Himself as a Father, and in the relationships already indicated. He is our Father (verse 2) and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (verse 3). From this verse until verse 8 the apostle expounds salvation. From verse 8 to 10 we are introduced by the Holy Spirit into the knowledge of the proposed purpose

or decree of God as to the glory of Christ, namely to "gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth" (verse 10). We have our participation, still future, in that glory; and further, the sealing of the Holy Spirit whilst we are waiting in expectation of it. The apostle expresses it in this way, that "after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." (verses 13, 14)

This position of the Church, which already enjoys its own redemption, but waits for the redemption of the inheritance, has its perfect type in Israel. This people, redeemed from Egypt, did not enter at once into Canaan, but into the wilderness, whilst the land itself remained still in the possession of the Canaanites. The redemption of Israel was finished: the redemption of the inheritance was not. The heirs were redeemed, but the inheritance was not yet delivered out of the hands of the enemy. "Now all these things," says the apostle, "happened unto them" (the Israelites) "for types, and they are written for our admonition" (the Church), "upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Corinthians 10:11)

Christ is waiting for the first resurrection to be completed so that everything may be subjected to Him; subjected, not of right only, but in fact. He is waiting for that solemn moment when Jehovah will make all His enemies as a footstool under His feet. (Psalm 110:1) Until that moment arrives, kept as a secret in the depth of the divine counsels, He is sitting "on the right hand of the Majesty on High." (Hebrews 1:3)

Christ will take the inheritance of all things as a man, in order that the Church, bought with His blood, purified co-heir of an inheritance which will be itself purified, may inherit all things with Him.

Let us keep in mind, then, these two fundamental points, first, Christ, in the counsels of God, possesses all things and secondly, in virtue of being the bride of Christ, the Church participates in all that He has, and in all that He is, except His eternal divinity (although in a sense we do participate in the divine Nature—2 Peter 1:4).

Evidence of Psalm 8

Let us look through the passages which furnish the thoughts we have been giving out. All things, we say, are purposed for Christ. He is "appointed heir of all things." (Hebrews 1:2.) They belong to Him of right, because He is their Creator. (Colossians 1:15-18) Observe, in this passage, two headships of Christ; first of all He is called "firstborn (or chief) of every creature;" then, "firstborn from the dead," "the head of the body, the Church;" a distinction which throws much light on our subject. All things were created by Him, and for Him, but there is an important additional truth, namely, that He will possess them as a man, a Second Adam, to whom God has intended in His counsels to subject them. This is quite clear from Psalm 8, which is applied to Christ in Hebrews 2:6, and is, in fact, the corner stone of the doctrine of Paul on this subject. He cites the psalm three times in his epistles, in passages, the leading thoughts of which are the subjection of all things to the man Christ under three different aspects, every one of which is important for us.

According to Hebrews 2 the pro-

phesy is not yet accomplished, but the Church has, in the partial accomplishment of that which is yet to come, the pledge of its final consummation. All things are not yet put in subjection to Jesus ; but, in the meantime, Jesus is already crowned with glory and honour—certain proof that what remains will have its fulfilment in due time. Under the present dispensation (the object of which is the gathering together of the co-heirs) all things are not subjected to Him ; but He is glorified, and His followers acknowledge His rights.

In Ephesians 1 : 20–23, we equally see Jesus exalted, but as the effect of this is the introduction of the Church into the same glory, Jesus is presented to us, in this glory, as the Head of the Church, His body, “the fulness of him that filleth all in all”—the other truth upon which we have been insisting.

Again, in 1 Corinthians 15 this same fact, the glorification of Jesus, and the subjection of all things to Him, is shown to us, but still in another point of view, that is, as taking place at the resurrection, according to the power of which Jesus has been declared the Second Adam, and withal head of a kingdom which He will possess as man, and which he will eventually deliver up to God the Father, whilst He himself, as Second Adam, is to be “subject unto him that put all things under him,” instead of reigning as man, as He had been doing, over all things—all things, we say, except over Him who will have subjected them to Him.

Two Reconciliations

An important distinction becomes clear from the passages we have been citing. It is this, that besides the reconciliation of the Church there is the reconciliation of all things. We

saw that the reconciliation of the Church was represented as a thing accomplished, and the glory as a thing future, of which we have as yet but the earnest in the presence of the Holy Spirit in us after having believed. But we see in Romans 8 : 19–23 that the deliverance of the creation will take place at the time of the manifestation of the sons of God. During the present time, when Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, everything is in a state of misery and the whole creation remains in the bondage of corruption. But this is our expecting state, until the Most High enters upon the exercise of His power, until He reigns and becomes possessor in fact, as He already is by right, of the heavens and the earth. Inhabiting a fallen creation, we have on the one hand the assurance of being “accepted in the beloved” with the joy of the hope of the inheritance by the Spirit Who is the earnest of it : but on the other hand, by the same Spirit, we give utterance to the sighs and groans of the creation, inasmuch as we are in the body.

The passage already cited from Colossians 1 establishes this distinction. Verse 20 reads, “And having made peace by the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself ; by him, I say, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven, And you” (the saints) “. . . now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death.” The Church is already reconciled. The things in earth and heaven (not sinners remaining in their unbelief who are in neither) will be reconciled later, by the efficacy of His blood already shed. (The order of the ceremonies on the great day of atonement explained this reconciliation typically, though with special reference as to details to the part

which the Jews will have in these blessings.) Verse 16 of the same chapter clearly refers to the same things when it says that "all things were created by him and for him." All that He has created as God, He will inherit as the restorer of all things. Were there, for example, a blade of grass that was not subjected to His power in blessing, Satan would have got an advantage over Christ, over His rights, and over His inheritance. This inheritance is necessary for the glory of Christ. We are not the inheritance, we are co-heirs, "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ".

Conclusion

As for us, it is not on the liberated earth, but in the "heavenly places" that we shall find our abode. The spiritual blessings in heavenly places which we enjoy even now in hope will be for us in that day our

physical and normal state, so to speak, but the earth will not fail to receive the effects of it. The earth will enjoy the fruits of the victory and of the faithfulness of the Second Adam and will be the magnificent testimony of it in the sight of heavenly principalities and powers, as it is at present a testimony to the ruin and the iniquity of the first Adam. It is therefore very clear from our first consideration of this subject that we are at present living under the dispensation during which the heirs are gathered together, and that after this there is another dispensation which will take its place at the coming of the Saviour, a dispensation in which the heirs shall have the enjoyment of the inheritance of all things; in which all things shall be subjected to Christ, and to His Church as united to Him and manifested with Him.

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE ————— COLIN CURRY

3. KEY FEATURES (continued)

"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5 : 20)

Between the Advents

TH**ERE** is no doubt that the period between the advents fills a special place in the scriptural plan, and that the crowning truths of the whole biblical revelation are fully disclosed in this our day. What has followed immediately upon the historical manifestation of Christ has a peculiar depth and quality about it. The day of faith in an unseen Lord, the day of the Spirit, the day of the calling out of the Church of God, the day when God is known as Father, is indeed a day of special light and opportunity. There are

suited responses to such disclosures, too, which need to be pressed. While recognizing that Scripture is by no means solely directed to these ends, for those who search for its current relevance it will be fair to give some prominence to these parts of its teaching.

The Old Testament covers an extensive period of time. In the light of its teaching, this must be considered as a long period of probation for mankind. The outcome was not a good one. Though God was infinitely patient, setting men in new

situations so that every possibility for self-betterment was examined, the perverseness and weakness of the human material upon which God showed His interest and care was proved again and again. More than one passage speaks of the coming of Christ as the climax of this process. He spoke of it Himself in the parable of the husbandmen (Matthew 21 : 37-39). God's last and greatest messenger of all, His own Son, was refused and cast out. The world's unawareness of the visitation of its Maker, His rejection by the nation which had special reason to expect and welcome Him, brought the long probation of humankind to an end. If in the prophet's day God asked the question "What could have been done more?" (Isaiah 5 : 4) how clear it becomes that man in his sinfulness had certainly reached the point of no-return when Christ Himself had been rejected and crucified.

The crowning wonder of all came to light at this very point. In its implications regarding the unfaithfulness and sinfulness of men, the cross of Christ was the darkest of all events. Yet other profound issues were also settled there. Surrounding that momentous event there are special glories which are of an inward and inexpressibly deep character. There, in a transcendent way, God was displayed. His limitless love was demonstrated, His high standards upheld and underlined. There too the qualities of another man were shown. There the Lord Jesus, sinless and holy, showed His devotion to God to the limit, honouring Him, obedient to Him in the severest test. There the Son of the Father, Who had said of Himself "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father", showed clearly that divine love would hold nothing back in

self-giving, though this was done on behalf of loveless and worthless objects.

This great act of Christ having been accomplished, with a fitting recognition of it in His resurrection and ascension, there followed a time when the riches of God's grace burst upon this world in an unprecedented way. The restraints were removed, the national barriers were swept away. Where sin abounded, grace exceeded. God demonstrated His ability to bring good out of evil, to overcome evil with good. All along it had been His intention to do this ; many a New Testament passage shows that this was no afterthought with God. Out of His eternal reserves, on the perfect and righteous foundation of Christ's death, God bestows His richest gifts, and brings His great schemes into effect. This is what the New Testament is mostly about. It speaks of a God Who can justify the ungodly ; it shows Him making new beginnings with impossible material, discarding the old and bringing in the new in Christ, even bringing life out of death itself. More profound and more splendid truths about God than had been possible to know in earlier times are here revealed. His nature, His infinite goodness and resources are clearly shown in this, the Christian era ; and the fuller and final revelation of God calls for deeper responses than the more limited disclosures of earlier ages had allowed.

Aspects of Christianity as Foreseen by Christ

We now seek to examine some of the characteristics of the present Christian age in a little more detail. For this purpose we select from the gospels a few passages in which our Lord looked ahead and gave His own outline of what was to come. First we shall look briefly at

Matthew 13, where in a sequence of parables an **outward** view of this period is given. We shall then refer to His words in Matthew 16, and also in John chapters 13 to 17. Here **inward** and more **fundamental** features of Christianity are in view. These passages (and others) certainly show that our Lord fully foresaw all the developments arising out of His rejection and death. There is also a special directness and value in looking at the features of Christianity as described in advance by its Founder. Much of the remainder of the New Testament will be found to amplify and expand the teaching which He first outlined.

The gospel of Matthew opens by showing our Lord's title to be King over the nation hitherto specially favoured by God. Though they ought to have expected Him, they were in fact in no mood to recognize or to welcome Him. By chapter 11, it is accepted that He will be rejected, and grave words about their culpability are pronounced. With this as the background, He begins to teach along new lines. The parables in chapter 13 illustrate the form and characteristics of "the kingdom of heaven" during the ensuing period, following His final refusal by His own people. Good developments, the widespread sowing of the seed of the word of God, and its reception by the hearing of faith, are intermingled with less satisfactory features. Among these are inadequate responses to that same "word of the kingdom", and the introduction of what is spurious and false by the adversary of the work now being described. There are suggestions that a considerable time will elapse, during which hidden developments will constantly continue, until ultimately a time of harvest is arrived at. Then finally a separation

will take place of the true fruits of the good work (as it initially started) from its false accretions. Under the surface all along there had been that which made the whole operation worthwhile to its Originator, the pearl of great price, the treasure hid in the field, something of great value to Himself, more than compensation for all that He gave to acquire it.

As a picture of Christianity this is not an entirely pleasing one, though it has aspects which are encouraging to consider. However, events have confirmed its accuracy. The New Testament had not been completed before trends of the kind depicted here were visible. It would be foolish to read the New Testament with a blind-spot for the indications it gives about departure from the faith, about profession without reality, during the present era. Some epistles correct misconceptions in the minds of genuine Christian people, bringing to light much positive truth and guidance in the process. Others warn against what is false and erroneous, though in the guise of truth. They suggest ways in which dubious teachings and inconsistent behaviour may be tested; they show the true path for Christian people in days when unreality in Christian things is not uncommon. The letters of John, Jude and 2 Peter, for instance, and also those of Paul to Timothy, are weighted with guidance of this kind, with every indication that the passage of the years would in no sense decrease the need for it.

In the other passages we have selected, our Lord speaks of true Christianity in its inward and essential aspects. "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). This was one way in which He described what

would occur. Clearly He considered this aspect of His work was yet to start ; the verse eliminates the idea of the existence of the Church (in the sense He intended it) in Old Testament times. It was a post-ascension activity of our Lord, by His Spirit. We see this work commencing in the Acts. His chosen servants, apostles, prophets and evangelists, had their part in it under His direction. The gospel was the door into it ; there was equal opportunity for all ; no distinctions existed within the body of believers so formed. The unique place of the Church, as a unity within the purposed plan of God and as the object of the love of Christ, is a prominent New Testament theme. Its place as the body of Christ, undisclosed in earlier days, but revealed after the descent of the Holy Spirit, was given especially to Paul to make known. This great truth, ever in view in the intention of God, rounds off and crowns the whole scheme of revelation, adding as its climax one of the most wonderful thoughts of all (Colossians 1 : 24-29). Nothing will spoil His work in building that Church. Ephesians 5 speaks of it as His pure and spotless Bride : His satisfaction in her will be complete ; she is the fruit of His own perfect work on her behalf.

The practical bearing of the teaching about the Church must not be overlooked. To be a believer in Christ is to be incorporated into a vast spiritual organism of which the human body is an apt picture. Christ is the head of this spiritual body and each Christian is a member. The link with Him is also the bond of unity between the members. Evidence of that vital link with the living Christ should appear in our lives as Christians. Deriving from our union with Him there should spring the real

experiences of fellowship with others, of mutual profit and spiritual growth, of helpful and constructive activities and ministry amongst the people of God. The need to participate in this in the local setting (contributing to it and benefitting from it) forms a definite part of the pattern of New Testament instruction.

Our Lord's final discourse with His disciples (John 13 to 17) picks out the essence of Christianity in a direct and profound way. With the dark shadow of the cross gathering in intensity, He was able even then to look beyond it, in the anticipation of His victory there, and to speak of some of the richest parts of the Christian revelation. Soon these matters were to be fully unveiled, and the possibility open for His disciples to enter into them. "The time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father" (16 : 25). It is as **the Father** that God is known in the Christian day. "The only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1 : 18). The most profound truth of all, about the nature of God, is at last in the open. The whole bible can, no doubt, be considered as an account of the progressive self-revelation of God : the opening verses of Hebrews clearly show that this is a valid view of the bible. In partial and intermittent ways God had shown Himself in earlier times, so that important divine characteristics were disclosed to men and understood by them. But the end-point of all this cumulative revelation outshone all that had preceded it. In Christ, God was manifest in the flesh ; here at last was the direct disclosure, exhaustless in its fulness, to which nothing further could be added. "God

was in Christ, reconciling the world unto itself" (2 Corinthians 5 : 19). The Father was seen in the Son (John 14 : 9).

These chapters in the fourth gospel speak also of the reception of this great revelation of the Father. For the disciples, the Holy Spirit would be their power to assimilate and to respond to it. Rather than any outward behavioural aspect of Christianity it is the underlying life of the Christian which is to the fore in these chapters. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17 : 3). The knowledge of God, revealed as the Father, seen in the Son, entered into by the indwelling Spirit ; here we draw near to the central genius of the Christian life and experience. To faith today it is open to know and to respond to love of a transcendent kind, of the quality which belongs to the eternal scene, such as is shared between the Father and the Son. Soon our Lord Himself will return to welcome His people into the eternal home. His promise about this is to be relied on (John 14 : 1-3). Meanwhile, He instructs His disciples so that the rich experiences which are proper to that life need not await that day. We too, along with them, are told of the quality of the life we possess and should enjoy. We are told of the environment and atmosphere in which that life is at home, what it feeds upon, what will strengthen it ; we read here of the fruitfulness and the growth natural to that life and also of its power to overcome what would seek to destroy it. We are urged to continue in it, pursuing the active lines in which that life properly engages itself.

We have considered some of the great Christian essentials. To conclude this sub-section we may note that attempts to undermine these fundamental matters have been (and are still) very real. Certainly it is necessary to notice that an important element of the New Testament teaching (towards its close) aims to warn us against these attempts. The letters written by John, for instance, do not hesitate to label certain teachings as **false**, and their sponsors as **anti-Christian**. To have wrong thoughts of the person of Christ, to deny or belittle the apostolic witness about Him, to discount the testimony regarding His incarnation and death, is to strike at the roots of the Christian faith. Teachings which are misleading, and which really vitiate everything that Christians hold dear, can appear very plausible on the surface. Discrimination is all-important in these matters ; and guidance about this is given. But it is not enough to be informed correctly : there are practical tests too, of the genuineness of professedly Christian persons and activities. These tests are applicable to ourselves as well as to others. To be truly in touch with God, the Source of divine love, is to be reflecting certain characteristics in our lives. Hallmarks of God's children are righteousness, love, faith, and an absence of constant sin. To say and not to **do** is valueless, a point which John in the first letter makes repeatedly (see, for example, 3 : 18). The inter-relation between belief and practice is prominent in the whole scriptural scheme : it is not unrealistic to treat it as another key feature. In concluding this part of our study we hope, in the next issue, to devote a final section to this.

ANOTHER VALLEY.

AFTER a wonderful experience of intercession and communion with God as declared in chapter 18, Abraham now passes through a personal lapse of his faith, detailed for us in chapter 20. Let us notice the journey he took as he went towards the south. It says in verse one, that he dwelt between **KADESH** and **SHUR**, two very important place names; for Kadesh means 'consecrated', and Shur signifies 'a fort'. The place of consecration (Kadesh) was where Abraham had enjoyed the fulness and blessing of God. On the other side was a fort (Shur), as though he was now in an enemy's land, needing the succour and help of One who was able to deliver. As a sojourner, Abraham had gone southwards to Gerar, the place of sojourning, and was here to be tested both as to the secret of his consecration and the preserving care of God over him in a strange land. Here we are to see him again as in Egypt in chapter 12, in the moral degradation of the flesh, as later restored to the dignity which always belongs to him in God's sight.

The old compact between Abraham and Sarah is acted on again, after so long a time—acted on now at Gerar, as before it had been in Egypt. It had been made between them ere they left their native country. It was brought out with them from the very place of their birth. It was, I may say, in them older than anything of God; and after many changes and exercises it is in them and with them the same thing still. It was a very evil thing—both subtle and unclean. It was false and yet specious, and savoured strongly of the serpent, of him that is a liar and the father of lies. Abraham was forced to betray it, vile as it was, to the king of Gerar. "It

came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This is thy kindness which thou shalt show unto me: at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother." This was worse than we might even have feared. There was not a principle in the life of faith that was not gainsaid by so vile a compact as this, brought from the very place of their nativity with them. And such is the flesh, the inbred corruption. Its way, whenever taken, is shame and deep dishonour. It degrades a saint even before men. It is that which will confound and expose an Abraham before an Abimelech. And it never changes, or improves, or ceases to be. It is the same in Egypt, and at Gerar. It lives in us still, and follows us everywhere. We get it at our birth from the loins of Adam; and we are, for the common consistency of our way as the called of God, to mortify and refuse it.

Had he turned aside from the will of God, and sought self-pleasing? Very quickly he has to take refuge in a coverage of lies, saying to the king of Gerar that Sarah was his sister; for Abimelech had taken her to himself. How remarkable it is to note that Abraham does not cry out to God in prayer and supplication for Sarah, his wife, in this hour of her need, and of his extremity. The slender line of communion with God was evidently hindered and broken by some secret or selfish sin on the part of Abraham and Sarah. Yet God in His faithfulness comes in where they have failed, and warns Abimelech in a dream, of the present serious position. Was not Sarah appointed to be in the direct line to Christ? This could no doubt be a means of attack from the adversary, who was seeking to pervert the pure genealogy of Christ.

Abimelech must have had some knowledge of the true God seeing he called Him Lord, saying, "Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?" (Genesis 20:4) The disgraceful conspiracy of Abraham and Sarah was now disclosed by their own words, for he had said unto Abimelech, "She is my sister"; and she had said of him, "He is my brother." Sincerity and simplicity were found in Abimelech's dealings with Sarah, causing the overruling hand of God to be manifest towards him, as He made known that He had withheld him from sinning against Him. Precious words indeed, seeing that God's glory and honour were in danger and jeopardy. "Therefore suffered I thee not to touch her."

Restoration to Abraham of his wife Sarah must be made quickly by Abimelech, in order to stay the hand of God in judgment upon him, and his family. Notice how graciously God speaks to Abimelech, of Abraham as a 'prophet', saying, "He shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live". He was very much accustomed to this intercessory service; and the dignity of being a friend of God, which Abraham had temporarily lost, was now about to be restored to him. O, the wonders of the goodness and mercy of God; that not only was He willing to restore His servant Abraham from his lapse of faith, but He would bless him, and still use him, and also glorify Himself in the doing of it. Abimelech was gravely concerned about the words of God, and conveyed the message to all his servants, causing them to be sore afraid. In all this, we behold the greatness of God in all things relating to the spiritual prosperity of Abraham and Sarah, who were His by sovereign choice. However, Abimelech is sincere and upright, and called for Abraham to enquire why

he had done such a thing, so as to bring this judgment of God upon him. Listen to his words: "What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." What a serious searching of heart for Abraham, in the presence of God, and before Abimelech!

Then Abraham confessed the saddening story of the fear of man upon them, and of the half-truth used to overcome it. How very often are our thoughts and fears unfounded! First of all, Abraham thought that there was no fear of God in that place. Why should he be journeying to such a place at the very outset, if that was the case? Certainly, it is always good for us to realise that God is quite able to take care of His own in a strange land, just as in any other place. Then, too, we must never think that there is no fear of God in a foreign land; for here was the king of Gerar willing to hear the word of God by means of a dream, and ready to obey His command. Truly, a delightful position indeed!

This had been a great test for Abimelech; but how much greater had been the trial for Abraham and Sarah? For Abraham there was the disclosure of his fear of man, and of his reliance upon human expediency, rather than full and implicit trust in the living God. Being afraid of death, he had relied upon a 'half-truth', that Sarah was his sister, rather than his wife. Even from the beginning of their travels from Ur of the Chaldees, he and Sarah had fostered these thoughts in view of a time of extremity, despite all the goodness of God shown to them in their path of faith. (Genesis 12:11-13) Now, things had come to a climax.

In the mercy and kindness of God, Sarah was restored to Abraham, and Abimelech gave him possessions and much wealth, with liberty to dwell in his land wheresoever he should please. Then addressing Sarah, he declared that he had given her brother (note, not her husband) one thousand pieces of silver, and that he was to be a veil for her before all. Thus Sarah was reprov'd, and the marriage tie held sacred and holy in the sight of God. What a lesson for all, in this present day when the tendency is to under-

value the divine sanctity of marriage, and allow a course of things which may seem to be right, thereby bringing dishonour upon God.

The chapter closes with a fitting and touching climax ; Abraham, the prophet, found praying for Abimelech, his wife and household ; God hearing and answering the intercessions of His servant, granting healing and the removal of the judgment which lay upon them, for He had closed up the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

"THE CROWNED CHRIST"

J. S. BLACKBURN

Impressions from Ripon, 1968.

4. THE GLORIOUS CITY

Revelation 21 : 1-11, 16, 22-27

WE were speaking yesterday about the fact that these closing chapters in the main present, in chronological sequence, the events which include the Second Coming in power and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, His millennial reign, the last judgment and eternity, and the passage we have read today connects directly with these.

This vision of the Holy City is, in a rather hazy way, one of the passages of Holy Scripture most frequently alluded to. Most of the popular imagery of heaven rests on a combination of the words of Christ to Peter in Matthew 16 and on this vision of the city, especially the gates of pearl and the streets of gold. However much of the false there may be in the popular view, I do hope that we shall see that here we have the very glory of God in the Lamb.

I am anxious to connect directly with the chronological sequence, and I ask you first with chapter 21 open before you, to notice that there is a very important break at verse 8.

No one can possibly understand this chapter without taking account of this fact that verse 8 is the end of the section which begins by saying, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth". John saw "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband". In verse 4 we read "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying". When in verse 5 God says "Behold I make all things new", this is the new creation never to end. Even in verse 8, with truly dreadful solemnity, we read of "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone : which is the second death".

This section (verses 1-8) is the fullest description that we have anywhere in the word of God of the eternal state—of that into which all things will merge when God makes all things new and the present heavens and the earth are rolled up and done away.

This is in direct sequence with

what has gone before and I want to speak as briefly as possible of this sequence, completing the difficult middle chapters. These chapters (6-21) are divided into two parts. In chapter 11 we are told quite plainly that along one line we have come to the end of the story in the millennial reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. Under the seventh trumpet we read, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ ; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (11 : 15) and the story starts afresh. We have had warning of this in chapter 10, that the prophet starts afresh from a new point of view in chapter 12. The dominant city up to that point is Jerusalem, the place where our Lord was slain (11 : 8), but the city dominating events in the second part of these chapters is the city of Rome. This is absolutely indisputable from chapter 17 and whoever denies it is a blind leader of the blind. There is not the faintest shadow of a doubt, that this is the city of Rome at present in Italy on the Tiber. In this second telling of the story from chapter 12, we have the fundamental causes lying behind the events which we now see developing around us. I mean by that the division of Europe into two, the unification of the west under one head, (not yet seen), the progressive departure from God culminating in an absolutely open defiance of God and rebellion against Him. The events now in the making, the facts and persons that lie behind them are described in chapters 12 and 13. In chapter 12, in one sense, we go right back to the beginning in Eden. Just as in Eden, you have the man and the woman and the woman's seed, so in chapter 12 you have the man and the woman and the woman's seed. In chapter 13 are the two great

human agents of the devil ; they are called later the beast and the false prophet. In chapter 14 there are many separate sections which tell what God is doing in these times. In chapters 15 and 16 we have the seven vials, that is the successive events in which God pours out His wrath upon that system of evil that has been established ; and included in this is the fact that Babylon the Great is fallen. In chapters 17 and 18 we have Babylon described and destroyed, and from 19 to 21 : 8 the chronological sequence detailed at the beginning of the previous study.

Now let us compare 17 : 1 with 21 : 9. In 17 : 1 you will see that the narrative of events that have been developing is interrupted, because Babylon the Great has been mentioned under the seventh vial : "Babylon the Great is fallen" (16 : 19). This is also mentioned in 14 : 8, therefore quite naturally the Holy Ghost by His servant turns aside to give us two chapters in which we are told all about Babylon the Great and what it means. It is a city and it is a woman. Look at 17 : 1, "There came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither, I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters." "So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness : and I saw a woman" (verse 3), "Babylon the Great" (verse 5). Now those words in 17 : 1 are exactly parallel with 21 : 9, except for the names. What a marvellous difference there is after this ! "And he carried me away (not into the wilderness) in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." In the former case, when the seer is describing the evil

coming to its fruition and being destroyed, he turns aside to give us the Holy Ghost's description of that evil system, Babylon the Great, the city and the woman. So now in 21 : 9 he has reached the end of the story in eternity, and since in chapter 19 there has been a reference to the bride, and the marriage of the Lamb, and since also there is in 21 : 2 a reference to the bride, so in exactly parallel manner the Spirit of God causes John to write in 21 : 9 that there is to be a section that is devoted entirely to going back upon the narrative and explaining all about this city. It is a woman, the bride of Christ, and it is a city that is the centre of God's administration of all things in the world to come, and it is the city that is described.

Another point to notice is that that description does not end with chapter 21, but with 22 : 5. The section descriptive of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, runs from 21 : 9 to 22 : 5, and it is quite separate from the first eight verses of chapter 21 which is the end of the chronological story reading through the coming of Christ in glory, to the establishment of the millennial kingdom, the final outbreaking of evil, the judgment of the great white throne and then in eternity the new heavens and the new earth.

Let us notice particularly that when John was taken to see Babylon, that evil woman, he is taken into the wilderness. We have had a lot to say about the symbols of the Revelation this week. It is important to see what these symbols mean and most of them are quite plain. The wilderness is the place where God's people had to journey, but where there is absolutely nothing that will help them in the things of God except what comes down from above. There is nothing there that

will do anything else than hinder them in their journey except what comes directly from God, the manna. There are pits and snares and traps of all kinds set by the enemy, but God has the power to guide us through the wilderness. Now when John is taken to see Babylon (and a splendid, imposing, attractive, seductive, scarlet woman she is) it is fitting that he goes to the wilderness. For all the colour and magnificence and the seduction, there is nothing at all for God, and that is what the wilderness means. But when John is taken to see the sight that we are called upon to see today, when John is taken to see the things that we have the privilege of contemplating today, then he is taken to an exceeding great and high mountain. It is a viewpoint immeasurably lifted up above this world. Do not let us be afraid of what lifts us up above the things that belong to this life. It is absolutely vital that our faith should illuminate "the trivial round and the common task" and everything that we have to do, but this will only come true if our viewpoint is immeasurably higher than the things that belong to this world. It was from an exceeding great and high mountain that John saw the Holy City, and how we pray that we might have a mountain-top experience today ! We contemplated a mountain-top experience during our last series of readings, when we saw our Lord Jesus Christ in His transfiguration, and here is another one of the characteristic mountain scenes of scripture, when John was taken to see that great city, the holy Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, from an exceeding great and high mountain.

Now just to run over the structure of this section about the

city, before I come to speak immediately of the Lamb in it, we shall find it to be, as always in scripture, very orderly. The vision begins in verse 9 and in verses 10 and 11 we have the way the city appeared to John in his vision, its introduction and its **general appearance**. In verses 12-17 we have a section which deals with its **design and measurements**. This section indicates quite plainly that these are all symbols. Whoever heard of a cubical city? If you try to work out the actual geometry of the city, you will find it is a cube, with length of side equal to 12,000 furlongs; and yet it had a wall only 144 cubits! It is a description which involves symbols almost entirely. In verses 18-21 we have the **materials** of the city, and this is a most lovely subject to contemplate. The materials of the city are gold and precious stones, and I hope in a few minutes to come back to these, but this is another indication that we are not intended to read literal materials in these descriptions, because who can conceive gold that is clear as the light, like transparent glass? "The street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass" (verse 21). The meaning is that we are to add the symbolic meaning of pure gold to the symbolic meaning of transparent glass. It is impossible to give a geometrical literality to either the materials or the dimensions of this symbolic city here presented. Verses 22-27 give the **persons** in and around the city, beginning above all with God and the Lamb. And finally, in the beginning of the next chapter the description is concluded; in verses 1-6 we have the **blessing** that is in and flows from the city.

Now I want to concentrate upon a concept of this city which involves taking three points quite

separately. First, look at verse 22 "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it". The correct translation of verse 23 is important. "The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the Lamp thereof". Let us start with this point for an understanding of this city. The glory of God did lighten it, but the light-bearer, the Person in whom that light is placed to shine forth to illuminate all, is the Lamb. The glory of God is the first thing. The great mark of this city, (this is why it is a city of gold), is that the glory of God did lighten it. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God". We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God, but in Christ we have been restored and here the glory of God shines. Secondly, the Lamb is the Lamp. Here we have an exact fulfilment of John 17:23. This is one of the three prayers for unity in John 17. "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me". This follows immediately the idea of the glory, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one". Now you see how precise this is. It is to be sharply distinguished from the other prayers in this chapter by our Lord Jesus Christ for the oneness of His own. This is their oneness in the glory, when the Father is in the Son (that is "Thou in Me"), but the Son is amongst His people, ("I in them"), and it all shines out upon the world. The fulfilment of this prayer is pictured in these verses in Revelation 21. First, let us think of the glory of God, that

wonderful light, that wonderful blessing : “ the glory of God did lighten it ”. Secondly, “ The Lamb is the Lamp thereof ”. As from the beginning every expression of God was by His only begotten Son, Who was the Word, so in the end, the full expression of the glory of God is pictured here in that the Lamb is the Lamp of that Holy City.

Here we come to the real significance of these precious stones. I do not think we are intended to identify in particular these twelve stones, but we are intended to see the marvellous variety that belongs to them. We talk about precious metals and we talk about precious stones, and all my life long I have reflected upon what this word ‘ precious ’ means. What is in fact the difference between gold and lead ? Even should it turn out that there is as much gold as lead in the world, gold would still be a precious metal and lead a base metal. It might turn out that there are as many diamonds in the world as pebbles, but diamonds would still be precious stones and ordinary pebbles would not be so, and I am going to suggest that there are two concepts which attach to the precious stones and the precious metals ; of these the first is their permanence. The jewels are hard : diamonds are used in cutting instruments : the precious metals never lose their shining and their brightness : these qualities infer permanence. The other property is marvel of their colour. In other words the point is that the function of these precious stones and precious metals is to take the white purity of light and split it up into its parts so that the real beauty can be seen by those who behold. The pearl picks out a colour effect, and the blue stone picks out a colour and the brilliant deep red

stone picks out a colour, so that by these stones and by these metals there is split up for us the pure beauty that goes to compose the white light. The glory of God enlightens this city, the Lamb is the Lamp thereof, but every part of this city (and that is going to be all the saints) has for its function to take a living ray of that glorious Light and mediate it to the nations, because the nations live in the light of the glory that shines in the city.

I close by referring to 3 : 12. There is no more pure delight than to contemplate the glory of this city, where His servants shall see His face, where they shall serve Him and His name shall be on their foreheads, but the contemplation is intended to affect us now. In this address to the overcomers in Philadelphia, (you and I can be said almost certainly to belong to either Philadelphia or Laodicea) the Lord says, “ 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 ”. Somewhere here among the confusion and the warring sects and the seductions of the world, are the stones and the pearls and the gold of this city ; and upon those who overcome Christ is writing here and now the name of His city, the New Jerusalem which cometh down out of heaven from God. Do we want to have our part in the scarlet woman, due for absolute damnation and utter destruction, although it is so pleasurable to behold, or do we want to have our part in the New Jerusalem which comes down from God out of heaven ?

BOOK REVIEW

Jesus Rediscovered

By Malcolm Muggeridge. Fontana Books.

FROM the point of view of Scripture Truth this collection of essays and addresses is marred by a number of blemishes. Its outspokenness will be taken in their stride by the young of all persuasions, but will be a stumblingblock to many of their parents. Its content of truth is confined to a few (immeasurably important) texts repeated to the point of monotony. What is much more serious is that the book sounds an uncertain note on several fundamentals, including the personality of God, the truth of Genesis, the virgin birth, the meaning of the atonement and the bodily resurrection of Christ. It seems to have no place for a Second Coming, nor for a future kingdom of God on earth. This formidable list is only partly to be accounted for by the form—essays and speeches given over four years to different audiences—or by the possibility of development in the author's experience and convictions. His well-known intention to shock the reader doubtless plays a part.

Even when he feels "attuned to God", he is aware of his oneness with the human race (all children of God), rather than with the Church. Indeed, he only seems to know of the "institutional church", and no place is found for the Church eternally settled in the counsel of God and in the love of Christ.

The author is at his strongest in his terrific deunciations of the spirit of our age and of the ecumenical movement. He is very much at one with a teacher of former times who saw in his Bible "the dispensation in ruins. Here, what his enemies call his "talent for invective" is given full rein!

My aim, however, in this review, is to share the thrill of certain passages which, in their delight in the love of Christ, put the author in company with Bernard of Clairvaux and Samuel Rutherford, the

bright shining light of whose devotion has perpetually delighted Christians of all intervening generations.

"I think of a man, Paulinus, in the fourth century about whom I have read. Foreseeing the darkness ahead he decided to light a lamp and keep it burning in a Christian shrine. I should dearly love to do just this—a little lamp to signify that whatever the darkness, however profound the sense of lostness, the light of Christ's love and the clarity of his enlightenment still shines, and will continue to shine, for those that have eyes to see, a heart to love and a soul to believe." (p. 104)

"I may, I suppose, . . . pass for being a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets—that's fame. . . . It might happen once in a while something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time—that's fulfilment. Yet I say to you, and beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by a million, add them all together, and they are nothing—less than nothing, a positive impediment—measured against one draught of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are. What, I ask myself, does life hold, what is there in the works of time, in the past, now or to come, which could possibly be put in the balance against the refreshment of drinking that water?" (p. 100)

How worth while it will be to pray for this man, perhaps in the words of a monk who wrote one of the thousands of letters he has received, that "the gentle Saviour will give him a better understanding and appreciation of our Christian heritage," and continues, "Every morning at 5 a.m. . . . I ask our beloved Saviour to be good to you and to those dear to you. I will continue to do that for whatever short time remains before I meet Him face to face". (p. 10)

THE EDITOR.

Impressions from Ripon, 1968

5. THE COMING LORD

Revelation 22

THE coming Lord is very evidently the character in which the Lord Jesus presents Himself in this chapter, so this is the way I propose to introduce it. In this chapter, there are three distinct references by the Lord Jesus, either mediated by the prophet, or His personal word, which announce His coming again: (verse 7), "Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book"; (verse 12), "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be"; (verse 20), "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly." And there follows the response which the Lord desires from all the saints, "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Finally we are assured that until that moment arrives, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be sufficient for all that we need.

This is a somewhat ill-assorted unity as a chapter, because the first five verses relate to the subject of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, and they complete the theme begun in 21:9. From verse 6 to verse 15 we have a conversation between John, the writer, and the angel, about the book that he has written. Finally, what is unique in the book, the Lord Jesus speaks in His personal name, out of the very last page, not only of this book but also of the whole bible. I propose to divide the rest of my remarks into two. First, to speak about the second coming of Christ, and second, the personal address of the Lord Jesus beginning in verse 16.

The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is described in the Old Testament in words which we know were absolutely incomprehensible to those who first read those prophecies, and indeed to those who read them in New Testament times, until the explanation was given. Let us compare two prophecies of the Christ's coming, both quoted in the New Testament. To king Herod, when he asked where the Christ should be born, the chief priests and scribes quoted Micah 5:2, "Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel." They rightly understood that the Christ would come by being born in Bethlehem. According to Daniel 7:13, when He comes His coming would be with the clouds of heaven and with power and great glory. Yet no one distinguished the first coming and the second coming of the Messiah from these and similar scriptures.

As regards the stages of the second coming, a similar state of affairs existed in the beginning of the New Testament. Let us put together only two passages. First, in the intimate circle of the disciples in the upper room, the Lord Jesus said to them, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many places for you to dwell, if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go away I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." We, the

disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, surrounding Him, are moved as we hear words like this spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ to His own. "If I go away, I will come again and receive you unto myself and we shall be together in the Father's house." But something quite different was explained in Matthew 24, based, as has been noted, on Daniel 7, "Then . . . they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." And the events immediately to follow are given, "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." The two things are not obviously describing *the same event, and at that stage it would have been quite impossible for anyone to understand exactly what was meant. The explanation is given uniquely in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.*

Let us notice that we should be deluding ourselves most disastrously if we were to think that **all** the facts relative to these future events have been revealed. In the wisdom of God and the love of Christ and by the Spirit of God, we are only given what we need for the practical purpose in hand, and to move our hearts toward the Lord. We are often told what is the reason for a particular enlightenment. 1 Thessalonians is for comfort, that the brethren who have been bereaved, and out from whose sight had gone their loved ones, 'absent from the body and present with the Lord', might be comforted. So that they might not sorrow as others sorrow, who have no hope, he gives them these words. In another place He speaks about His coming in the parable of the talents so that they might get on with the job of working for Him until He comes again ;

and in another scripture, speaks of His coming so that they might purify themselves. These are the three great practical purposes for which Holy Scripture speaks to us about the second coming of Christ. For our comfort, for our stimulus as His servants, and to purify us, the Lord speaks of the fact that we are going to meet Him at His coming.

"If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." This is the first great fact. When Jesus comes, when He comes on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, according to Revelation 19, with the armies of heaven in His train, upon the white horse of victory, when He falls like a stone upon the image, then, God will bring His saints with Him. How can this be ? How is it going to happen ? Here for the first time it is explained. "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord" (it was a critical and special revelation) "that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not go before them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord." We are to be caught up (raptured) to meet Him for His coming. The saints will come with Him when He comes with power and great glory, because they will first of all have been raised from the dead and caught up to meet Him. This much is clear, certain, absolutely indisputable from the Word of God. Those only doubt it, who say to themselves that this is too

fantastic to believe. Nobody can doubt that this is what it says. The saints will first be raised and raptured to meet Him and then after that they will come with Him.

The question then arises as to how long is the interval between the first and the second parts of that one great event which is the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it has been believed that the seven years that come at the end of the vision in Daniel 11 help us here. It is necessary to put together many indications gathered from all parts of scripture, to conclude that there might be a considerable lapse of time between the moment when the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and catch away His own to be with Him, and the time when He comes again with power and great glory to rule. In the scheme of the Book of the Revelation which we have been following this week, we might think of the rapture of the saints as represented by the apostle John's being caught up to heaven at the beginning of chapter 4. In chapters 2 and 3 he is, as we are now, among the saints upon earth, where he hears the Lord speaking to him. From chapter 4 to the end, he is in heaven where the saints will be, and he is seeing the events unrolling from that situation. According to this interpretation, the rapture of the saints is represented as a first approximation by the apostle John's being caught up and entering into heaven in the beginning of chapter 4, and then the manifest, all-glorious appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ to reign over all the earth is described in chapter 19. He appears with a name on His vesture and on His thigh, "King of kings and Lord of lords," on the white horse of victory, with the armies of heaven in His train, and all His foes shall be brought to

nothing when, with His saints, He reigns upon the earth with Satan bound for a thousand years. Thus all the events represented by the events of the vision between chapters 4 and 19 symbolise, primarily, events to take place between the two parts of the second coming.

I felt it necessary, in face of the appeals of our Lord Jesus Christ in this chapter, to try to have a clear view of what the rest of scripture tells us about the second coming of Christ, and exactly how it fits in to the book of the Revelation. With this I come to verse 16 where the Lord Jesus Christ addresses us personally. Many voices have been heard in this book—the voice of the prophet recording what he saw, the blast of mighty trumpets, the roar of many waters, and great multitudes. (We all know what a staggeringly impressive thing it is to hear a murmur rising from a huge crowd of people). All these sounds have been before us, and then a stillness and a silence descends upon us and we hear the voice which says, "I Jesus." All kinds of symbols have been used, the Son of Man, the Ancient of Days, the Lamb, the Man-child, but in the end all symbols are dropped, and the voice which addresses us says, "I, Jesus."

The story opens in Matthew, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Over the cross, in letters which embrace the whole wide world, "This is Jesus." When He arose and ascended into heaven, He did so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. The voice that here speaks begins, "I, Jesus." Oh that we may receive into our hearts, the power and the love of all that the Lord desires to say to us and to receive from us when He ends by saying, "I, Jesus." Can you be careless about this book, can you

think it not worth reading because it is difficult, when the Lord Jesus ends the whole book of scripture by saying, "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches" ?

"I am the root and the offspring of David." One other passage puts together the two concepts of this verse, although the symbols used are different. Psalm 110, "Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." The Lord gave to the unbelieving Jews this riddle, "If David called Him Lord, (that is, the Messiah which was to come) how is He then His Son ?" The answer is He was both. He was David's Lord, in His Diety, and He was David's son in His manhood, and so the truth of the deity of Christ and the manhood of Christ appear clearly in this final address. One of the loveliest passages in the story of David is in 11 Samuel 7 when we read that after the ark had been brought back, when David received the promises of the Lord that a king would always sit upon His throne, he sat down in the presence of Jehovah and he blessed and magnified His name for the mercy and grace that had deigned to give such a promise. I think that is David at his best, sitting there enjoying the presence of the Lord and magnifying and blessing Him. Jesus is the root and the offspring of David, and He is Himself the real fulfilment of that promise given in 11 Samuel 7.

"I am the Bright and Morning Star." In the last chapter of the Old Testament, Malachi 4, the prophecy occurs, "The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings." The cult of sun-tan is a kind of over-recognition of the fact that the sun has healing in its wings, in its rays. The Sun of Righteousness with healing in its rays refers to the

magnificence of His coming on the clouds of heaven, but the contrast between two parts of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is nowhere better presented, than in this concept of the Sun of Righteousness arising, and immediately before it, the morning star. 11 Peter 1:19 might perhaps be translated, "The word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed in your hearts as unto a light shining in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star arise." The harbinger, the promise, the messenger, the beginning of the dawn, is presented by the morning star. It is as the One who shall descend from heaven and call His own to be with Himself, the bright and morning star, that the Lord Jesus Christ addresses us here.

When we are at one with the power and activity of the Spirit of God, absolutely and unhinderedly, it is the Spirit and the Bride, or perhaps we should understand the Spirit in the Bride, that says to the Lord Jesus, "Come." And the same power that makes the Bride respond to Christ and say come, makes the saints turn to the world and say, "Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." We may talk all kinds of marvels about the fulness of the Spirit, we may seek fantastic experiences because others claim them, but this is the evidence of the fulness of the Spirit, that in forgetfulness of self and our experiences our hearts respond to Christ and say to Him, "Come." Then we will turn to the world and say, "Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." Finally, the Lord Jesus, after summarizing again the words of this prophecy, repeats for the third time, "Surely I come quickly," and He looks for our response "Even so come Lord Jesus." "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

3. KEY FEATURES (continued)

“The word of God is. . . a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4 : 12)

“Scripture is given. . . that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3 : 16, 17)

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”
(Psalm 119 : 105)

Belief and Practice

AN attempt to outline key features of scripture would certainly be incomplete if it failed to point out that it has much to say about our **conduct**. There is direction here, well spread throughout the whole book, regarding right thoughts and actions in a whole range of situations. Many of these situations are familiar ones in the normal circumstances of life today. By its own claim, part of the profit to be gained from scripture lies in the “training in righteousness” which it provides. Other good effects upon the reader are that it reproves and corrects him. (2 Timothy 3 : 16 R.S.V.). To read it and remain complacent is to sidestep its proper effect upon us. We must by all means seek to avoid an insensitive and superficial approach to **these** aspects of its teaching.

Doctrinal instruction is of course also to be found throughout the bible. 2 Timothy 3 : 16 (already quoted) includes this among the valuable features of its message. It may be well to point out that the whole biblical teaching needs to be taken together, due weight being given to all the helpful objectives mentioned in this verse. In particular it is unwise to separate the **informative** and the **hortative** parts of the teaching, emphasizing one and understressing the other. For instance, to take the line that behaviour is all-important, apart from what we believe, is to ignore our strengthlessness and dependence

upon the grace of God for any life or movement that would please Him. To adopt the false principle of justification by works would be an extreme form of such an emphasis. This, as we know, is an impossible basis on which to stand before God. Milder forms of the same wrong emphasis are possible, however. An over-absorption with activistic and devotional aspects of Christian living can be an ill-balanced reaction to the bible, particularly if it is accompanied by an avoidance of the great doctrinal instruction which God has graciously granted. Doctrinal teaching, properly received, can be most moving and stimulating. It is customary in the bible to use it as the spur and the incentive towards the appropriate responses in our lives. Much may be lost if it is neglected.

To be well-versed in the information content of the bible and yet to have little concern about the practical out-working of our faith would, however, be a really serious misreading of the scriptures. “Faith without works is dead.” So James, in his forcible style, challenges us with this issue (2 : 26). Nor is he alone in this ; almost every other New Testament letter agrees, stressing the expected effects of the expository teaching upon those who read. In a word, they speak about our **responsibility** to live as Christians should, while also putting us in touch with the springs of **power** for such living.

Consider, for instance, the following sample verses which highlight the thought of Christian duty. "What manner of persons **ought** ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (2 Peter 3:11) The appeal is based on what they know: knowledge and consequent living ought to correspond. A similar argument appears in the following quotations. "Beloved, if God so loved us we **ought** also to love one another" (1 John 4:11). "I forgave thee all that debt. . . **shouldest** thou not also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant?" (Matthew 18:32, 33) "These things write I unto thee. . . that thou mayest know how thou **oughtest** to behave thyself in the house of God"; for indeed the secret spring of a godly life is a profound one, as the writer of this last-quoted verse in effect goes on to say (1 Timothy 3:14-16). Verses such as these could be multiplied extensively.

Christian responses are, of course, more than the fulfilment of duty. A section in the letter to the Romans (chapters 6-8) picks out and explains what is the controlling principle in the genuine Christian life. "We are not under law but **under grace**" says the writer. He then proceeds to point out that this new mastery of our lives is a wholesome and welcome one, which certainly does not lead to a lowering of standards. On the contrary, it can supply the energy for a life really pleasing to God. The Galatian epistle is also concerned with this theme. The apostle Paul no longer lived a life directed towards law-keeping as such. A new principle dominated him. "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the

faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (2:19,20). Christ, not the law, ruled his life.

With these passages in mind, the extensive sections of the Old Testament surrounding the giving of the law will need to be read with discernment. Certainly they must not be treated as irrelevant. The commandments, for instance, are clearly not arbitrary rules which might have been different. This is part of the revelation of God. His rightful authority over man is plainly asserted; a clear specification is given of right and wrong as He sees it in the lives of His creatures. Here too is the line which is really the best for man to follow, laid down by a God Who is good, showing His care for him thus. Man's weakness and inability to fulfil it was the only unfortunate side to the story of the law of Moses. But the sense of the God Who is behind the law, holy and just, yet also good and full of loving-kindness, is much needed still in our day. That there are absolute moral standards and that there is One Who sees and measures His creatures in this way, needs to be continually in mind. Flexibility and laxity on moral matters is common today: it is not unknown in Christian circles. God is not less severe today, in His assessment of evil ways and attitudes, than when the law was given.

It is of interest to note, however, the remarkably different passage which follows immediately after the chapter (Exodus 20) which lists the ten commandments. The Hebrew servant envisaged in verses 1-6 of the next chapter shows a spirit of service of a different quality from what was customary under the law. Unmotivated adherence to the law of Moses often produced a sense of inescapable bondage. But here we read of one who, having fulfilled his contract

of service, stayed on willingly and permanently, out of love for his master and his family. It is surely not by accident that these two chapters are placed in sequence. The sense of slavery in which a person under the law finds himself is very real, and the unhappiness which results is greater the more earnest the person is. Romans 7 describes this experience. But the experience which is properly Christian is different. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8: 14-16). The true response of the Christian believer is willing and free, in accordance with the status and relationship into which he has been placed. Divine love, received in the first place, and continually appreciated, is reflected in his reactions and activities. Jointly, and in a way not easy to distinguish the Holy Spirit and the human spirit of the believer concur in responding to God. Along this line lies the possibility of fulfilling in our lives what is pleasing to God. Christians have, indeed, a higher motivation than duty. It would not be expected, therefore, that they would fulfil less than duty would require. This plain lesson is perhaps easy to avoid, since it is one of the more disquieting ones to face.

Christian Thoughts and Actions

We attempt now briefly to classify some of the kinds of responses indicated in the bible. From the foregoing discussion it should be clear that **faith** is all-important in the true Christian response. Such a faith is,

however, more than assent to a body of doctrine, or to proof-texts, or other formulae. It involves that real trust and dependence which leans directly upon Christ Himself; and which so responds to Him that the consequences of that faith are patent in a person's life. There are important moral aspects in a right response to the person of Christ. The standards of **Christian morality** are the highest of standards; self-effort is not, however, the means of meeting them. The constant line of argument put to New Testament hearers is that they should be what they now are. There is hope of proper Christian living, and reason for urging it, only because of what God has already done for believers in Christ. Starting from a status given, and a life received, behaviour in accordance with it can be anticipated and pressed.

The many facets of Christian **character**, and the factors which encourage its growth, find a place in the biblical teaching. That character has both passive and active elements. The Christ-like spirit shines out under adversity, or in other conditions which require endurance and constancy. It continues on its course in a quiet, non-anxious, confident, and inwardly-joyful way. It is alert and awake to all that is positively good and pleasing to God; being concerned and co-operative along these lines. It is not self-interested and self-assertive, nor is it easily provoked. It does not return evil for evil, but loves those that are antagonistic or unconcerned. It has a gracious approach to all. It thinks and acts on constructive and profitable lines. Such characteristics are not gained in a day; they should, however, be developing, indeed they should be under cultivation, in our lives. This is part of the fruit of the

Spirit, a consequence of our growth in the divine nature ; which, nevertheless, the New Testament unhesitatingly urges upon us as the appropriate outcome of the grace which has reached down to affect our lives.

A Christian's **habits of thought** are also closely connected with his **faith**. Faith sees the invisible things and has better-directed motives and higher objectives in life than would be possible without this insight. Springing from "the fear of the Lord" true wisdom is found ; and, in the exercise of this, discernment and balanced judgment are possible in facing all kinds of situations, personal and general, commonly met in human life. The much-neglected book of Proverbs is important in this context. It puts first the moral choices which confront men and in which wisdom and folly demonstrate themselves in the courses they take. But it also has much to say about finer ways in which the spirit of wisdom can be manifested by one who fears the Lord. A few only of the features which it approves are prudent actions, wakeful and business-like ways, right deployment of time, peaceable and purposeful living, friendliness, and straightforward integrity in all our dealings. Practical demonstrations of such attitudes, worked out in the full Christian context, are to be found in the New Testament. The way in which such qualities appear, spontaneously and almost intuitively, in the life of the converted Saul of Tarsus, for instance, is an interesting study in itself. The Christian's life should be coloured, even in its finer details, by the insight into the deeper things which he possesses.

The various biblical forms of **Christian activity**, some of which are the norm for all Christians, while

others are of a particular kind for which not all would be fitted, are almost too numerous to list. Co-operative activities amongst Christians are important, indeed they are almost essential to normal Christian progress. Individual Christian service also has its place ; and certainly no amount of joint activity can be a substitute for personal Christian devotion. To be inwardly true before God, and responsive to Him, is of first importance. A private life of communion with the Lord, including private prayer and the seeking of light and guidance from His word, private concern for His interests and the needs of others, expressed in real personal initiative for Him, are among the highly-important attitudes to foster. The joint activities too, of prayer, fellowship, and mutual support in Christian things, mutual response and thanksgiving to God, finding its highest expression in worship, are part of the life in which a Christian ought to be happily involved and to which his full effort should be given. A pattern of local assembly life is fairly strongly indicated in scripture ; this is not wisely ignored by any individual believer. Also, there should clearly be a strong outward-looking side to our practical Christianity. It would be a strange version of Christianity which devoted itself entirely to internal concerns within the church of God. The growth of that church involves additions to it as well as the upbuilding of its members. The Lord is still at work in this way, and often uses His people to this end. The thought that evangelism comprises only a small part of the Christian work and the Christian concern would be difficult to support from the New Testament. There are suitable approaches too, involving practical concern for the

needs and well-being of people, which agree with and support a proper concern for their blessing.

Special avenues of Christian service, and other special contributions to the profit of the Christian community which individuals can make, are numerous and very diverse. Scripture supports the view that all Christians have a place to fill, under the Lord. Whether their function is a prominent one, or of a less open kind, it is important to recognize it and to fulfil it. Some individuals have abilities as spokesmen in Christian things, teaching and instructing others, expounding scripture, passing on the message of God in a helpful way. These things can happen informally as well as on more public occasions. Others fulfil a more pastoral ministry, having a sense of care for the flock of God; some are able to shoulder the responsibilities of oversight within a local group of Christian people. Stewardship in practical matters connected with gatherings of Christians requires another type of ability. There are special forms of evangelism for which some are particularly suited. To name these activities is to pick out some of the obvious ones, but care is needed that the wrong im-

pression is not gained in selecting these. Less prominent though equally real ways of fostering the interests of Christ are legion, and all of them quite necessary. In these matters we are not to overestimate what we can do, but to give sober and fair thought to the contribution which would be peculiarly ours to make (Romans 12 : 3). God has certainly equipped all His people so that they may function in some distinctive way for Him. One lesson of the parable of the talents may be that the apparently rather small gift is especially susceptible to neglect (Matthew 25 : 18).

Even a brief list of ways in which we are encouraged to respond to God has proved to be a formidable one. We may well share the feeling of inadequacy which caused Paul to ask "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2 : 16 ; 3 : 5). The answer is still as he gave it. Only the grace of God, in Christ, can produce these effects in our lives. That such responses might properly be expected, and that our Lord is worthy of them, cannot be in doubt. The bible, among its other lines of teaching, does certainly exhort us and instruct us in detail about such matters.

THE CHURCH OF GOD 3

HERBERT HIRST

WE have seen that the formation of the church was announced **beforehand** by the Lord's words to Peter recorded in Matthew 16 : 13-18 and that the actual work of construction could not commence until redemption had been accomplished by the death and resurrection of Christ.

The **existence** of the church on earth was revealed for the first time in the Lord's words from heaven to

Saul of Tarsus, that inveterate arch-enemy of Christ. While engaged "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," he was caused to hear a voice saying "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?". Blinded by a light from heaven, fallen to the ground in fear and trembling, he replied "Who art thou, Lord?" (Acts 9). Nothing could have been more unexpected, more searching than that question

of six words addressed to the heartless persecutor by One whose supreme authority he was constrained to acknowledge. The repetition of his name made him realise that One in heavenly light and glory knew all that he was doing ; that he himself did NOT know what he was doing. He realised, too, that he had no answer to give to that searching question, for he was convicted of the deepest ignorance of God's thoughts and movements and of sinful hatred of God, of Jesus and His treasured saints. Not only was he convicted, but in boundless grace he was converted. Saul at once surrendered, saying "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?" In that light from heaven he saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and that light blinded him for ever to the glory of this world. Henceforth the Lord's will was paramount.

The impression made upon him by this meeting with the Lord Jesus did not diminish as time rolled by, but rather grew. The "light from heaven" which met him on the road to Damascus had become "from heaven a GREAT light" when he later made his defence before the Jewish people (Acts 22 : 6) ; and later still, when before King Agrippa, it had become "a light from heaven ABOVE THE BRIGHTNESS OF THE SUN" (Acts 26 : 13).

In that light Saul now perceived that those he was persecuting to the death were of particular value to the heart of the Lord. That searching question of six words contained a revelation of immense importance : the Lord's persecuted ones were **part of Himself**, and in persecuting them Saul was persecuting **Him**. Thus was disclosed the fact that there was a **living body** upon earth which belonged to a **living HEAD** in heaven. And here is a truth of

vital importance to every Christian, transcending all questions of denominational allegiance ; for the disciple of Christ has been set by God Himself in the body in which divine purpose intended him to be, and that is in the body of Christ. The choice is not his, it is God's.

It may be suggested that this is reading too much into the Lord's words to Saul, and that the idea of a living body on earth vitally attached to, and deriving all from, a glorious Head in heaven is rather fanciful, imaginary and unreal. Attention is, therefore, invited to what follows.

Acts chapter 9 describes how the Lord sent a message to His disciples to inform them that Saul was a chosen vessel to carry the truth concerning Him ("My name") to both Gentiles and Jews, as well as Kings, and that he would suffer much for his witness. This faithful witness for Christ tells us in chapter 1 of his letter to the Colossians that he had been made a "minister" of "the gospel" (verse 23) and a "minister" of "the church" (verses 24/25), the church being identified as the "body" of Christ. Verse 18 condenses the truth into few words—"He (Christ) is **the head of the body, the church.**" Some have summed up the truth in Colossians as the Christian **on earth** saying "I have a **Head in heaven**"; and the complementary truth in Ephesians as Christ **in heaven** saying "I have a **body on earth.**" The fact that the ministry of the gospel and the ministry of the church were entrusted by the Lord Jesus to the same servant indicates plainly enough that the two ministries are inseparably united in the Lord's eyes and that we should hold the truths of the gospel and the church as indispensable to one another.

The vast scope of "the mystery of His will" which God "hath pur-

posed in Himself " before the foundation of the world, revealed in chapter 1 of Ephesians, shows that " **the church** " is here viewed as embracing every member of the body of Christ from the day of its formation (the day of Pentecost) to the day of its completion when the last member is added prior to the coming of Christ for them. It is not " **a church** " which is the subject here, but " **the church** " (v. 22). In chapter 2 (11-17) the Spirit of God through Paul reminds these Gentile believers in Christ that they were once **without** Christ, **outside** of Israel, **without** the latter's covenants of promise from God, **without** hope and **without** God. But all this had been changed and the death of Christ had accomplished the change. That death had broken down the high wall of separation between Jew and Gentile and had taken away the hostility between them—the "law of commandments in ordinances." In Christ, the Jewish status had gone; the Gentile status, too, had gone. Indeed, both men had gone from before the face of God, condemned by the judgement of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one **new man**, with none of the awful features characterising Jew and Gentile, had been brought into being in Christ, so making **peace** between the two and reconciling **both** to God in **one body**, the body of Christ. Glorious accomplishment! Excellency of wisdom divine! This body, we must not forget, is described in chapter 1 verse 23 as being "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." Does this not mean that as Christ is the full revelation of God, **the church** (the whole church, not a part of it) is the vessel into which this treasured revelation is infused—just as a man's qualities are displayed in his body? Therefore in chapter 3:8-11 the ministry of these "unsearchable

riches of Christ " by Paul the apostle is said to be designed to produce in "the church" or "assembly" of God even NOW—a display of the variegated wisdom of God for the instruction of principalities and powers in heavenly places, i.e. of every intelligence on high. For this reason, the church has been termed "the lesson-book of angels." Is it necessary to affirm again that this "eternal purpose" was "not made known unto the sons of men" in former ages "as it is **now** revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (vv. 5-6)? It awaited the accomplishment of redemption by the death of Christ and the formation of Christ's own church or assembly, His very own body, as the vessel to contain this tremendous treasure—the incomparable worth of Christ.

The unique place occupied in the purpose of God by the Church of God may be seen if the following considerations are kept in mind. God's dealings from early in the history of the world were restricted largely to the descendents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel). In spite of all His favour and provision *for this people, they proved themselves disobedient and rebellious, so that He had to send them messages through His prophets like the following: "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel. . . You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together except they be agreed?"* (Amos 3:1-3). With the utmost patience, God sent His servants the prophets, but these were rejected and stoned. Finally, He sent to them His Son, the heir of all things, but Him they crucified and slew. This brought upon them "wrath to the uttermost" (I Thessalonians 2:14-

16). Jerusalem was destroyed, with its temple ; the people were put to the sword or carried away captive ; and from that time, as the Lord Jesus foretold in that remarkable parable spoken to the chief priests and elders of the nation (Matthew 21 : 33-43), the kingdom of God was taken from them and given to "a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Thus, for the time being, God set this favoured nation of Israel aside ; although all His promises to their fathers will in due time be fulfilled completely.

The Gentile nations, too had meanwhile proved themselves to be no different from the nation of Israel. The "times of the Gentiles" began when sovereign power was taken from Israel and put into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon ; but in him and the rulers of the successive empires following that of Babylon, pride and avarice and lust of power evidenced their moral ruin and even the desire to usurp the place of God.

If then, Israel has failed in her responsibility to God and has been temporarily set aside ; if the Gentile powers have been tested and failed in like manner, what has God wrought for nearly two thousand years since the rejection of Christ by both Jew and Gentile ? He has, in the most precious sovereign grace of His heart, been calling sinners of both Jews and Gentiles to Himself by the Gospel, attracting them to Christ and uniting them by the work of the Holy Spirit within them into the House of God in a collective way

and into one body, the body of Christ, in a corporate manner, as it is written "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into ONE BODY whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond (slaves) or free" (I Corinthians 12 : 13). This verse tells us that all such have been made to "drink into one Spirit," and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the divine means of uniting all true Christians with living bonds to the Lord Jesus Christ their living Head in heaven. If only we could realise the wealth of spiritual resources at our disposal, turning away from all that we are in our sinful fallen nature and, strong in faith, drawing constantly with the Holy Spirit's gracious help upon the illimitable resources in our living Head, what glory to God would result in our lives ; and as regards the three large present divisions of the human race we should "give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God" (I Corinthians 10 : 32).

Let us take to our hearts the truth as it really is from the divine side— "We, being many, ARE ONE BODY in Christ" (Romans 12 : 5). "There is ONE BODY, and ONE SPIRIT" (Ephesians 4 : 4) and let us think less of the very generally accepted idea that there are "many bodies" of Christians.

The church of Christ is not an organization but a living organism ; and this was far from being the case with any of the people of God in pre-Christian times.

Reflections on Nehemiah

MOST of us are familiar in one way or another with city walls. Perhaps the best known are those built in the XIVth century at York and to a large extent remaining until this day in remarkably good condition. To walk round these walls or to gaze upon them from the streets below is an experience calling forth varied emotions, voices from the past reminding us that our sojourn here is relatively brief in relation to history. How much more so, may we well believe, would this be the case of that Old Testament saint Nehemiah, a godly Jew of the captivity, rich in this world's goods and faithfully serving an alien king and queen who clearly had a great regard for him. His faith, humility, courage and devotion to God and his native land shine right from the beginning of the narrative but the limited portion of the book of Nehemiah which is the subject of these meditations will be found in chapter 2:11-16 and chapter 3 generally, but with special reference to verses 1 and 15.

Voluntarily undertaking with the providential backing of Artaxerxes the rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and the gates thereof burnt with fire, he faced opposition of all kinds from within and without. Although supported by royal troops and letters of administration (received because of his complete faith in God and consequent big thinking and asking) Nehemiah did not underestimate the task which lay before him and, like the king of whom the Lord spoke as going to war, he too considered the cost. This is seen in the three days waiting and night journey or journeys round the ruined walls so

graphically described in verses 11-16 of chapter 2.

Let us then in spirit go with Nehemiah on this night scouting patrol. Something of the manifest desolation is clearly pictured, reminiscent of more recent days when we have seen our cities blasted and burnt and reeking with the stench of burning rubble. Sorrow, heartbreak and almost despair are meet companions in such conditions, as many older Christians will recollect from experiences in the last war. What did Nehemiah find during that epic night journey? It is clear from his subsequent actions and the masterly manner in which the reconstruction of the walls was carried out, that from an engineering standpoint a very full assessment of both damage and available resources was made.

I believe there was much more to this survey than purely material or economic values. Scripture always has a purpose and in this case by concentrating our attention on but a few of the points of interest on the walls we find a clue to what that purpose was in Nehemiah's case.

The first gate he mentions is the **Gate of the Valley**, (2:13) fortified by King Uzziah in the VIIIth century BC about 300 years previously. We may reasonably conclude that as a godly Jew clearly intensely concerned in the welfare of the nation as a testimony for the true God, Nehemiah would be familiar with Old Testament scriptures. For him this gate would be a reminder of a great king who did a magnificent job of reconstruction yet failed in the end through pride. His downfall must have been a dreadful shock to the godly of his day. It was said of Uzziah that "When he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction," sad end to a fine life

story. Here surely was a warning to Nehemiah and it would seem that he learned the lessons well, for we get no hint of subsequent failure. Along with the warning there may too have been inspiration. Isaiah 6 tells how that in the year King Uzziah died Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up : this vision is directly linked with the Lord Jesus (John 12 : 41), and suggests that Isaiah, turning away from the failure of a popular idol and identifying himself with the contamination of the national sin, is given a transforming vision of a glorified Lord and with the vision an enabling for the tasks to be given him, so that cleansed and renewed he may go forward. So on the one hand there was for Nehemiah as for us today, warning against presumption and on the other hand encouragement and enabling to take up his tasks in the strength of the Lord.

The other gate mentioned in Nehemiah's circuit is the **Gate of the Fountain** (2 : 14). This fountain fed the Pool of Siloam, associated in Isaiah 7 : 3, 10-14 with the thought of asking God for a sign leading on to a declaration that God Himself would give a sign in the coming of **Emmanuel**. Here the clarion call is to have faith in God. For Nehemiah it was a future coming ; for us today it is faith in a Saviour who has been and accomplished the glorious work of redemption, but also a Saviour exalted and glorified and who is coming again. Here again, as with Nehemiah, all is intended to have a bearing on our present manner of life.

Nehemiah went by the brook, probably Cedron (2 : 15). What memories were here of King David of old going over in rejection, yet later to have his Kingdom established and play a part in the building of Jerusalem. Surely here was encouragement : Nehemiah, under the

good hand of his God, was playing his part in the great history of the people of God and setting the scene for the coming of the Son of Man.

He completes the circuit of the walls, once more coming back to the Gate of the Valley with its implied warning and encouragement. "Be strong and of a good courage" is a word for us today.

Thus far we have really been more concerned with what the walls meant to Nehemiah, but now we enter a broader field. This next phase is the actual commencement of the work and here divine guidance and insight are sweetly indicated inasmuch as the pivotal point is the **Sheep Gate** (3 : 1). This is true so far as the actual builders of the wall were concerned, being both the beginning and the ending (see last verse in the chapter). "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord."

Here also we approach the second part of these meditations from a different point of view. Instead of in the main looking back, we look to scenes future at Nehemiah's time, but nearly 2,000 years old to us. Nehemiah was building better than he knew and for all time he was to have a place in divine history as the one who was associated with making a reality the decree of Cyrus "to restore and to build Jerusalem" (Daniel 9 : 25). Here indeed was one of the incontestable and amazing prophetic pronouncements connected with the coming of the Messiah so literally fulfilled in the person of Jesus and His death.

As in gates in city walls to this very day, so in bible times, they were a matter of special interest. Much has been written about the gates of Jerusalem but let us go back to Nehemiah's account and while noting many gates are involved, take

a look at some of special interest in view of their later association with our Lord.

The **Sheep Gate** was the gate through which sheep for sacrificial slaughter were brought en route to the temple. This takes us back in thought well over 3,000 years to the Passover Lamb and God's promise "When I see the blood I will pass over you." Somehow when one thinks of Jesus as the Lamb of God foreordained before the foundation of the world but manifest in these last times for us, one often finds oneself thinking also of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. Calvary illuminates this precious truth and true Christian life springs from the light the cross shines upon our sins. Truly other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Perhaps also the Sheep Gate suggests the door. "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." At one end of the scale the High Priest and his brethren were associated with the building of the Sheep Gate and at the other end were the goldsmiths and merchants (verse 32). There does seem to be some hint here of the priesthood and deity of Christ. The blood of the sheep was spilled on the altar, and Christ "by his own blood entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Hebrews 9:12). Gold is closely associated in the tabernacle furnishings with articles which are definitely types of Christ, so it is fitting that we should find goldsmiths involved in the Sheep Gate.

Near the Sheep Gate was a pool, the Pool of Bethesda, which is spoken of in John's gospel as the scene of the healing of the impotent man. Here the Lord not only healed the man, but declared His own

equality with God the Father. Here too we find the gospel proclaimed with glorious certainty—"Shall not come into condemnation but is passed from death unto life." The Lord's warning to the impotent man "Sin no more lest a worse thing befall thee" is relevant today.

Passing on to 3:15 we come to the **Gate of the Fountain** and Pool of Siloam, the latter meaning Sent and speaking of Christ as the Sent One of God. Here for a moment we look backward in time to Isaiah 8:6 where the waters of Shiloh which flow softly are represented as being refused and to our mind comes the gentle grace of Christ and His rejection. Rather, however, we would associate these waters with the presence of our Lord when it was said "As Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth." The commanding words, "Go wash in the Pool of Siloam" (reminding us of the apostle's later words, "God. . . commandeth all men everywhere to repent") found an echoing response in the heart of the poor blind man and turned his feet to take the walk of faith to the Pool of Siloam and, deep though that pool was, he went and washed and received his sight. Does not this story encourage us as we see on the one hand Jesus despised, and in one sense unknown by the great ones of His day, being rejected by many, and yet we see the greatness of His Person progressively revealed to the once blind man. Today Satan is doing all in his power to take men's thoughts away from the true greatness and Godhead of the Lord Jesus, but to him who, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word," He will surely reveal Himself as the **Sent one of the Father.**

Nehemiah's wall is gone, but the

lessons written therein remain and the message of Daniel whose prophecies are closely linked with the wall are being and ultimately will be, fully brought to pass. History testifies to their truth but above and beyond all this, great and encourag-

ing though it is, we have the New Testament revelation of the personal return of the Lord Jesus for His saints. Help us, O Lord, to assimilate and hold Thy truths in right proportion and to walk worthy of Thy Name.

QUESTION

Question : (from Mr. A. J. Wigginton, Grimsby) How do you view the 144,000 in Revelation 14? They differ from chapter 7 and appear to be a special company?

Answer : These two companies of 144,000 are similar in the following respects : the number 144,000 ; probably both are of Israel ; both are marked for God. In chapter 7 they are introduced as part of a parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals, in chapter 14 as part of the story of the period when the beast and the false prophet are in power. I would pin-point two features to enable us to distinguish between them. These are, first, that in chapter 7 the company is of all Israel—twelve tribes, and second, the company of chapter 14 is assembled on Mount Zion and follow the Lamb.

It is most helpful to use Matthew 24 as a basic background of events after the Rapture of the saints and culminating with the coming of Christ to reign. That is to say, Matthew 24 covers the same period as Revelation 4 to 19 (in its primary bearing) with particular reference to Christ's disciples in Jerusalem. In Matthew 24 we can clearly distinguish the apostate mass of the Jews (represented by the mass of the

Jews who were rejecting Christ in Matthew's story) ; the remnant of Jewish disciples who believed in Jesus, without being members of the church ; and in verse 31, after the coming, the elect of Israel assembled from all the world by the great trumpet.

- For the sake of simplicity I suggest that the 144,000 of Revelation 7 are the same as the elect of all Israel from the whole world to be assembled **after** the coming. If they remain to be assembled they have evidently been preserved through the Tribulation extending to the whole world and the reason for this preservation is the sealing described.

The 144,000 of Revelation 14 are the remnant of Jews who believe in and follow Christ after the Rapture of the church saints. In the symbolic picture of Revelation 14 they are gathered to the Lamb in the associations of Mount Zion. This reference to Mount Zion is the feature most specially to be noted. Zion is an Old Testament name, and came to be applied to Jerusalem in its kingdom associations of beauty and glory. Like the disciples of Matthew 24, the 144,000 of Revelation 14 are closely associated with a preaching to cover the whole world (Matthew 24 : 14 and Revelation 14 : 6).

10. THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL.

IN the last three of the parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13 there exists a problem of interpretation arising from two parallelisms. These are respectively the parables of the Treasure hid in a field, and the parable of the one Pearl of Great price, and afterwards the close parallels between the parables of the Tares and that of the Dragnet, with which the chapter closes.

I do not pretend to certainty on these points, but have found so much light and help from the proposals of F. W. Grant, that I suggest that his interpretations be taken as the basis for the present study. This view will not carry universal assent, but will certainly merit the closest attention. On verses 44 to 46 his interpretation was that the Treasure is Israel, while the Pearl is the Church.

If it is kept in mind that this series of seven parables represents the first comprehensive view afforded by Scripture of the long inter-Advent period then any scribe wishing to be instructed into the Kingdom of heaven, and bearing in mind "the things old," would immediately enquire: Where does the main subject of our Sacred Scriptures, our holy, chosen, beloved nation of Israel stand in these mysteries? The answer is in verse 44, and, in summary, is threefold. Firstly, what was from the beginning J e h o v a h 's Treasure, is still so. Secondly, during all the period of these mysteries the Treasure is hidden in the world. Thirdly, a Man, (surely no other than He who has already been seen as the principal person in effective control of all, the Son of Man) is to pay the ransom price in His all, in order that the world, and with the world the Treasure, might be his. Time will be well spent in a study of each of these three.

illustrate that the relation which the Divine loving kindness from and at the beginning desired to maintain with His people was that Israel was His "peculiar treasure." This appears in Exodus 19 : 5 as God's intention in the origination of Israel's nationhood at the Exodus : and again in the deuteronomic review preparatory to their entry into Canaan. (Deuteronomy 14 : 2 and 26 : 18,19) "The Lord hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people. . . and to make thee high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour." The word 'peculiar' has a quite distinct meaning : they were to be a treasure for His own possession and for none other. No believing heart can mistake that the heart of Jehovah was deeply involved in these transactions, and the Old Testament language through to the end intensifies this Divine longing. Listen to Jeremiah 2 : 2 and sense the love and longing of God reaching back over the centuries and witnessing so certainly that His heart has not changed towards them. "Thus saith the Lord ; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness."

The second lesson we have suggested from the parable is that during the whole period of these mysteries the Treasure is hidden in the world. An aspect of the significance of this element in the parable is certainly that to promote the blessing of Israel in the sense of the fulfilment to them of Old Testament prophecy is no part of the activity of seeking the Kingdom during the present time. Perhaps we have to make the difficult effort to distinguish between Israel, the original whole nation to which the promises were made, and the small remnant

One quotation must suffice to

centred on the Jews who returned from the Exile with Ezra. The distinction is not easy to maintain consistently since, for instance James includes them all in the Salutation of his epistle. If, however, we make the distinction, the meaning of the parable is sufficiently clear. The ten tribes which formed the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam and his successors represented the mass of the nation. In B.C. 721 Samaria was taken by the Assyrian king, the inhabitants of the kingdom of Israel were deported, and the kingdom ceased to exist. From that day forward history knows nothing of them. In prophecy, however, they have a prominent place. They re-appear after the appearing of Christ, they are re-united with restored Judah, and with its ancient unity recreated under "great David's greater son," Israel is seen to be *Jehovah's* treasure. Where has this people existed through these centuries of oblivion? The parable answers the question. "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field." *Jehovah's* treasure has been hidden in the world. Its whereabouts is quite unknown, and by many its existence unsuspected.

Bible prophecy makes reference to the future restoration of the ten tribes in many places. After the future appearing of the "Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, (Matthew 24 : 30, 31) he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Who are these elect, to be assembled after the coming of Christ as King? Scripture answers the question quite specially. Isaiah 11 describes the establishment of the Kingdom in the Branch out of Jesse, and continues, "And it shall come to pass in that

day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." (vv. 10-13) Hosea also deals largely with Ephraim, and includes a promise, "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: afterwards shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king: and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." (Hosea 3 : 4, 5) The elect to be gathered after the appearing of Christ are therefore unquestionably the ten tribes of Israel, to be joined to Judah, and the Israel which was *Jehovah's* treasure will by these events be recreated. The end of the story—"so bright with love, so dark with woe"—of Israel as the treasure for the heart of the Lord, shines like the rainbow after rain. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. . . For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee." (Isaiah 54 : 7-10) "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is

mighty; . . . he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." (Zephaniah 3 : 17)

The third element in our summary of the parable of the Treasure is that the Son of Man has paid the ransom price in His all, so that the world, and with it the Treasure, might be His own. The reference to the place called Calvary, and to the precious blood of Christ, is unmistakable. As the Person in effective control of the whole enterprise of the Kingdom, a number of actions are attributed to the Son of Man in these parables. From the beginning He sows the seed, and at the end He sends forth His angels. But no other action can rightly be set alongside this action, in which without any limit He pours out His all in sorrow and shame, in anguish and death, to secure the world for the sake of the Treasure. That He has indeed bought the world is evidenced by the fact that even those who most horribly deny His claims, (false teachers who bring in damnable heresies), are nevertheless bought by Him. (2 Peter 2 : 1)

And now we come to the parable of the Pearl. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." The first point of interest is that the Lord is presented, not as a diver, but as a merchant. He saw it, and His heart was set upon it, not in the darkness and slime of the ocean depths, but in the beauty with which all the daring and skill of the diver and the craftsman could endow it. It satisfied His heart, not in its original night of hideous gloom, but displayed with the loveliness which He Himself would impart to it. "A

glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but. . . holy and without blemish," was the object before Him when He loved it and gave Himself for it.

It is most worthy of note that contained in the word 'gave' is the same abandon *without limit* which is represented by the phrase 'sold all that he had.' The word **paradidomi** means more than simply 'give,' as the various English words used to translate it show very strikingly. It is translated 'betray' to describe the action of Judas Iscariot, for the action of the chief priests when they 'delivered' Him to Pontius Pilate, and when Pilate 'delivered' Jesus to be crucified. Exactly the same word occurs in Romans 8 : 32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," and in Galatians 2 : 20, "the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Finally, it occurs in the passage which gave rise to this train of thought, Ephesians 5 : 25, "Christ loved the church, and delivered himself up for it." It clearly bears the meaning of delivering over without any withholding to the extremity of suffering and death.

In the words of the parable, emphasis seems to be placed on there being **one** pearl of such great price : its unity is of importance. Although the stress is on the fact that among all the pearls seen by the merchant man, only this one possessed the qualities he was seeking for, this accentuation of its unity naturally draws attention to the unity which is an essential mark of the church. The "one flock" of John 10 : 16, ("there shall be one flock and one shepherd,") and the unity of the disciples in John 17 : 11, 21, 22, foreshadows the unity achieved in the church by the union of Jews and Gentiles who believe. The church is repeatedly

stated to be essentially one, as the body of Christ.

In bringing to a close this consideration of the fifth and sixth of the seven parables of the chapter, we ought to recall that they are the first part of the three parables uttered in private to the disciples inside the house, in contrast with the first four spoken by the seaside to the great crowds gathered to hear Jesus. The first four present the outward form which the mysteries of the Kingdom present to the world, and answer questions which sooner or later arise in the mind of every active disciple. Is it to be expected that so many hearers will fall away, and why do they do so? Why is so much error abroad? Why are the big battalions always on the side of the false?

The last three parables reveal the secret of what there is in the Kingdom enterprise for the heart of the Lord, and since during the period covered by this chapter the situation regarding the Treasure is static, this is especially true of the parable of the Pearl. Here is the germ of what expands in the epistles to occupy a dominant position. At the first explicit mention of the church, with one tremendous flash of final and

victorious revelation, the active powers of evil so prominent in Matthew thirteen and in experience, are relegated to defeat. "I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18) The attitude of the disciple seeking first the Kingdom of God will surely mirror that of the pious Israelite. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee." (Psalm 122:6) "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. . . if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." (Psalm 137).

Finally, we have in these two parables in embryo the only references in the chapter to the Cross and its meaning. This central theme of all Scripture expands and deepens on page after page of the epistles, until it rings out in the song of the worshippers above. "Thou art worthy. . . : for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. . . to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE ————— COLIN CURRY

4. PROBLEMS.

"Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Luke 8:18)

"Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness"
(Luke 11:35)

"Not. . . handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2)

IN the process of hearing the word of God, it is the word of God itself which is the active agent. The hearers are in many senses the passive recipients of its message;

though, as it is heard, a response is expected. The word of God has the power to disturb the conscience, to quicken into life, to instruct, to command with authority. Our part

is to receive it and bear fruit, to believe and live, to hear and to do.

This being so, our clear aim must be to allow it its direct and unimpeded effect upon us. This involves approaching it with simplicity, aiming to grasp its immediate meaning, accepting without modification what the text actually says, if necessary endeavouring to elucidate this in places where it is not perfectly clear. It also involves a conscious guarding against our own set views, which we find difficult to waive, and of which we are so easily unaware. It is not difficult to distort Scripture if we approach it with presuppositions (our own or those of others, too readily accepted). Scripture has its examples of false exponents, who built up upon it their own fanciful edifice, warping its plain meaning by adding their own thoughts and constructions. The effect was to vitiate it as a real power in their lives, to mislead others instead of helping them, and to incur scathing comments from our Lord. In minor as well as major ways tradition and prejudice can still "make the word of God of none effect" (Mark 7:13). If our own thoughts and preferences are read **into** the Scriptures, we must inevitably read them **out** again at the end.

To get at the first and direct meaning of the text (without processing the message it contains in the act of reading it) would seem, therefore, to be an essential first step. In places, problems of understanding what the text actually says still remain, but these are rather few in relation to the whole. We shall need also to bear in mind that words which are simple and obvious in meaning may also be profound. This is often so with the words of Scripture. Many passages, though not difficult to grasp, are also ex-

haustless in their real content. This is true of short phrases, and even of single words. For example, very much is involved in the choice and use of prepositions in, say, the great discourses of our Lord in the fourth gospel. Every word, throughout the whole bible, is right in its place; and often the full meaning must be beyond our penetration. But, though this is so, we return to stress the fact that over wide ranges of the bible the meaning is **on the surface** and problems of understanding are few. Often the difficulty is not one of understanding at all, but it lies in inability to accept what is clearly said. The simple and straightforward teaching which is characteristic of Scripture can be beclouded when there is preference for what is less direct or less searching, or for what is more complex, or considered to be more advanced and "spiritual." There is need to beware of the loaded viewpoint, and to avoid leaning thoughtlessly towards any preferred school of interpretation.

We stress this point partly because critical persons often say that Scripture is capable of widely different meanings depending on the view of the reader. This is not so if the words are taken at face value. For instance, whoever the reader and whatever his viewpoint, it is impossible to doubt that the bible teaches truths such as the resurrection of the body, justification by faith, the deity of our Lord, and the importance of His death. As a further example, the aims of the New Testament letters are as clear as daylight to any serious and impartial reader. What they say (except perhaps in minor details) is not in doubt, apart altogether from whether it is accepted or not. In a very general and real sense the cream of the biblical teaching is on the surface: the simple can find a

clear message while the erudite and high-minded can easily lose their way. God speaks, to heart and conscience, not in ways which require our penetration or expertise to discover : the qualifications, rather, are simple receptiveness and faith. On such straightforward (yet more than natural) lines a truly spiritual reception of the word of God takes place. Thus the enlightenment which is of the Holy Spirit is gained.

The first and most obvious meaning is highly important then, and there is little hope of profiting from a passage if this is not grasped. But there may be more to find there as well. It must be recognized that the bible itself allows the possibility of multiple understandings of some of its parts ; though it is not suggested (in the bible) that every passage is capable of this. In some places in the New Testament the immediate meaning of the text is that some Old Testament passage or incident must be understood to have a secondary meaning. Free use of Old Testament citations, often putting a new construction on them, is frequently done under the Holy Spirit by New Testament writers. To quote a very direct case, the story of Isaac and Ishmael is referred to as an allegory in Galatians 4 : 24 ; the contrasting principles of liberty and bondage in the Christian's life are seen to be illustrated by that story. A good example of a chapter which has a great deal latent in it is Genesis 1. Apart from matters of detail, its direct message (which itself is highly profound) is that God is the author and originator of all things, that purpose and order are stamped upon all that has developed under His hands, that man was the object and end-point of all that He prepared. Reading Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 alongside this chapter, however, we see that another Man

was really in sight behind all this. God's great intention ultimately to exalt Christ, setting **Him** over the works of His hands, to hold the rule and dominion for Him, is at least not far away from the first chapter of the whole inspired book. To add to this, another New Testament verse speaks of Adam as "the figure of him that was to come" (Romans 5 : 14). Ought then this first chapter to be considered as a kind of view of history too ? We may go even further, in the light of other New Testament verses. For instance, 2 Corinthians 4 : 6 suggests something different. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts". The parallel between physical creation and the new creation, within the believer, seems intended to be drawn to some extent. How far can one go in these directions, and where should the line be drawn ?

It is plain that, in these matters, we must aim to steer a course which lies well between two opposite possibilities. One possibility is that we may miss what is intended as a secondary meaning of a passage ; our approach may be **overcautious**. The other possibility, equally to be avoided, is that we may imagine what is **not** intended. This would be the **overfanciful** interpretation. We **must** avoid confusing imagination with spirituality. Referring again to the secondary meaning underlying Genesis 1, we should surely not wish in the interests of caution to avoid the light which the New Testament throws back upon the passage. Nor, surely, ought we to try to go far beyond what the relevant New Testament passages indicate. For instance, to build up from the whole chapter a **detailed** picture of a soul's progress towards the light based on 2 Corinthians 4 : 6 (which refers

only to one verse in Genesis 1), would seem to be excessive. To do this would be doubly questionable in a case like this, where even the primary meaning of many of the details is too profound to be decisive about.

In approaching the bible in any sense, and especially in considering problems of the kind now under discussion, it is suggested that the following points should be continually in mind. First, understanding is by the Spirit, and the attitudes of humility, dependence, and open-mindedness to His instruction, are always necessary. He is the real interpreter of Scripture, and any understanding we may receive is His gift. Secondly, patient study and meditation is in no sense less necessary because of His indwelling presence. Such study can only be effective because of His enlightening; but our time, our thought and interest, our Scripture-directed judgments will be required. Thirdly, we shall be wise to adopt and use whatever aids are available, having a balanced judgment as to their value and its limits. Scripture itself is the first and greatest aid to the understanding of Scripture. One passage throws light upon another; everything must be read in the light of the whole. The consistency of God's word can be safely assumed and used. Guidance will be found in the way Scripture interprets itself; false trails are also pointed out there for our warning. Fourthly, it should be no surprise to find figurative use of language in places in Scripture. Such use of language is normal and frequent even in ordinary contexts, and would be expected in the bible too. Indeed, recalling that truth of an eternal and divine character is here brought down to us, for our assimilation, the use of metaphor, picture, and parable is the more to be expected in the way it is

presented. Though much of its teaching is straightforward, the bible **does** also use symbols, types, and similes. We may be sure that where this is done it is necessary, and is really an aid to understanding. Finally, it should be recognized that we are **not** given a complete go-ahead for all kinds of extravagant interpretations. There are limits which should not be exceeded. A spiritual view will be a controlled one, and will reject what is extreme.

We have discussed as an example a passage (Genesis 1) which, in view of other Scriptures, may need to be looked at in more than one way. We have seen that, in accepting secondary meanings of a passage, it may be inadvisable to proceed far beyond the point to which the supporting Scriptures would take us. We may be sure that the safest interpretations are those which Scripture itself firmly indicates. Many more examples might be quoted, several of these are still more plainly supported than the one we have used. To quote only a few from a very large selection, the following are said explicitly to have more meaning than the immediate one: the stories of the passover in Egypt and of the brazen serpent; the procedures of the great day of atonement; the regulations concerning the offerings; some of the activities of Moses; the "servant" passages in Isaiah.

But the further question may be raised: Are any beneath-the-surface meanings acceptable when these are **not** suggested in a direct manner elsewhere in the bible? Certainly it is doubtful whether these (even if allowable) could be considered so certain, or ought to be pressed so confidently, as those which have the full support of Scripture. We hope to address ourselves to this further question in the next issue.

(To be continued)

THE HEAVENLY CALLING

T. S. DAVISON

“Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3 : 1)

PRIOR to their conversion to Christ, those to whom the epistle to the Hebrews was addressed had known only the earthly calling common to Israel as Jehovah's earthly people. The “oracles of God” in their possession, viz the Old Testament Scriptures, told of God's original call to Abraham, and also of His subsequent call to Abraham's descendents who had become a nation, although in bondage under Pharaoh in Egypt. “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.” (Hosea 11 : 1).

Abraham's call had the practical effect of separating him from his country, his kindred, and his father's house. (Genesis 12 : 1-3). Similarly, the calling of Israel constituted them a nation separated from every other nation on the earth, “peculiar treasure unto me above all people : . . . a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19 : 5-6). God Himself erected the middle wall of partition between Israel and the Gentile nations, which many centuries afterwards was said to have been broken down in the death of Christ, and in the creation in Christ of the “one new man,” in which all fleshly distinctions were obliterated. (Ephesians 2 : 14-15).

Abraham's calling, (as was also Israel's) was an earthly calling to an earthly inheritance, and earthly blessing. Abraham is included amongst those who are said to have “died in faith, not having received the promises” (Hebrews 11 : 13). Similarly, the full blessing of Israel according to God is kept in abeyance, until bestowed in accordance with the terms of the New Covenant

(Ezekiel 36 : 24-31). The gifts and calling of God are without repentance, (Romans 11 : 29) and all that God has purposed and promised in connection with the earthly calling will be fully implemented in the world to come, both in regard to Abraham and his seed ; not, however, on the ground of man's responsibility but through the sovereign grace of God, and on the righteous moral foundation of the death of Christ.

The Hebrew converts to Christ, previously referred to, were now to learn that, as Christians, their calling, hopes, and prospects were no longer connected with the earth, but with heaven, where their Lord and Saviour, Jesus, the Son of God, their great High Priest, was seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens (Hebrews 8 : 1).

Let us trace, as briefly as is consistent with clarity, from various portions of the Word of God, some of the characteristics of the heavenly calling of the saints of this dispensation. First of all, its

Origins and Purpose

(Romans 8 : 28-30)

In these verses we learn that this call originated in the purpose of God before time began. We may think that our spiritual history began when we first believed the gospel and trusted in Christ as our Saviour. In one sense this is true,—our responsible history as christians began then. It was the effectual call of the gospel to which, through grace, we responded. These verses teach us, however, that that call was the third link in a divinely forged chain of five links, issuing from the heart of God in eternity past :

coming down into time and the earthly sphere, and leading back into eternal glory with Christ in the heavenly sphere. Proceeding from the purpose of God, the **first** link is His foreknowledge, not only of events, but of persons.

The **next** link in the chain is that those whom God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Here we see the great object before the heart of God, towards which His ways in time are directed,—that heaven should be filled for eternity with those conformed to His Son's image,—those the Son is not ashamed to own as His brethren, and amongst whom He is supreme as the firstborn One,—He who is uniquely **the Son**.

The **third** link has already been mentioned, the effectual call of the gospel in time, and on the earth.

The **fourth** link—justification—implies the work of Christ on the cross, His sacrificial death and resurrection. We are also justified by faith in time and on the earth.

The **final** link in this wondrous divine chain is the glorification of the believer, the subject of the heavenly calling. This is the consummation of the ways of God in implementing His eternal purpose concerning Christ and His brethren. The five-link chain of the purpose and ways of God proceeds from God, from eternity, and from heaven; is seen in time and on earth; and leads upward to complete fulfilment in heaven in eternity to come.

When we briefly consider these stupendous facts concerning the Christian calling, we are not surprised that the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews characterises the calling as a heavenly one (Hebrews 3 : 1).

The Heavenly Man

(1 Corinthians 15 : 45-49)

In these verses we have brought before us two men,—the first man Adam made a living soul, and the last Adam, who is a quickening Spirit. In God's sight every believer is transferred from the headship of Adam to that of Christ, and is no longer "in Adam" but "in Christ."

But as Adam is the first man, so Christ is the second man, and in verse 47 the contrast is drawn between Adam, who as to his origin was of the earth, earthy, and Christ, who is simply stated to be "out of heaven" (N.T.) He is the true anti-type of the blue ribbon on the fringe of the Israelite's garment in Numbers 15 : 38, 39. He is the heavenly man, and He brought into this world of sin and sorrow the very atmosphere of heaven. He Himself said to Nicodemus "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3 : 12, 13).

In verse 48 there is a further contrast drawn, between the character of those connected with the first man, the man of the earth, and those who through grace are eternally associated with the second man. "As is the heavenly so also are they that are heavenly." This indicates what the believer is as "in Christ" before God. There is however a corresponding standard of practical walk in this world which is consistent with this heavenly calling and character, and this important aspect will be pursued presently.

Thirdly, verse 49 speaks of the heavenly destiny of the believer. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." This shall be seen

to be accomplished when, at the rapture of the church these bodies of humiliation, our only link with the old creation, shall be transformed into conformity to His body of glory (Philippians 3:20-21). We shall then be fully conformed to the image of God's Son.

**Earthly Things
or Heavenly Things ?
(Philippians 3:17-21)**

It is evident from these verses that even while Paul the Apostle was still alive on the earth the heavenly calling of the church corporately, and the believer individually, had never been grasped by many, or, if understood, had been refused or let slip. He wrote, with tears, that there were many professing christians known to him, concerning whom he had often previously spoken, who showed by their walk that they were "enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." These professors (not surely genuine believers) preferred christianity without the cross. In this respect they have myriads of successors in the christian profession today, and like their modern representatives, they were not interested in heaven, but were said by Paul to "mind earthly things." This is broadly characteristic of what is termed the christian religion today. To such the very words "heavenly calling" are meaningless. We have heard a great deal in recent years of the "social implications" of the gospel, but those who insist on this emphasis seldom give any indication that they understand the nature of the gospel as God's glad tidings concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and that it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. They concentrate time and effort on the application of

what they term "christian principles" towards the righting of social evils, the raising of the standards of living of the underprivileged, the provision of more and better houses, more and higher education, more leisure, higher wages, etc., etc. Naturally they seek to attain these ends through political action, as well as through what is termed "personal involvement" in all kinds of social service. Sadly enough, these ideas are shared, more or less, by many genuine saints of God. It has been put on record by some such that christians ought to seek to occupy "key positions" in national and local government, in order to influence events for good, and to advance the Kingdom of God on earth. This desire to "leave the world better than one found it," as it is often expressed, in many or most cases a thoroughly sincere desire, ignores the solemn truth spoken by our Lord as He contemplated the approaching death of the cross, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12:31). During the 4000 years of man's history up to the cross God had been, so to speak, on terms with the world. But at that solemn hour the world,—that is man's world, that system of things called in the Galatian epistle "this present evil world"—took sides finally and irrevocably with Satan, the Prince of this world, against God. From that moment the world, as a system ordered by man under the domination of Satan, has lain under the judgment of God, and awaits the execution of that judgment. It is of the utmost importance that this fact, and its implications, should be clearly understood by believers. The One who will execute judgment is Christ the Son, into Whose hands the Father has committed all judgment (John 5:23,

27). Only then will righteousness reign in this world, with its consequences of universal and lasting peace, the righting of all wrongs, and the solution of those problems which the best and wisest of men have found insoluble.

As long as the church remains in this world the interests and prospects of those who are partakers of the heavenly calling are in heaven. As the apostle writes in verse 20 "our conversation (or commonwealth) is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." We have already noted this passage in relation to the transformation of the believer's body by divine power to the likeness of Christ's body of glory at the moment of the rapture of the church (1 Thessalonians 4).

The Practical Implications

The very important question arises, in view of the varied aspects of the truth as to the heavenly calling which we have so briefly considered, what nature of practical conduct is consistent with this calling?

With regard to the relation of christians to earthly government, national or local, the instruction is that they should be subject to the higher powers, for the powers that be are ordained of God. Hence, "render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Romans 13:7). The christian should be irreproachable in these respects.

Finally, the Galatian saints were instructed, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are

of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). Could there be a wider sphere of activity in accordance with the mind of God? If we are found thus doing good, we are treading in the footsteps of our Lord and Master in His earthly pathway. Peter said of Him in his address to Cornelius and his household, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). This reminds us that the greatest good we can do for our fellows is to bring the gospel to them.

A beloved servant of the Lord, now with Christ, told of a rifle-shooting championship match in which a competitor, who had a great reputation as an expert marksman, hit the bull's eye with every one of his shots. But when the scores were announced, his was NIL! Why? Simply because he had been aiming at and hitting the wrong target. The moral drawn from the parable was that it is better to be an indifferent marksman aiming at the right target, than an expert aiming at the wrong target. Let us be sure that we are aiming at the God-appointed target! And what is that? Let the word of God itself supply the answer. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:1-4).

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH————— J. N. DARBY

adapted by AUBREY F. HOWE

2. THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST.**Foreword**

(In this adaptation of J. N. Darby's third lecture, the original author presents the Second Coming of Christ as a single event and gives little attention to distinguishing between the Coming of Christ for His saints and His Coming with His saints, that is, between the Rapture and the Appearing. He is mainly concerned to combat claims that Scripture teaching has been already fulfilled in various events, such as the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in A.D. 70, the coming of the Holy Ghost, the death of the believer, or is to be fulfilled in the future by a Millennium brought about by the Holy Ghost acting in the gospel. He emphasises that the New Testament promises can only be fulfilled in a personal and visible return of the Saviour this earth.—ED.)

Introduction

IN Acts 1:11 His return was promised in the most distinct way immediately after He had ascended into heaven. Whilst the disciples were still following with their eyes the ascending Saviour, two angels appeared and said to them, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Here then we have the very first object which was set before the disciples, the hope of the Lord's personal and visible return.

Acts 3:20, 21. What is the great object of all the counsels of God? We have earlier seen the secret of His will (that God would gather together all things in Christ) and we are now looking at what He has openly spoken of by all the prophets, that is, the earthly part. "He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." Here we have it clearly revealed that the restitution of all things will be accomplished by the

sending of Jesus from heaven, not by the operation of the Holy Spirit activating His disciples in His absence. It is doubtless true that the Spirit will be shed abroad very widely in that coming day, specially upon the Jews, but we must remember that already, shortly before Peter spoke the words we have quoted, the Holy Spirit had been sent from heaven to announce the exaltation and expected return of Jesus. It is indeed Jesus Who will re-establish the creation and Who is the inheritor of all things. When Jesus appears in His glory, the world will behold Him, whereas it cannot see the Holy Spirit.

The Lord's Teaching in the Gospels

Matthew 24:30. The Saviour was telling His disciples about the most critical time in the prophetic future of the Jews when He said, "Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." The Lord Himself was unmistakeably pointing to His visible return to the earth. Attempts have been made to show that these prophecies were ful-

filled at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus in A.D. 70, but apart from any other consideration it is abundantly clear that the essential part of the whole scene has never yet taken place, namely for the Son of man to be literally seen coming in clouds with power and great glory.

It is interesting to notice that the fig tree, of which the Saviour speaks on this occasion as indicating the approach of summer by putting forth leaves, is especially the symbol of the Jewish nation. This is in keeping with the general bearing of this discourse, which relates to the coming of the Lord in relation to the Jews. These important teachings are also recorded in similar terms in Mark 13 and Luke 21.

Matthew 24 : 48, 49. The hope of the return of Christ is so important to the life of the Church that it provides an exact index of its faithfulness. The Lord Himself points this out. It was when the servant said in his heart, "My lord delayeth his coming," that he began to smite his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken. The Lord therefore presses the warning to be ready, because, He says, the Son of man (not death) cometh (verse 14).

Matthew 25 : 1-13. When the ten virgins went forth to meet the bridegroom it was not death nor the Holy Spirit they had been told to expect, for neither of these is the Bridegroom. It is stated that they all slumbered and slept, and it is in respect of their failure in watchfulness for his coming that they are all guilty. All the virgins are found in the same state, the wise (those with spiritual life) as well as the foolish (who lacked the oil of the Holy Spirit), all alike slept and forgot the imminent return of the bridegroom. On the other hand, what wakes them all up is the midnight cry that he is

coming.

John 14 : 2, 3. "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go. . . I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." In these words the Lord laid the foundation for the hope which the Scriptures show to be the constant and living expectation of the church.

The Witness of the Epistles

Romans 8 : 19-22. This passage tells us that all the disordered and groaning creation is waiting in suspense the moment of the Saviour's appearing. This moment will not arrive at the time of the last judgment, since at that judgment the earth and the heaven will have passed away (Revelation 20 : 11).

Philippians 3 : 20, 21. "For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." This is the conclusion of a confession by the apostle Paul of the most powerful motives that ruled his life and inspired his conduct, evidence indeed of the practical result of expecting the Saviour's return.

1 Thessalonians 1 : 9, 10. One of the features of the conversion of the first Thessalonian Christians which was particularly noticed by many was that they had "turned to God . . . to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." They were certainly not saying that there must be a period of a thousand years before His coming. We can see that the hope of His coming formed an evident part of their testimony.

1 Thessalonians 2 : 19. This hope also connected itself with Paul's joy in serving the Lord, expressed as follows : "What is our hope, or joy,

or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?"

1 Thessalonians 3:13. When the apostle desires for his converts a blameless walk he prays that the Lord "may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The believers in Thessalonica were penetrated to such a degree by the hope of the early return of the Saviour that they did not think of dying before that event, and when one of them died his friends were distressed that he might miss that happy moment. Paul reassures them by telling them that when that time comes God will first raise the dead believers and bring them with Jesus so as to be reunited with those who are still alive at His coming. "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven. . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." This is the comfort given by the apostle, and we can see how far we are from his views when we consider that they have been largely replaced by the idea of an intermediate state of happiness (the soul separated from the body). Admittedly, Paul wrote that for him it was far better to depart and be with Christ than to abide in the flesh, (Philippians 1) but this state is nevertheless a state of waiting. The dead in Christ wait and He Himself waits for the moment of His second coming, a moment which, as we have seen, coincides with the resurrection of His own.

Four passages only are to be found in the New Testament which speak of the joy of the departed soul (if one omits Luke 16 where the comforting of Lazarus is contrasted with his former wretchedness). There is Paul's statement above, and again in 2 Corinthians 5 where he writes among other things that he is "willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (verse 8). Then there is the occasion when the thief, occupied with the future glory of the Kingdom, said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." The Lord replied to him, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42, 43). Certainly it is far better to expect the glory, present with Christ, than to remain here below. But it is still a state of expectation, like that in which Christ is Himself placed at this moment, sitting at the right hand of the Father. The fourth instance is that of Stephen, who dying said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59).

2 Thessalonians 1:9, 10; 2:3-12. "The mystery of iniquity," which was already working in the time of Paul, was to go on until it culminated in the activity of the man of sin, "whom the Lord shall . . . destroy with the brightness of his coming." No improvement is foreseen in the state of mankind such as would be essential if a spiritual millenium were to intervene before the Lord's coming.

2 Peter 1:16-21. The transfiguration was a kind of pattern, or a similitude, of the coming of the Lord in glory. The apostle writes, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he re-

ceived from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy." That is, we have the word of prophecy confirmed or made more sure by the transfiguration.

1 John 3 : 2, 3. "We know that when he (the Son of God) shall appear, we shall be like him. For we shall see him as he is." We shall be like Him only when He appears, not before. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." The present effect of this hope on any one who is absorbed with it is that he conducts himself accordingly — he purifies himself. Knowing that when Jesus shall appear I shall be like Him, I ought to be as much as possible like Him even now. This is the practical effect of the expectation of His return. It gives a powerful motive for holiness as it also gives a perfect measure for it.

* * * *

DETACHMENT.

"**T**AKE heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare" (Luke 21 : 34). Note the term 'life' in Jesus' words. In the Greek New Testament three words are commonly used for life : **zoe**, spiritual life ; **psuche**, psychological life ; and **bios**, biological life. The last is the word used here, appearing

Conclusion

Matthew 13 : 24-43. This passage gives us the parable of the tares and the wheat and among other things demonstrates that there can be no millennium apart from the return of the Lord. The tares (namely the evil which Satan has done where the good grain has been sown) are to go on increasing until the harvest which is the end of this dispensation or age. The evil which he has caused by heresies, false doctrines, false religions, all these tares will continue, increase and ripen in the Lord's field until the harvest.

May the Lord attach us in heart to His coming—to Himself in person. There is nothing more practical, more powerful to disentangle us from a world which is to be judged, and at the same time to knit us to Him who will come to judge it. Nothing can better serve to show us wherein ought to be our purification ; nothing which can so console and invigorate us. Assuredly, if we are expecting the Lord from day to day, there will be seen in us a self-renunciation rarely seen among the Christians of today. May none of us be found saying, "My Lord delayeth His coming."

in its adjective form, **biotikos**, 'of this life'. The Lord is warning us to beware lest we be unduly pressed with this life's cares, that is to say, with anxieties regarding quite ordinary matters such as food and dress which belong to our present existence on the earth. . . . We are to be in a true sense detached in spirit from our goods in the house or in the field (Luke 17 : 31).

WATCHMAN NEE.

THE SEATED CHRIST A. H. STORRIE

Hebrews 1 : 1-3 ; 8 : 1 ; 10 : 12 ; 12 : 1-3.

AS is well known, Hebrews is a book of contrasts, showing, as it does, the superiority of the Christian revelation over that of the Mosaic economy of the Old Testament. In this connection the word "better" occurs again and again. Amongst the "furniture" to be installed in the tabernacle there is no mention of a seat for the priest, for his work could never be regarded as finished. In contrast with that fact, in Hebrews it is recorded four times that our Lord, our great High Priest, sat down.

Nothing in literature excels the grandeur of the opening words of the book of Hebrews : "God having spoken in many parts and in many ways formerly to the fathers in the prophets, at the end of these days has spoken to us in the person of the Son. . . who being the effulgence of his glory and the expression of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, having made by himself the purification of sins, set himself down on the right hand of the greatness on high. . . ." (1 : 1-3). How arresting it is to our thoughts that the One so gloriously described should have anything to do with our sins. Yet it is so ; thus believers can say : ". . . having made purification of (our) sins. . . He set Himself down. . ." His own personal glory shining forth, He set Himself down as of His own right and title. No other seat was suitable to such a One.

In chapter 7 the superiority of our Lord's priesthood—after the order of Melchisedec is developed ; the continuity of Christ's priesthood is prominent. The Aaronic priesthood had to pass from one priest to another—his successor, when the former died. In contrast with this our Lord has an intransmissible priesthood ; it is eternal and

heavenly in its very nature for the value of His blood is continuous or perpetual.

"Now a summary of the things of which we are speaking is : We have such a one high priest who has sat down on the right hand of the throne of the greatness in the heavens ; minister of the holy places and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord has pitched, and not man. . ."

In chapter 10 we again are made to see the superiority over our Lord's priesthood over that of the Aaronic order. As we read in Psalm 40, we see our Lord coming forth to do the will of God and to fulfil the counsel made in a far past eternity : ". . . Lo I come to do thy will." He taketh away the first, which is the ceremonial law, to establish the second, which is the will and grace of God, by which will believers today are sanctified. Then in contrast to the priest **standing** to accomplish the sacrificial service, we read : "But **He**, having offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down in perpetuity at the right hand of God. . . ."

There remains one more instance of our Lord having sat down to be considered ; it is in the passage, chapter 12 : 1-3. The Lord here, as so often in Hebrews, bears the name which He took in manhood : "Jesus." And He is "the leader and completer of faith," having run the full course, and on whom we must fasten our gaze as we, too, run the race set before us. In view of the joy set before Him, the joy of doing the will of God, He endured the cross, having despised the shame, He is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. Well may we consider Him who endured so great contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest we be weary and faint in our minds.

A NEW YEAR MESSAGE

DEUTERONOMY 11 : 7-12

MANY customary greetings will have been exchanged by the time this first issue of Scripture Truth in 1970 has appeared. Some of these are usually more sensible and meaningful than others, but even those such as, "All the best for the new year," are soon forgotten in the relentless passage of time. For the thoughtful-minded Christian, however, the beginning of a new year is a moment for reflection, both retrospective and prospective.

Looking backwards over the year that is past we are bound to give thanks to our God for His faithfulness and changeless love. Not all His wisdom permitted to come our way has been pleasant, nor has all been unpleasant, but the measurements and quality of the ingredients have been dictated by the Father's almighty love and unerring skill. What priceless lessons have been afforded by the ever-changing variety of the ways along which He has led us, and even the chastening consequent upon our folly and self-will has "yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness" where exercise has resulted. Thus the blend of joys and sorrows divinely proportioned has filled the days of another year, and has laid the basis for faith's anticipation of that which lies ahead.

In the forward look there is apprehension and fear in the minds of many around us; and little wonder, as the human plight grows deeper with every passing year of man's determined disregard for God and His claims. The gaunt spectacle of wars and rumours of wars, as predicted by the Lord Jesus, added to the debacle of ever-mounting crime and the mushroom-like growth of the permissive society, presents anything but a hopeful prospect for the

man of this world. But for faith how different is the picture, and truly our sights should be raised for "all the best" in the days that lie ahead. It may well be that 1970 will be the year in which the glorious promise of the coming again of the Lord Jesus will at last be fulfilled. Certainly nothing in the divine programme hinders that blissful event except the completion of the Church, the Bride of Christ. That would without doubt be "all the best" for the Christian. But short of that climactic event, can he be confident of enjoying the best every day of the New Year? Let us soberly examine the Scriptures and see if such confidence is encouraged and justified.

Possibly more than half a million of God's people heard the memorable words of Moses, their leader, as He encouraged them onwards toward their ultimate destination in the land of Canaan. A critical point in his speech is reached in Deuteronomy 11, where he counsels them to look back over the past with its mighty deliverances and solemn lessons, for he spoke to those whose "eyes had seen all the great acts of the Lord which He did." In this confidence they were to go forward, remembering their own weakness and failure, but also the lessons these afforded in the light of God's chastening ways with them, and His omnipotent care for their well-being. Before them lay prospects that could not have been better. If ours are different, are they any less? True it is that an earthly Canaan lay before them with its promise of material prosperity and vernal bliss, whereas our blessings are spiritual and heavenly, but surely there the contrast ends. It has been said, with a measure of truth, that every

material promise made to God's ancient people can find its counterpart in the spiritual realm of the New Testament. Canaan, in Joshua's story, finds its answer, not in Heaven itself (for although promised to Israel, they would have to fight the enemy there before enjoying the land), but would correspond to "the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" to be enjoyed by faith **now**, while clad in the armour of God, to stand and withstand the enemy in the land. (Ephesians 6 : 13).

What lay before them **materially** and what lies before us **spiritually** is in sharpest contrast to the world (Egypt in Israel's case) where survival depended upon human effort (v. 10). With its notorious lack of rain, Egypt had to use man-powered irrigation methods to maintain its crops. For us, we have been set free from the world of man-made efforts to satisfy the soul, doomed in any case to abject frustration and defeat. For them and for us the sights were to be set on a "land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land which the Lord your God cares for : the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, **from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.**" (v. 12. R.S.V.). Here then is the real prospect of all the best, God's best for the believer in Jesus, even sweeter than its meaning for those of old.

Let us notice that the vista presents "hills and valleys," not the flat, uninteresting, uninspiring terrain of Egypt. For Israel the very physical contours of Canaan were to teach them the character of their God (see Psalm 36 : 6 and Psalm 125 : 2 etc.). For us, advancing into the year 1970, the prospect of "peaks" and "troughs" in view assures us of that heavenly refresh-

ment (the rain of heaven) provided by the Holy Spirit, and the guarantee that the Lord God cares for this land, where He has set us in Christ. Not always shall it be the exhilarating experience of the mountain top, for passing through the valley of Baca (tears) we shall find there, as in Psalm 84 : 6, the deep wells of soul satisfaction, enabling us to "go from strength to strength" (v. 7). Also in the troughs of experience we discover that "the valleys also are covered over with corn ; they shout for joy, they also sing." (Psalm 65 : 13) How many a lowly point in our pathway has yielded the richest food for our souls, causing us to rejoice and sing praise to God. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," says the Psalmist, "I will fear no evil for Thou art with me." (Psalm 23 : 4) Again, "He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills." (Psalm 104 : 10).

Finally, beloved, "all the best" for us is in our spiritual Canaan, for "the eyes of the Lord thy God are **always** upon this land," it is His delight as well as ours. Does it not afford the deepest comfort and encouragement to know that, however obscure from the world of men, nothing escapes His eye in our pathway. Is there any wonder we sing :

" We love the Shepherd's voice :
His watchful eye shall keep
Our pilgrim souls among
The thousands of God's
sheep."
(Watts)

Is there a single day in the year before us that might cause us anxiety, some unexpected turn of events, or some long envisaged trial at last upon us ? Let us remember that the Lord's care and watchfulness are upon us, "from the beginning of the year (1st January 1970)

Then said I, Here am I ; send me". It is clear enough when this verse is read in its context that Isaiah spoke these words. We can see too that a special vision of "the Lord. . . high and lifted up", and a special process of purification and preparation, were necessary to make him ready to respond in the way that he did. We can admire Isaiah's willingness to undertake the mission for which he was singled out. In thinking of the way in which his response was framed, using the words "Here am I ; send me", some will say we must see in Isaiah a pale reflection of the Lord Jesus, and that these words can be considered as expressing His attitude in a pre-temporal way. Indeed, it is possible that some may even be unaware that Isaiah said it at all, having heard it quoted so frequently as from Himself. How much of this secondary view of the intention of this verse is really allowable ? Can we consider it at all as question and answer between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in an eternal context ?

In seeking to face this question the following points may be made. First, it is probable that no harm will arise in using the passage in this way provided it is recognized that a liberty has been taken, and the direct meaning of the verse has been violated to some extent. Secondly, it should be recognized that some guard on its applicability to our Lord is also necessary. For instance, in what sense is it possible to imagine the questions in this verse ever asked in relation to the Lord Jesus ? We can think of these questions being raised only in a very pictorial way, and in some senses it is misleading to do this. We know that **He** was eternally prepared and intending to fulfil His great mission ; and that the question Who would go was eternally settled and therefore not to be asked.

Nor can we ever think that He needed preparing and purifying for His task, in the way that the one in view in this passage did. The limitations of this verse in its application to the Lord are serious, and very important to have in mind. In the third place, there may be something to gain in finding this second meaning in the verse, provided its partial applicability is understood. His readiness, His willingness, His spontaneous response to every detail of the will of God, is something we must always admire, and it may be fair to think about this when reading this verse. It may be doubted, however, whether the verse adds anything of this kind to what other scriptures already say in a less questionable manner. Finally, there is loss if the questions and answer in this verse are merely quoted out of context, perhaps by hearsay, with the primary application not in mind at all. It must be doubted whether this is ever the way to understand scripture.

Our reflections upon this borderline case may help us to be clearer about those which come on either side of it, and we now consider a few examples of these.

It may come as a surprise to some to have it pointed out that the use of the parable of the good Samaritan as a picture of our Lord rests, for its validity, purely on internal considerations in the relevant passage. It is absolutely clear, of course, that there is an important and more direct lesson intended by the parable. The hearer of the parable, as it was spoken, had no doubt what its first intention was. Yet, who could doubt that the neighbourly actions which our Lord pressed were of the highest standard, of the kind that He Himself epitomized ; and that therefore what He recommended to the lawyer, and illustrated in the parable,

was in fact a likeness to Himself. It is not difficult in the parable to catch a glimpse (in a very wonderful way) of our Lord Himself. Here is depicted His grace and concern for the helpless, the purposefulness of His mission to bring them help, the effectiveness of His intervention when other potential helpers were impotent, the completeness of His provision for those whose cause He undertakes. The validity of this reading of the parable lies partly in the comprehensive way in which it describes the attitudes and abilities of our Lord. It does not fit in one or two points only : there are no discrepancies ; it fits as a whole. There are nevertheless one or two details which, while by no means out of character, do **not** have a plain meaning ; and to refrain from strong claims or dogmatism on these could well be a mark of wisdom. Summarizing our comments on this example, then, it would be difficult for one who knows and loves our Lord not to recognize Him here.

A similar comment applies to the lengthy story of the Patriarch Joseph which appears towards the end of Genesis. It is a story which relates history in the first place. It has other direct lessons to be learned, too, from Joseph's faithfulness and constancy in testing, and from the way in which God honoured it. But, on grounds of its own internal consistency, it is hard indeed to avoid seeing in it a massive and extensive illustration of a greater story, the story of Christ's rejection and exaltation. Elsewhere in scripture we have only a hint to support this view. Acts 7 : 9 speaks of Joseph as among the first in a long line who were met with unbelief and opposition from the descendents of Israel ; and that chapter later makes the point that Christ Himself ultimately received from them treatment of a

similar character. This is admittedly only a small hint. To find Christ in the story of Joseph has to be a self-confirming process almost entirely. And yet how difficult it is to avoid this meaning in the story ! A story of unbelief and refusal by his own kindred, of unawareness and callousness from others (less directly linked to him), of misrepresentation by some, and forgetfulness of his kindness by others, has close links with the story of our Lord. Still more is this so when in it we see a patient and submissive spirit, leaving it all to God, Who was in control of all : going down to a very low point indeed ; yet there, most of all, showing his capability and competence to take the highest place. Then we see him remembered, in due course, and relied on to take control both in days of plenty and in days of lean-ness : all the (surrounding) world ultimately being brought into submission to the throne which he represented. Every knee bowed to Joseph ; his own people were included, with much heart-searching for them on the way. Before that time, while still in the period of plenty, Joseph had found new links, a bride and then a family, more than compensation for the (temporary) loss of the old ties. The whole story is reviewed afterwards in the words : "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth and to save your lives by a **great deliverance**. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God. . ." "Ye thought evil against me ; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Genesis 45 : 7, 8 ; 50 : 20). So wonderful is this illustration of the grand way in which God has brought good out of the evil which men have devised, that it seems unnecessary to press further that this certainly is allowable.

It is a less pleasing task to pass now to interpretations which seem nearer the other extreme of validity. We do not wish to dogmatize here ; but nevertheless we believe that the difference in quality between the examples just quoted and those which are to follow is extreme. This is not a matter of judgment, it is patently so. Consider, for instance, the incident (in Acts 20 : 7-12) at Troas when Paul went on preaching till midnight. Is it fair to consider the episode of the young man's fall from the window as a description of a soul's decline and fall from truth once known and enjoyed ? Such a hidden meaning, putting also a construction upon the "many lights in the upper chamber," "the third loft" (and other details), has no support from elsewhere and, it would seem, little support within the passage itself. The balanced reaction to this would be to suspect it, to consider it farfetched. The thought that this is an unworthy approach to scripture is, to say the least, an understandable one. There is need to justify this approach on the part of those who adopt it. This, however, is rarely attempted. The users of such interpretations, on the contrary, usually consider them to be self-evident.

Further examples from the Acts, to quote only two, of passages which have been treated in this way are "the street called Straight" (Acts 9 : 11), and the story of the shipwreck at the close of the book. From other parts of the bible, we quote a short selection almost at random. The writer has heard these used in recent years and, on the principles outlined above, found them unconvincing. A construction put on the phrase "two legs, or a piece of an ear" (Amos 3 : 12) seemed completely unnecessary (as well as imaginative), especially as the points made were clearly taught in the New Testament. A

similar observation applies to a very indirect reading of the story of Solomon's wise judgment in settling the case between the two mothers (1 Kings 3 : 16-28). Strange conclusions have been derived from individual verses in chapters like Deuteronomy 22, putting very strained meanings into verses 3, 6, 9, 10 ; while insisting, where it suits, on the literal meaning of other verses (e.g. 5, but certainly not 11 or 12). On what principles can such a hotch-potch reading of a chapter be sustained ? Why is it necessary to find such complex justification for matters which, for the most part, are taught in crystal-clear fashion elsewhere ?

One further important point needs stressing. We have seen that the use of figurative passages to illustrate teaching plainly found elsewhere in the bible is sometimes allowable, though by no means always so. But to use such a passage as a **basis** for teaching not otherwise indicated is **not** warranted. To take such a liberty is to exceed all scripturally-supported principles of interpretations ; it leaves no curb whatever on what may be imagined to exist in scripture. An extreme example of this is the extraction of detailed directions about church discipline (not given in the New Testament) from instructions about lepers in Leviticus.

We have quoted extreme cases. Ranging between these extremes is a very wide spectrum of scriptural passages and incidents, which it may be possible to read in fuller ways than those which first appear. Each will have to be considered carefully, in a dependent, teachable way. From the cases we have quoted it is plain that there are wonderful things, near the surface, and in a large number of places also below the surface, in the word of God. It is equally clear

that the need for restraint in what we extract from it must be constantly in mind. The Spirit of God is not necessarily the prompter of all that we may tend to derive from the bible. We have endeavoured to point out some principles which will help towards a profitable yet guarded approach to these matters.

A few further matters seem worth mentioning before this section is concluded. Most people will know how the ecclesiastical authorities of the time dismissed Galileo's findings with his telescope as anti-scriptural. The facts which he discovered are not questioned today, and no conflict with the bible is suspected. The belief that the earth is at the centre of all physical things was, however, a life-or-death test of orthodoxy in that day. This example highlights the need to be sure that what we consider to be essential teaching of scripture is not really a misreading of it. We should be awake to the possibility of imagining that some passages say more than they do. It is easy to feel strongly about a well-established tradition in which non-scriptural elements may be hidden. In zeal for some special line of emphasis in scripture it is possible to over-run the mark, and to be found over-elaborating what it says. This is possible in many fields of its teaching. Perhaps the prophetic teaching of scripture is very susceptible to this mistreatment, but it is not confined to that. Returning to a further issue of a scientific kind, Genesis 1 and 2 provide another example of a difficulty which need not necessarily arise. To say that these chapters teach **instantaneous** creation is to impart an idea which is not clearly there (and which perhaps has no meaning). Nothing is said at all about **processes** of creation, though it is plainly insisted that God is

creator of all. Isaiah 43 : 7 gives an interesting sidelight on some of the verbs used in Genesis 1, and speed and immediacy in the work of creation by no means appear to be the principal ideas involved. Let us be sure that what we defend and insist upon in scripture is real. Much of it is clear, and for this we can stand with confidence.

Finally, a word may be said about some dangers which familiarity with scripture can bring in its train. Teaching from the bible, though it may be highly allowable, can easily be cast in a set terminology under which the living power and clear meaning can be obscured. It can become habitual to use a special language, assuming that everybody understands it : this phraseology can become a substitute, a shorthand (or perhaps a longhand !) for what it represents. To use terms like "the fleshpots of Egypt", "the red-heifer aspect of the death of Christ", "feetwashing", "kingdom truth" is not very revealing. We do not suggest that these expressions are meaningless ; merely that they are obscure if not explained. This is wrapping things up instead of making them clear. Discussion can go on amongst the select esoteric group who "understand" these matters, but this precludes understanding by the uninitiated. Real meaning can slip out of the discussion as words become a substitute for underlying truth. Even questionable English begins to be used. Stock phrases and jargon can hold the field. What goes on becomes a parody of clear scriptural exposition, such as is commended in 1 Corinthians 14. Clarity, meaningfulness, and convincing power are stressed as important there. Our findings from scripture need to be direct, fresh, and first-hand in their expression.

SADDUCEES AND HUMANISTS

ALASTAIR J. DURIE

IS belief in the supernatural only one of man's childhood beliefs to be discarded at will by mature rational 20th century man? Does any life after death exist? Humanists argue that not only is this hope false but it is positively harmful. Christians—they allege—use their belief in a world to come to avoid social commitment on this one. "Let us concentrate on this life," they say; "forget your superstitious ideas about an after-life or angels or even God just as you ceased to believe fairies or witches were real; devote yourself to life now—it's the only one we have. Man's resources are all he has: we can forget the idea of a God who can intervene miraculously."

This line of reasoning clearly runs head on against Christianity, which above all is a religion of the supernatural, of the Almighty God, of miracles and resurrection, of life and living. We find a controversy in the New Testament with this issue central — in Mark 12:18–27 — between Jesus and the Sadducees—the anti-supernaturalists of their day. A small influential group of high-priestly and land-owning families who collaborated with the Roman administration, they were doctrinally absolute literalists for Moses' law alone—they recognised only the Pentateuch as scripture. They held that this life was what mattered: there was no supernatural "no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit" (Acts 23:8). In this there was a heated difference with the Pharisees who did believe in some sort of after-life (see the dispute in Acts 23!). In short, the Sadducees were the modernists of their day.

Their question to Jesus was therefore "loaded". Note how they framed the question to our Lord,

based on Deuteronomy 25:5 concerning the remarriage of widows. They intended only to ridicule the whole idea of an after-life. What answer could Jesus give these men—polyandry in heaven? They thought that they had Him.

In His reply Jesus was unhesitating. "You are quite wrong". Why? Because they knew neither the scriptures nor the power of God. Moreover, their idea of the life to come was quite mistaken.

As far as the Pentateuch was concerned, Jesus and the Sadducees were on common ground in accepting this as authoritative scripture. The Lord not only knew the scriptures but could use them. He quotes from Exodus 3:6 to prove from Moses that the resurrection of the dead was a reality. "I am. . . the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" Jesus interprets as showing that these men were not dead though each had died physically. This refuted the Sadducees from their own authority. Lest, however, they escape by claiming this is just His interpretation, Jesus points out other errors.

Their **idea** of the after-life was wrong. They were assuming, for the purposes of argument, that it was going to be like this one with a few alterations. People today think like that—one hopeful assumption being that there will be no more work. Jesus says that the next life will be of a totally different **kind** e.g., marriage will cease; people will become like angels in this respect. To project this life's forms and patterns into the next is wrong.

The Sadducees were also wrong because they did not know the power of God. They had tried to push God out to the touchlines of existence. Their God was far too small. How

very contemporary! (If the unbeliever has no idea of the tremendous power of God, it is unfortunately also true that the believer often lacks the experience of God in action). The tragedy of such a sceptical position is that it is God alone—the God of power and resurrection—who can offer help in this world. Yet the modernist would deny himself—and others—that. It is God alone who can reverse the inevitable procession of birth, growth, decay and death. Resurrection—the miraculous and supernatural reversal of the natural process—is the distinctive act of God.

The New Testament speaks of several examples of resurrection.

1. The resurrection of Christ from the dead (1 Corinthians 15 : 4).
2. The resurrection of them “that are Christ’s” (verse 23).
3. The resurrection of the saints in a spiritual sense (Ephesians 2 : 6).
4. The two resurrections (John 5 : 29).

1. The resurrection of the crucified Lord is the keystone of the preaching of the early church. (The proclamation that in Jesus is the resurrection of the dead leads to further conflict with the Sadducees (Acts 4 : 1, 2). The implications of the resurrection of Christ need no exposition here, except as showing the tremendous power of God at work. This is the ability of the power available and operative through the Spirit in the Church and the individual believer. No wonder, therefore, that Paul prays for the Ephesians that they might know “what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe, according to the working of His great might” when He raised Christ from the dead. We ought to pray that the Church of God in our time may know this resurrection power.

2. The resurrection of Christ is described as the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. He is the first—but all believers will follow. His resurrection guarantees ours—and this is certain for the believer according to His promises (e.g. John 5 : 24 ; 11 : 25). Hence Jesus can call His followers in the next age “children or sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20 : 36). This is a certainty according to His promises, demonstrated in His own resurrection.

3. There is a sense of resurrection which is past for the believer. In Ephesians, the believer is **alive** in Christ ; the unbeliever is **dead** in sins. So the rebirth **is** resurrection. This surely is a real miracle, the demonstration of the power and mercy of God in action each time it happens. So who says there are no more miracles today ? Each time a soul is reborn that is a miracle of resurrection to a new kind of life. Hence perhaps the order of the “resurrection and the life” rather than “the life and the resurrection”.

4. Jesus did reveal that resurrection was not just for the Christian. There are two resurrections, ‘of the good to life and the evil to judgment’. Those who have rejected the Son in this life have only a resurrection to judgment to be realised in the day of judgment. “He who has the Son has life ; he who has not the Son has not life”. So the new life in Christ and participation in his resurrection to life is not just a desirable option : it is **vital** for each individual now.

Jesus has said to the modernist who thinks there is no after-life (or angel), “You are quite wrong”. Is there a rebuke for us as believers who claim to know scripture in that we may lack the experience of God in the power of Christ’s resurrection ? (Philippians 3 : 10). The God

who can work resurrection from spiritual death for the believer, continues to work in us. Let us then rely on His love more, and our own powers less. Samuel Rutherford wrote in St. Andrew's prison, "We know not half of what we love when

we love Jesus. Go on in the strength of the Lord and put Christ's love to trial and put upon it burdens and then it will appear love indeed ; we employ not His love, therefore we know it not".

ABRAHAM

ROBERT THOMSON

THE PROMISE FULFILLED.

TO call Genesis chapter 21, a climax of faith would be a true and fitting description of the fulfilment of the promise of Jehovah to Abraham, "He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir" (Genesis 15 : 4). This promise had been given him twenty years before ; and also confirmed by showing him the stars of heaven, saying, "So shall thy seed be". To the natural man, this waiting period must have been exceedingly trying and doubtful ; but to the heart engaged with God who gave the promise, faith toward Him is strengthened. 'And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb : he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief ; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Romans 4 : 19/20).

The birth of Isaac was a marvellous climax to the faith of Abraham ; but a far greater climax was to be reached centuries later when in the outline by Matthew we read, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1 : 1). Kingship and blessing were to be secured in this great and glorious Person, Jesus Christ, whose descent could be traced back to David and Abraham. Here was the first link in the chain, "For in Isaac shall thy seed be

called", and that seed was Christ.

Let us observe now the note of victory and triumph as the chapter reveals its precious contents. It begins with the Lord working in His own faithful way, fulfilling His word as promised. Had He not said, "My covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year" ? (Genesis 17 : 21). This was completely beyond the course of nature, and must be wholly of the wisdom and power of God. So the son and heir of Abraham was born of Sarah and named Isaac ; a very fitting name signifying "laughter". Sarah, now filled with joy could say, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me".

Abraham, as head of the house, and in the place of authority, called the child Isaac, as the Lord had spoken to him. Also he had him circumcised the eighth day, according to God's command. Incidentally, Ishmael was circumcised when he was thirteen years old ; (and Jesus was circumcised the eighth day, (Luke 2 : 21)). It is good to see this implicit obedience on the part of Abraham, proving the sufficiency of God for him in every step of his pathway. God had given him strength to overcome nature through the birth of Isaac, and now commands that this child shall be reckoned as the son of the promise. Ishmael was to be regarded as one

born after the flesh, and must be put away from him.

It is well for us to see the place Sarah has in all this manifestation of the wisdom and power of God in the birth of Isaac. She acknowledged that God was the source of her deep joy and holy laughter, which was to be infectious enough for others to share. Having now been brought into line with God Himself, she gladly declared His might and grace in giving her renewed life and vigour for the fulfilling of His promise to Abraham. The question raised by Sarah went beyond the boundaries of flesh and nature, "Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck?" The weaning day came along, the child grew, and a great feast was given by Abraham. This was of great importance, for weaning would imply the thought of one being separated from the earthly source, to be linked with another greater source which would lead to full growth and spiritual development. The Psalmist's spirit of lowliness is very sweet, "Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child". (Psalm 131:2) Samuel's day of weaning is mentioned in 1 Samuel 1:22-24, prior to his service before the Lord in the temple.

Isaac, now established as heir of the promise of Jehovah, became the object of mockery by Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, a figure of legal Israel. This is brought out more fully in the Epistle to the Galatians (Ch. 4:28-29) "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." Ishmael therefore is cast out as to the inheritance, but is preserved historically, through the

sovereign goodness of God. For Abraham, the putting away of Ishmael was very grievous; yet we learn from this action, and it is assuredly confirmed that they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

It is always the way of God to give further light concerning the establishing of His purpose, and He spake words of encouragement to Abraham, "In all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called". (Genesis 21:12) Of Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, he would make a nation, "for he is thy seed", said Jehovah. From this point we see the delightful obedience of Abraham, and the overruling word of God in relation to the parting which was so hard for nature to bear. Rising early, he sent away Hagar and the child, giving them adequate provision for the way. Thus departing, she wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba, (significantly meaning, "the well of the oath") where quickly the resources of nature ran out, and death seemed inevitable. The child was placed comfortably under a shrub, and the sorrow-stricken mother moved a distance away, that she might not see him die. She then lifted up her voice and wept, and the God of the helpless heard not only her voice, but the cry of the lad. Then from the storehouse of His loving kindness and care, there came rich provision and comfort for them, yet at the same time not revoking His promise concerning Isaac.

An angel was then sent from heaven to Hagar, enquiring of her trouble, Bidding her fear not, he told her that God had heard the voice of the lad and she must now go to him and cherish him, for God was to make of him a great nation. Perhaps the whole of the Arab population today is from this source. Then God

opened the eyes of Hagar, and she saw a well of water. The bottle of water was not the fullness of His goodness, but rather the well, with all its unfailing supply. The bottle was soon empty—a limited supply. Thus the care and well-being of Ishmael was divinely assured, God being with him providentially in the wilderness as he grew up. Quickly he learned to be a wilderness dweller, an expert in archery, and eventually obtained a wife from Egypt. How significant are all these details of that which typifies the flesh,—wilderness dwelling, and a partner from Egypt!

From this point we see how God placed great dignity upon Abraham by the fact that Abimelech was very much aware that God was manifestly with Abraham in all that he did. Therefore he sought an assurance from Abraham that he would treat him well for the kindness he had shewn him. This is very instructive, suggesting that the nations will give homage to Christ in the day of His power, when the whole creation will be blessed in Him, the true Isaac. Abraham was ready to

swear, and all apparent wrongs being put right, a covenant was made between Abraham and Abimelech. Everything from Abraham's side was based on the principle of sacrifice, and he gave to Abimelech sheep and oxen. The covenant between the two of them being ratified, there was the added gift of seven ewe lambs from Abraham set by themselves. This gift was to be the perfect witness that Abraham had digged the well of water.

The well was given the significant name of Beer-sheba, which means, "The well of the oath". To Abimelech, the token of kindness and faithfulness from Abraham to himself and his posterity; to Abraham there was the planting of a tree, a symbol of life and fruitfulness. He also called upon the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. It is a scene depicting peaceful conditions, with Abimelech and Phicol, chief captain, returning to their own land of Philistia, and Abraham rejoicing in Jehovah, abiding in the land of the Philistines many days, not on sufferance, but as one who possessed greatness from God.

THE WONDROUS WORKS OF THE LORD ————— ROBERT DAVIES THOUGHTS ON PSALM 105*

AT first sight Psalm 105 is merely a recital of Israel's early history. From a careful reading of the Psalm, however, it is apparent that the writer is not content to trace the hand of a distant but providential deity: these events are to him nothing less than the wondrous works of the Lord and their recollection an occasion for praising His holy Name.

"O give thanks unto the Lord. . .
O let your songs be of Him and
praise Him." (vv. 1, 2)

It is abundantly clear to the

psalmist that God's revelation of Himself is not in the form of a series of abstract propositions, but in history—in His dealings with Abraham, the twelve patriarchs and their descendants. This may remind us that Christianity is an 'historical religion'. By this is meant not teaching handed down through history, but God's intervention, decisive though obscure in human writing, in the birth, life, death and resurrection of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Luke who begins his Gospel by setting the wonderful

*All quotations from the Psalm are taken from the Revised Psalter.

events he relates within the framework of history. "In the days of Herod, king of Judaea. . . (1 : 5) and ". . . when Quirinius was governor of Syria." (2 : 2. R.V.) "Jesus Christ. . . our Lord. . . suffered under Pontius Pilate." His death and His resurrection constitute God's supreme revelation of Himself. "God. . . has spoken to us in (the person of the) Son." (Hebrews 1 : 1, 2. N.T.) These great events are for us "the wondrous works of the Lord" and, like the psalmist, we do well to be talking of them :

" . . . and let your talking be of all His wondrous works." (v. 2)

A good example for us to follow is found in the eleventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Those 'ordinary' believers (they did **not** include the apostles—see Acts 8 : 1), scattered abroad from Jerusalem as a result of the persecution which followed Stephen's death, carried with them the word of the Lord—preaching at first only to Jews, but later to Gentiles also. "The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord." (Acts 11 : 21) As a result the church at Antioch in Syria was formed. (cf. Acts 13 : 1)

There is no doubt that to the New Testament writers, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were not only "the Lord's doing and marvellous in their eyes", but also the consummation of Old Testament prophecy, the climax of all God's wondrous works. For them the Old Testament history was a foreshadowing of this great redemptive act. This thought lies behind Stephen's apology and Paul's address in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch. God had (says the apostle) chosen their fathers, delivered them from Egypt

"with a high hand", raised up David "a man after His own heart", but he had also overthrown those who opposed His will and **now** God's promises were fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus. "The promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again." (Acts 13 : 32, 33) To those who believe, therefore, is the promised blessing, but to those who scoff or reject the good news a solemn warning : "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish" (Acts 13 : 41).

We may now look at this Psalm in a little more detail.

In vv. 6 to 9, the psalmist goes back to Abraham and to the great promises made to him. The Lord is a covenant-keeping God,

"and appointed the same unto Jacob for a law :
and to Israel for an everlasting covenant" (v. 10)

(See also Genesis 28 : 13–15 and 35 : 10–12)

Jacob is not, humanly speaking, an attractive character. He proved himself a schemer and a deceiver. A fellow human being might well count this a valid reason for breaking his word, but God is ever faithful :

"He hath been always mindful of His covenant", (v. 8)

God's covenant with Abraham is not only the first of His 'wondrous works' toward Israel, but our own blessing as christians can be traced back to it also. The promise in Genesis 12 : 3 is "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" and again in Genesis 22 : 18, "in thy seed

shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." We know from the Epistle to the Galatians that being a child of Abraham and an heir to the promise is not simply a matter of natural descent but one of spiritual or moral affinity, that is to exercise faith as Abraham did. "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." (Galatians 3 : 7) "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham". (3 : 9) "If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise". (3 : 29) (cf. Romans 4 : 2, "But for us also. . . if we believe.")

In vv. 12 to 15, the keeping power of God is discovered. Doubtless verse fifteen refers to the incident between Abraham and Abimelech recorded in Genesis 20. Abraham was not free from blame, but God's hand overruled. Later, (Genesis 26), Isaac made a similar error. Is God's concern for His people any less today, in spite of their mistakes and failures ?

Vv. 16 to 22 bring Joseph before us. Although sold to be a slave and his feet "hurt in fetters", he was God's man, sent before to provide deliverance in the time of famine.

"Then he called for a dearth upon
the land :
and destroyed all the provision
of bread.
He sent a man before them :
even Joseph. . ." (vv. 16, 17)

Without doubt, Joseph foreshadows the Lord Jesus in a remarkable way. Many parallels have been drawn ; he was loved of his father ; sent of his father ; sold for silver by his brethren ; falsely accused ; numbered amongst malefactors ; but ultimately exalted ; made supreme ruler to whom every knee had to bow. If the Old Testament gives us

thus the 'shadow', the New Testament gives us the 'substance' :—

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow".

(Philippians 2 : 9, 10)

Verses 23, 24 and 25 of the Psalm tell how Jacob and his sons and their families moved into Egypt and settled in what we should now call the Nile delta area and how their descendents prospered until "there arose up a new king. . . which knew not Joseph". (Exodus 1 : 8) Oppression and forced labour followed. The verses which follow in the Psalm (vv. 26–28) describe God's judgments in the land of Egypt and how He brought His people out of bondage.

"And brought out Israel from
among them. . .
With a mighty hand and
stretched-out arm."
(Psalm 136 : 11,12)

This is the great redemptive act of Old Testament history and thus constitutes probably the clearest picture of the 'redemption which is in Christ Jesus'. It was at the feast of Passover that Jesus died. "Christ our passover is slain for us". (1 Corinthians 5 : 7 margin) Peter writes of the 'sprinkling of the blood of Jesus' and of our being redeemed 'with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot'. (1 Peter 1 : 19) The Apostle John records that when the soldiers came to Jesus "they brake not his legs" in fulfilment of the scriptures (see John 19 : 33, 36, Exodus 12 : 46, Numbers 9 : 12). The essential point, however, is deliverance from bondage—Israel from the tyranny of an earthly ruler—the believer in this day from the

power of Satan. The 'strong man' has been bound and his house spoiled (Matthew 12:29). The Lord Jesus has annulled "him who has the might of death, that is, the devil; and. . . set free all those who through fear of death through the whole of their life were subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14, 15 N.T.)

"The LORD is my strength and song and he is become my salvation :

The LORD. . . hath triumphed gloriously : " (Exodus 15:2, 1)

We return to Psalm 105 at verse 36 :—

"He brought forth Israel with silver and gold : among their tribes not a man did stumble."

The Lord not only delivered His people, He cared for them and brought them through the wilderness into the promised land. (verses 39-44) In v. 39 reference is made to God's provision in the manna—"the bread of heaven". The manna symbolises "Christ once humbled here—God's treasured store". Our authority for this is our Lord's discourse recorded in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel. The people said, "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert", but Jesus said, "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven . . . I am the bread of life". (John 6:31-34) In practical terms we feed upon this 'bread' when we read and meditate faithfully upon the life of the Lord Jesus as portrayed in the four gospels. Without doubt Christ is to be found in all the scriptures, but the writer believes that the manna typifies particularly the Lord Jesus in His incarnation and humiliation.

The next verse (40) speaks of the

water which gushed out of the rock. 1 Corinthians 10:4 leaves us in no doubt as to the Rock: "and that Rock was Christ": and His death has opened to us the water of life. "For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall. . . lead them unto living fountains of waters". "And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely". (Revelation 7:17 and 22:17) Alternatively, we may think of the water as the Holy Spirit's refreshing power, "a well of water springing up into eternal life." (John 4:14)

The closing verses of the Psalm describe the people entering into their inheritance :—

"And gave them the lands of the nations : and they took the labours of the peoples in possession." (v. 43) We may think of the 'land' as representing our heavenly inheritance into which we shall some day enter.

"When to Canaan's long-loved dwelling
Love divine thy foot shall bring ;
There with shouts of triumph swelling,
Zion's songs in rest to sing."

Peter presents the inheritance as yet future—"an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you," (1 Peter 1:4). There is a sense, however, in which the Christian is already in Canaan, that is, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he is brought into a wonderful sphere of divine privilege. He is, here and now, blessed with "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). He is, of course, also in the 'wilderness'—in short we would suggest that if 'Canaan' represents our **privileges,**

the wilderness corresponds to our **responsibilities**. Both aspects bring in the possibility of failure on our part. Both should nevertheless be a source of encouragement to the believer. Do we really possess our possessions? (see Obadiah 17)

The close of the Psalm also brings before us the purpose behind God's revelation of Himself, namely, to secure for Himself a people and for His pleasure—a people whom He can acknowledge as His own in a special sense and who will, in turn, acknowledge Him as their God.

“And he brought forth his people
with joy :
and his chosen ones with
gladness. . .
That they might keep his
statutes :
and observe his laws.”
(vv. 42, 44)

The Old Testament is also a record of human failure : Israel as a nation failed to respond to the divine call, though there was always the faithful remnant who “called on the Name of the Lord.” Human failure has not altered God's purpose. Isaiah anticipates this :— “The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces ; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth : for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God ; we have waited for him, and he will save us”. (Isaiah 25 : 8, 9)

Many New Testament passages

indicate what God has done in the Person of His Son, to secure by redemption a people for Himself. No passage speaks more plainly on this subject than Titus 2 : 14 :— “Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a **peculiar people** (a people of his own—R.S.V.) zealous of good works.”

The culmination of God's plan is recorded in the last book of the New Testament :—

“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them and be their God.” (Revelation 21 : 3)

* * *

We would conclude as we began. God's revelation is not in the form of a series of abstract propositions, but a record of His ‘wondrous works’ in history to this end—to redeem from iniquity and purify a special people for Himself. “The Christian's God does not consist merely of a God who is the author of mathematical truths and the order of the elements. That is the portion of the heathen and Epicureans. . . The God of the Christians is a God of love and consolation : he is a God who fills the soul and heart of those whom he possesses. . . who makes them incapable of having any other end but him.” (Pascal's *Pensees*)

“Praise ye the Lord.”



5. REVIEW AND SUGGESTIONS

“They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” (Acts 17 : 11)

“Meditate upon these things ; give thyself wholly to them ; that thy profiting may appear to all.” (1 Timothy 4 : 15)

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only.” (James 1 : 22).

REVIEWING the ground covered in this series of papers, and attempting to summarize it in a general way, two kinds of observation may be made.

First, the breadth of the field of enquiry which is open to us, and the wealth of its contents, are clear. It is a marvel that we should be allowed, and indeed enabled, to enter into it at all. Here is knowledge and instruction of a unique quality, taking its character from its Source. Here is a fountain of divine revelation and truth, quite beyond valuation, imperishable in its nature and in its effects. To make progress under this tuition is to feel how profound it all is, and to sense how much uncovered ground still lies ahead. Yet to be involved in it at all, with any appreciation, is to want to go on. The Psalmist had a good sense of the value and of the attractiveness of God's written revelation as he knew it : “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned : and in keeping of them there is great reward.” (Psalm 19 : 9-11) Today, with the whole word of God available, we must certainly re-affirm his words and aim to capture again the spirit of them. What lies open to us is no less than growth in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1 : 10), with an increasing reflection of that knowledge in our lives. We cannot

esteem our opportunities too highly. With all our getting, let us get this kind of understanding (Proverbs 4 : 7). Alongside this, other things are secondary, though not necessarily to be neglected.

Our second kind of observation is as follows. In approaching such a limitless and profitable field of occupation, suitable characteristics on our part will be needed. It will hardly be right, for instance, to treat this as a semi-serious undertaking, to be done in desultory fashion. The right approach will have all the marks of respect for the material in hand. It will be prayerful and dependent ; unhurried, but also diligent. It will be disciplined, systematic and cautious. It will readily accept what is clear ; it will not shirk the responsibility of careful personal judgments, when these are needed. It will be first-hand in its weighing of passages as they come to be considered. By these means the participant will be brought into immediate personal contact with the Author of the message he receives, to respond to **Him** in faith and obedience. Subsidiary authorities, however eminent, will be checked against direct reading of the Bible, to stand or fall by that test. The Bereans weighed even Paul's words against scripture before accepting them, and were in no sense at fault in that ! A suitable approach must surely be a wide-awake one, in which a person ultimately becomes deeply involved. This activity will become part of his life ; he will be

constantly mulling over the subject-matter he is currently engaged with. In learning to sit at the feet of his Master and Lord, the attitudes of humble wonder, ready obedience, and forgetfulness of self, should come to the fore. His whole life will be affected as his Christian character develops ; and, almost unconsciously, his manner of life will impress and help onlookers.

Probably most readers, like the writer, will feel their shortcomings in these directions. But it seems unquestionable that these responses to the word of God would be the right ones. May our Lord so move us by His love, and in the light of all that He has revealed, that half-heartedness may disappear. In studying the scriptures and in responding to Him through their message, may we pursue more consistently a course which will please Him.

Practical Suggestions

We conclude with some suggestions of a practical nature which may help towards a profitable and personal reading of the word of God. It is self-evident that some of these suggestions will be valuable if followed. Others are included since the writer has found them helpful, though it may well be that these particular methods will not suit everyone. We do not wish to recommend any inflexible scheme ; indeed it seems important that individuals should have their own distinctive and purposeful ways of approaching the scriptures.

(1) **Regularity** and **alertness** in personal searching of the scriptures are highly desirable. Note the words "daily" and "with all readiness of mind" in the verse quoted at the head of this paper. To follow our bible-study only "if time permits", or to do it when we are too tired to concentrate seems inappropriate. More than once in the gospels we

find disciples asleep when critical things were afoot ; but "when they were awake, they saw his glory" (Luke 9 : 32, and see also 22 : 46). It seems appropriate to choose a wakeful time to spend with the scriptures. Let us on each occasion seek urgently to be in touch with our Lord, to hear His voice, to dwell on His glories and graces, and to be moved and stimulated by our communion with Him.

(2) The **time** we can devote to this activity will need consideration. Individuals will be in different situations here. Busy people, with little time to spare, may have to ask themselves whether all else that they do is of greater importance than this. Some limit on other activities may be part of the price to be paid : this will test the quality of our profession that our Lord's claim upon our lives is the cardinal one. In the lives of many ordinary Christian people, however, a good deal of "empty" time still exists. These are days when, even for the hard-working, leisure is on the increase. More time is available than one easily admits ! Perhaps if we were to analyse our usage of time over a period, and set a fair value on our various activities, economising to the extent of finding an extra hour each day would present little difficulty. Using that time to be absorbed with the scriptures, and with the Lord, might soon find us feeling how short is a single hour, and looking for more. Good habits in these matters, once established, are not difficult to sustain ; but to start them requires decision and persistence.

(3) **Broad reading**, within the bible, to help to build up general awareness of its contents, is valuable. A ready-made scheme is better than none at all, and, if this is preferred, one of the bible-reading schemes which are available can be followed.

The aim should be to cover the whole bible in a balanced way, over some considerable time. The notes which accompany such readings are frequently helpful and illuminating. These, however, should always be read with discernment. Though this kind of bible reading is necessarily rather cursory, it should not be allowed to sink into a routine ; importance should be placed on the immediate impressions and lessons which are received directly from the scriptural passages. The R.S.V. may be found suitable for extensive reading of this kind ; it combines reasonable fluency and intelligibility with a closeness to the original which is better than most other versions. The A.V. has some impressive passages and it would certainly be unwise to abandon it completely : only those who have been conditioned to it for long periods could imagine that its language is immediately highly meaningful to normal people, however. Modern translations which go all out for fluency are often pleasant to read, but extreme care is needed in building up a detailed understanding from what they say. Faithfulness to the original is not usually their strong point.

(4) **More concentrated study**, focussing upon some sections in a more intensive way, ought certainly to be pursued to some extent. Serious bible-students may well give the larger fraction of their available time to this. Depth of study will vary with individuals, and with the material under consideration. As a suggestion, an approach devoting at least a week (of daily sessions) to a chapter would allow a fair opportunity of going into that chapter in some detail. This might be a reasonable rate of coverage of most New Testament chapters as a first attempt. For this kind of study it is especially important to avoid com-

mentaries and expositions in the early stages, and to approach the bible directly for oneself. Aim **first** to get the gist of the teaching, and to formulate it in one's own terms ; **then** look at some of the more detailed expressions, trying (from the text) to obtain some feeling for what they may mean. Collect problems which arise in thinking over these matters, and do not be unhappy if some of these have to be left unresolved, perhaps for a very long time. An approach which does not raise questions is probably superficial, and not a very thoughtful one. **Later**, and only after a fair period of dwelling on the passage and living with its contents, turn to other commentators to see what they have to say : but again, bear in mind that no human commentator has the final word. The writer has always found that **books which elucidate the text** (i.e. those which help towards a more firm grasp of the actual words of scripture) are the most valuable of the books which can be appealed to. At the appropriate stage, it is good to read as many of these as possible in relation to the current passage. Some new slants on the meaning of some of the problematic phrases are sure to emerge. Leave **to the last** books which seem to tell one how the passage is to be understood in a rather inflexible way. To get a hold of these first can stultify an original and direct engagement with the scriptures.

(5) **Writing**, while studying, is important. A working note-book can be used for recording daily progress, jotting down impressions, queries, lines worth pursuing, etc., arising from what has been under consideration. From time to time a review and summary of progress is worth attempting. Nothing helps better, in consolidating understanding of a piece of work recently covered, than

an attempt to outline one's findings in a succinct and coherent way. Apart from regular personal bible reading most people who read periodicals like "Scripture Truth" are also often listening to talks on biblical matters, attending group bible-studies, and reading books and other articles on scriptural subjects. To gain the most from such opportunities, a record can be kept of points gathered up by these means: perhaps a further note-book should be kept on hand for this. Many good things are forgotten simply through failure to note them down at the time. One way of avoiding this is to keep handy a few blank filing cards in one's bible, and to jot worthwhile things down on these. Periodically the material so accumulated can be sorted out. Bible **marking** is also worthwhile. Particularly in extensive bible-reading, valuable impressions are often gained which are best picked out by underlining a phrase, or a sequence of words, or an idea which occurs repeatedly. As an example, going through the fourth gospel and simply underlining every reference to Christ as the One **sent** (by the Father) into the world, will show how this is a prominent idea in the whole gospel. Almost as frequent is the appearance of the thought of Christ as **coming forth** into the world, of His own initiative and volition. This is complementary to the other idea, and both are important. A bible marked in this way, as the exercise is performed, has a permanent record of important teaching noticed and gained. In these days of felt-tipped pens (of many colours) life is made easy for such a profitable activity. New points are noticed, and can be singled out in this way, each time the pages are scanned. A not-too-expensive bible will last a few years

before it becomes over-saturated with markings of this kind!

(6) A few **things to avoid** are now suggested in a tentative way. Avoid what is non-straightforward, for a very long time at least. Avoid making a show of one's knowledge, bearing in mind that a genuine bible-student will be a humble person. One can go a long way indeed without knowledge of Greek or Hebrew. Except for those few who have opportunities to become really expert in these languages, it may be better for others not to study them at all, or else to remain reticent (and perhaps even silent) about any amateur excursions they may make into these fields. The collection of biblical statistics is a practice which, on the whole, is of doubtful benefit and probably better left alone. The practice of stringing together verses from a variety of contexts, on the basis of accidental associations of words, is often questionable as a constructive activity. In bible study, the comparison of one type of passage with another (Romans with Ephesians, for instance) is no doubt valuable. It is certainly important to supplement the teaching found in one place with that which is given in others. But it is also true that to read a passage and fail to concentrate entirely upon it has its losses. For much of the time it is good to be content with straight passages and to avoid making too many cross-references. Readers will be familiar with bible expositors who read one passage and make most of their comments on others. To be thinking about too many passages at once makes for complexity.

(7) Finally, **watchfulness** is continually needed lest the whole activity takes on the character of a mere mental and systematic exercise. We must constantly take stock to see

whether this is happening. Let us not fail to express to our Lord our realisation that study is not an end in itself. Let us treat it as a means of knowing Him, of sensing His love, of learning His mind, and of finding guidance and strength to fulfil it in

our lives. Let us be prayerful always that, by this means, God will work within us those attitudes and responses which will please Him, and may our obedience to His word be entirely in correspondence with such a prayer.

FROM THE EDITORS NOTE BOOK

PRAYERS IN THE EPISTLES

. . . if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. (Romans 1 : 10)

. . . for Israel, that they might be saved. (Romans 10 : 1)

. . . that I may be delivered from them which do not believe in Judaea, and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints : that I may come unto you with joy by the will of God and with you may be refreshed. (Romans 15 : 31, 32)

. . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him : the eyes of your understanding being enlightened : that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe . . . (Ephesians 1 : 17-19)

. . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man ; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by

faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. (Ephesians 3 : 16-21)

. . . that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment ; that ye may approve things that are excellent ; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1 : 9-11)

. . . that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God ; strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness ; giving thanks unto the Father. . . (Colossians 1 : 9-12)

EXCEEDING

J. STODDART

Ephesians 1 : 19, 2 : 7 and 3 : 20.

AN interesting and profitable study of the New Testament can be found in observing the characteristic words and expressions employed by various writers. It may be rightly argued that such expressions vary from one translation to another and therefore identity is difficult to establish, if not impossible. In no case, however, is the meaning or force of the word or phrase incompatible with its occurrence in the Authorised Version which will, therefore, be used for the purpose of this paper.

It is beyond the scope and intention of our present study to cover in detail all such characteristic words, but to lay a basis for the above assertion, let us recall the familiar repetition in Mark's Gospel of the words, 'straightway' and 'immediately' in almost every chapter. The striking monosyllabic words, 'life,' 'light' and 'love' are surely of the very essence of John's writings. The sustained theme of 'joy' and 'rejoicing' is the most well-known key to the Epistle to the Philippians, while the word 'better' is the significantly recurring adjective throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews. Other examples will doubtless suggest themselves to lovers of the Word.

The repeated use of the word, 'exceeding' in the Epistle to the Ephesians will suffice for our present consideration, and will, we trust, provide an edifying study of the kind suggested. The fact that this epistle presents Christian truth at its highest level is well enough established. Degrees of quality in our English language are known as 'good', 'better' or 'best' and are thus

positive, comparative or superlative. It would thus surely be right to say that Ephesians is an epistle of **superlative** truth. The language employed by the inspired apostle in the doctrinal part of his letter therefore is elevated and descriptive in a very marked degree. Language itself is almost exhausted to convey the greatness of the truth he would communicate. This is not surprising when we consider the subject as that which was in the mind and purpose of God before the foundation of the world. Other epistles which deal with deflections from Christian truth and practice do not demand the wealth of expression found here.

In the apostle's prayer in ch. 1 : 16-23 he desires that we should know, among other things, "what is the **exceeding** greatness of God's power to usward who believe. . . ." Perhaps more is known to-day than ever before of the greatness of His creatorial power, and the immense resources of that power vested in the elements discovered and harnessed by man. But not in that vast area of search and research is the exceeding greatness of God's power to be learned. Physical power so eagerly sought after by man is derived from that in which it is already inherent or latent. No other source of power comes within the ambit of human knowledge. Let us notice, therefore, the contrast between this and the exceeding greatness of God's power. It is said to be "according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. . . ." Thus it is seen to be exercised in the sphere of death, where man is completely powerless, and displayed in

raising One from that lowest of all conditions to the very highest pinnacle of eminence and authority. Here is the superlative exhibition of Divine power and the meaning of its "exceeding greatness." Not even in the 70's with its vast and much boasted acquisition of power (principally of destructive character) is there anything that can equal—let alone exceed—power of this magnitude. And, beloved, this is the power of God which is "to us-ward who believe." What encouragement this is for us who feel our weakness in this boastful world of man's power.

Figures of astronomical value are familiar to us in these days when computers churn out assessments of national and international wealth. Sometimes these completely boggle the imagination of the ordinary person. Need the Christian adopt an attitude of inferiority complex in such a world? Indeed not, if we understand the meaning of Ephesians 2:7, for here again the writer resorts to the use of the word 'exceeding' to indicate something which has no rival in its immensity. The expression is, "the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." Our involvement in this is unmistakable for this is addressed to those "who were dead in trespasses and sins." But God, acting in the compulsion of His own great love, quickens us together with Christ, and makes us "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." What enrichment at the highest human level can compare with this? David desired to "show the kindness of God" to his erstwhile foes and was glad to find a fitting subject for it in Saul's grandson Mephibosheth, lame on his feet from a fall. He did this to perpetuate and honour the memory of Jonathan, and here we

have a delightful picture of that exceeding kindness that owes nothing to human inspiration. But even this is totally eclipsed by the facts of Ephesians 2, in which the faint picture of 2 Samuel 9 fades before the full-orbed display of the "exceeding riches of God's grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." The manifestation of this complete spectacle to the universe will, of course, require the "ages to come," a time when the finished work of grace in every saint of God will ultimate in glory, for the eternal honour of God's Son. This surely is superlative kindness.

A superb doxology terminates the apostle's second prayer of this epistle in ch. 3:20-21. The very weight of the truth he communicates rouses him to prayer and from prayer to praise. There is that which is far beyond asking or thinking power. Clearly we should ask and think a great deal more than we do, but what if God's ability to answer were limited to this! The apostle ascribes to Him that He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." Grammarians might despise the use of an adjective to qualify an adverb as we have here; human language reaches its limits and the niceties of grammar can scarcely be maintained. But no idle use of words can be alleged in these inspired sentences, for the Spirit Himself indites them to enlarge and elevate our appreciation of what God has done, is doing and will yet do for His Own glory. The exceeding abundance of His ability to act and answer for our blessing and His glory may well encourage our hearts in the poverty of their petitions. And we may well say with the apostle, "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout

all ages, world without end. Amen.”

To summarise the recurring phrases reviewed, we have—

The **exceeding** greatness of God's power. Ephesians 1 : 19

The **exceeding** riches of His grace. Ephesians 2 : 7

The **exceeding** abundance of His ability to surpass all we ask or

think. Ephesians 3 : 20.

May these considerations assure our hearts that we have infinitely more in our resources than this world's most cherished expansionist ambitions. Thus and thus only shall our worship, walk and witness reflect the superlative quality of that grace that has saved us.

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

J. N. DARBY

adapted by AUBREY F. HOWE

3. THE FIRST RESURRECTION

Introduction

THE resurrection of Christ from among the dead was the great fact that demonstrated Him to be the Son of God (Romans 1 : 4) and is a vital truth of the gospel, by which we are saved, and in 1 Corinthians 15 : 20 we are taught that in this, Christ was “the firstfruits”. The first resurrection will be victoriously completed when all that are Christ's will be raised at His coming (1 Corinthians 15 : 23). The rest of the dead will have no part in this, the first resurrection, and will remain in their graves until they are raised for the judgment of the great white throne about a thousand years later. (Revelation 20 : 5) The distinction as far as the Church is concerned is made in us even now by our union with Christ risen and the Holy Spirit's sealing. This is a brief indication of the subject of this lecture.

The Resurrection of Christ

The resurrection of Christ was the foundation of the preaching of the apostles. We can see this in what Peter said when he spoke of the need for some one to take the place of Judas. He said the new apostle must be one of those who had companied with them all the time the Lord Jesus had been amongst them from the baptism of John until the

ascension, because such a man was needed (to quote Peter's words) “to be a witness with us of His resurrection.” (Acts 1 : 22).

In the following chapter, in Peter's first preaching, he announced, “This Jesus hath God raised up, thereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2 : 32). Not long afterwards, in his next recorded address, he says, “Ye killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead ; whereof we are witnesses”. (Acts 3 : 15). The preaching was greatly blessed, but also aroused opposition, particularly among the Sadducees, who did not fail to notice the apostles' great theme and were “grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4 : 2). As the Pharisees had been the greatest enemies of the Lord Jesus when he had been on earth (i.e. the falsely righteous ones opposed the truly Righteous One) so also after His death Satan stirred up the Sadducees, who according to Acts 23 : 8 held that there was no resurrection. But the attack failed and “with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4 : 33). Peter preached to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his friends the same fundamental truth (Acts 10 : 40), Paul

preached it at Antioch-in-Pisidia in the Jewish synagogue, (Acts 13:30), and again to the learned Gentiles of Athens (Acts 17:31). Years later, in the presence of the high priest and the Jewish council at Jerusalem he maintained that the real reason for his being accused was for his preaching of the resurrection (Acts 23:6). Paul was passed on to the Governor Felix, who heard for himself the same doctrine (Acts 24:15) as did his successor Festus, who mentioned in his report to King Agrippa that a special point of controversy with the Jews concerned a certain Jesus, who had died, but whom Paul affirmed to be alive (Acts 25:19). King Agrippa decided to hear for himself and in the presence of many people of worldly distinction Paul in his testimony gave special prominence to resurrection as a general truth (Acts 26:8) and to the resurrection of Christ in particular (Verse 23).

Apart from these historical references in the book of the Acts we can also find the same prominence given to the resurrection in the Gospels and Epistles, and examples of this will be given when we consider details.

The Saints prepared for resurrection now

The resurrection of the Church is not a matter which is to be brought up for consideration at some appropriate date in the future, it is a consequence of its union by the Holy Spirit with Christ, Who is Himself already risen from the dead. This truth is expressed in such a verse as Colossians 2:12 where the "brethren in Christ" to whom the epistle was addressed are described as "buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, Who hath raised Him

from the dead." The resurrection of the Church is not a resurrection whose object is judgment, but simply the consequence of its union with Christ, Who has been judged in its stead. We shall be raised, not only because He will call us from the grave, but because we are one with Him and participate in His resurrection. The same fact is expressed in Ephesians 1:18 etc. and 2:4-6.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the individual believer is what characterises our position before God, and it is on account of the Holy Spirit also that the principle of the resurrection of the Church is quite different from the resurrection of the wicked. Romans 8:11 tells us that "if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you."

Resurrection applies to the body

Every Christian believes without doubt in the immortality of the soul, but this may be a suitable place to say that although it is recognised in Scripture and frequently implied there, it is not brought forward as a leading subject of gospel preaching. (Compare in our last article the way in which the joy of the departed soul awaiting Christ's second coming, although true, is not made the prominent object of our hope.) On the other hand, we have noticed the great prominence given to the doctrine of resurrection, and suggest the following considerations. An unconverted philosopher could believe after a fashion in the immortality of the soul, and might, in enlarging on it, elevate his own importance, exalt himself. There is something in the idea which can go along with the pride of natural man. But to think of resurrection—of

dust raised again—of a living and glorious being made out of it—this is a glory which belongs only to God, a work of which God alone is capable. The Word of God never speaks of glorified souls, but of glorified bodies. If a body reduced to dust can be reconstituted by God into a living and glorified man, then nothing is beyond His power.

The dead not all raised together

All who have died will be raised, and an examination of some revealing passages of Scripture on this subject will help us to see that all will not rise at the same time. Looking first at Mark 9:9, 10 we see that Peter, James and John were greatly puzzled, not by the Lord's reference to resurrection, which they were well acquainted with as orthodox Jews but because He with His unquestioned authority had spoken of resurrection "from among the dead", an exercise of divine power in the sphere of death which could discriminate between one and another. This phraseology, "from among the dead," is also used elsewhere and is always intended to convey the thought of discrimination between those raised and those left in the grave until later. Secondly, in Philippians 3:10, 11 Paul writes of the great object to which his life was dedicated, namely "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead." Why should Paul write in this way if all the dead are to rise at the same time and on the same principle? The truth is that Paul had before his eyes that resurrection which is elsewhere called "the first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5), and "the resurrection of the just" (Luke

14:14). The Authorised Version does not use the words "from among the dead" but these words give the proper sense. Very evidently this resurrection is an event which concerns exclusively the redeemed, who are being encouraged by this passage to take up for themselves the Apostle's words in verse 14, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

There is also a very significant expression in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 where we are told that "the dead in Christ" shall rise first at the time of the Lord's second coming. Without going into the general teaching of this passage, is it not clear that the dead are not regarded as an unsorted mass, but on the contrary there is even now a distinction which makes it possible for the redeemed amongst them to be known and recognised by the Saviour as His own, so that these redeemed ones may be "raised first"?

The subject of resurrection is taken up in more detail in 1 Corinthians 15 where the order is clearly shown—"Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (verse 23). The resurrection of Christ was clearly "from among the dead" and the expression "firstfruits" links His resurrection with that of His own, to take place at His second coming. This event will introduce His glorious kingdom, a time when all enemies will be subdued and "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (verse 26). If we see this last act of power as being the same as that described in the words, "death and hell (hades) were cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14) it is plain that Scripture reveals to us the order of resurrection in time as

follows. First, the resurrection of Christ an accomplished fact, then at His second coming all His own who are in the graves will be raised (thus completing "the first resurrection" or "the resurrection of the just") and lastly the resurrection of the wicked as mentioned above. When death is destroyed, death must release all its victims not already raised by God's power and so all will finally be raised from the dead.

The most comprehensive passage on this subject is in our Lord's discourse recorded in John 5 : 25-29 where we read that the Son of God has authority in the present age to give life and uses that authority. He also has authority to execute judgment. We read further that when he shall call for all that are in their graves to come forth there will be two characters of resurrection, characters which correspond to the two kinds of authority invested in the Son of God namely the communication of life and the execution of judgment. The passage reads as follows: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (rather "judgment", which is earlier said to be committed to the Son).

Two activities of Christ are here presented as attributes of His glory; one, to make alive; the other, to

judge. In one he gives life to those whom He will, and in the other all judgment is entrusted to Him, in order that all, even the wicked, should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. Jesus has been shamefully treated here below; God the Father takes care that His claims shall be recognised: Jesus gives life to whom He will—to their souls first, and then to their bodies. These glorify Him willingly. As to the wicked, the way of compelling them to recognise the rights of Jesus, is to judge them; and this judgment is given into the hands of Jesus. In the work of quickening, the Father and Son act together, because those to whom life is given are put into communion with the Father and the Son. But as to judgment, the Father judges no man, because it is not the Father that has been wronged, but the Son. The wicked will own Jesus Christ in spite of themselves when they are judged. At what period of time will these things be accomplished? For the wicked, at the time of the last judgment, before the great white throne; for the just, the children of God, it will be when their bodies shall participate in the life already communicated to their souls (the life of Christ Himself), at the resurrection of the just. The resurrection for these is not a resurrection of judgment, but simply, to repeat it again, the exercise, towards the bodies of God's children, of that quickening power of Jesus, in which He has already worked upon their souls, and which, in God's good time, shall work upon their bodies. "They that have done good unto the resurrection of Life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment."

But the objection is made that as Jesus said (verse 28), "The hour is

coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice", then the wicked and the just will evidently rise together. To answer that we would point to the use of the word "hour" in verse 25 where it is said, "the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." The word "hour" includes here all the space of time which has elapsed since the Son of God spoke those words. The dead heard the voice of the Son of God during the time He was living on earth and they have been hearing it for more than nineteen centuries. The hour for giving life to the soul has therefore already lasted more than nineteen centuries. Another hour is coming for the resurrection and the word has the same sense in the two passages. That is to say, there is a particular period of time during which souls are quickened and there will also be a particular period of time during which bodies shall be raised. We shall be raised in our bodies because we are already quickened in our souls. The resurrection is the crowning of the whole work, because we are children of God, because the

Spirit dwells in us, because (as far as our souls are concerned) we are already risen with Christ.

Summary

In previous articles we have written of Christ, the Heir of all things ; of the Church as co-heir with Him ; and of the coming of Christ to reign for a thousand years. We have now also seen that the Church will participate in His coming as the subject of the first resurrection, an event which we must not confuse with the day of the resurrection of the unjust or the judgment before the great white throne, which will not take place until the end of the millennium. It is the resurrection of Christ, the last Adam, which has introduced us even now (as partaking of eternal life) into the new creation of which He is the head and the glory, and which will introduce us into it in fact when He comes as the risen man. May this truth of the resurrection of the Church become bound up in our minds with all the precious truths of our salvation centred in Christ, so that in spirit, soul and body we may be preserved blameless unto His coming.

* * *

11. THE NET CAST INTO THE SEA

WE have already mentioned the obvious fact that this parable is, on the surface, closely parallel with that of the Tares. If they were intended by the Lord to describe in parallel the same preaching of the Word, then the existence of the parable of the Net, and its separation at the end of the series, would indeed be difficult to understand. Here again the proposals of F. W. Grant have been found so illuminating, that we shall take them as the basis of our explanation. In this last parable "we find, not another aspect of the divine dealings with the mingled crop in the field of Christendom, but a new acting, whether in grace or judgment, after the merchant man has possessed himself of his pearl, or in other words, after the saints of the past and present time are caught up to Christ." There are at least two good reasons for taking this view: the shortness of the operation of casting and drawing in the net, and the fact that Scripture undoubtedly describes a separate evangelisation belonging explicitly to the end of the age.

If we compare the parables of the Tares and the Net, we have to reckon with the fact that the Palestinian harvest was four or five months after the sowing time. It could very well be that the sowers and the reapers were different persons. In fact, in the parable they were different persons. In contrast with this, the whole action of the casting and drawing in of the net would cover only a few hours, and normally the same persons would carry out the whole operation. These facts, taken together with the relative positions of the two parables in the whole series, are con-

sistent with the view that the parable of the Tares describes the preaching of the word which was begun by the Lord, and is still continuing, while the parable of the Net reveals an evangelisation to be begun and completed at the end of the age.

The clearest prophecy of a gospel to be preached after the present preaching of the gospel of the grace of God is completed, is given by the Lord and recorded in Matthew 24 : 14. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations ; and then shall the end come." A closely related prophecy is found in Revelation 14 : 6 ; "And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." Remembering that in the parable the net is cast into the sea, it is also interesting to notice that in the previous chapter, (Revelation 13 : 1), the sea is symbolic of the mass of peoples, nations, and tongues out of which the first beast arises. Likewise in Luke 21 : 25, 26, ("the sea and the waves roaring ; men's hearts failing them for fear"), the sea is again used as a symbol of the mass of mankind at the end of the age.

Having thus confirmed good reasons for accepting the parable of the Net as giving the first hint of the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom at the end of the age, as the parable is found at the end of the series, reflection on it leads me to find the central interest in v. 48, which describes, in the parable as distinct from the interpretation in

v. 49, the action of the fishermen dealing with the full net after drawing it to the shore. The centre of their interest was "the good." They gathered the good into vessels, and displayed little concern with the bad. The words employed indicate that they were bad in the sense of rotten or worthless, and that the good were so in the sense of beautiful or precious. It is this thought especially which explains the position of the parable grouped with those of the Treasure and the Pearl. The casting of the net produced and garnered something desirable and precious. In this third sphere of action also there is seen something precious in the sight of the Lord, and therefore of real concern to the scribe instructed into the Kingdom of heaven. As always, the explanation found in v. 49 goes beyond what is in the parable, and presents events outside the period of the Kingdom of heaven. When the time of the execution of judgment comes, the angels are occupied with the wicked, and they are cast into the furnace.

Before leaving the seven parables of Matthew 13, it will be helpful to review comprehensively what is given to the disciples inside the house, when contrasted with those recounted to the crowds outside. This inside information includes, first, the interpretation of the parable of the Tares, in contrast with the parable itself, which follows the parable of the Sower. The discourse uttered 'within', then proceeds to the three parables of the Treasure, the Pearl and the Net. We note this superficially strange splitting of the **explanation** of the parable of the tares from the parable itself, and the linking together of this explanation with the three parables of the beautiful and the precious. Very special importance and interest are seen to belong to the additional light

the Lord's own disciples needed to understand the full meaning of the parable of the Tares. Its consequences, far beyond what could be seen by those living during the period of the Kingdom of heaven, are linked with the revelation of what was to be in all this for the heart of the Lord Himself by being given inside the house.

The parable of the Tares had ended (v. 30), with the tares gathered together into bundles ready for destruction, and the wheat hidden within the barn. This fairly clearly means the saints removed to heaven, and the field of Christendom containing only the evil to be destroyed. The explanation given inside the house (v. 37), resumes the story at this point and supplies a great deal of information which the disciples would require to enable them to understand how His kingdom would be cleared of all that offends, and how the righteous will be manifested in glory. These events will take place after the Lord has risen up and put an end to the mixed condition of Christendom now seen by the world. In and through these events the Kingdom of heaven is seen to issue in the Kingdom of the Son of Man on earth and the Kingdom of the Father in heaven.

Perhaps the persons and the classes who will compose these future forms of the Kingdom are indicated in more detail in the three parables of the beautiful and the precious to the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 10:32 Scripture presents a threefold division of mankind during the present period: "the Jews, the Nations, and the Church of God." Surely there will be something for the Lord out of each of these three sections of the human race. The view of the parables given in this paper supplies an answer to this. In

the Treasure and the Pearl and the Precious taken out of the sea of all nations after the pearl is removed, the Lord is exulting over the

thought of the fulness and extent of the way "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

THE HONOUR OF HIS NAME

A. H. STORRIE

OF all our Lord's various names and titles, perhaps the best known and most used is that of Jesus. Alas, these names and titles are only too often employed by speakers and writers in an haphazard and careless manner. This is particularly so in regard to the name given to our Lord in His humanity, the name of Jesus. Nevertheless such is the appropriate name to employ in certain connections. Like Himself, the name of Jesus came from heaven (Matthew 1:18-25). The Holy Spirit, needless to say, always has some definite intention in His use of our Lord's names. For instance, we raise the question, why, in the first few verses of 1st Corinthians does our Lord's full name and title occur several times? The epistle itself supplies the answer to this question, for there was much to correct in the Corinthian assembly; therefore the apostle brings to bear on the carnal and disorderly Corinthians the **authority** of the Lord Jesus Christ by giving Him His full name and titles.

Let us now turn to what is known as the Epistle to the Hebrews—for Hebrews is not an epistle in the usual sense of the term; it is rather the first, indeed the **only specimen** of teaching so called in the New Testament. And like a true teacher, the writer keeps himself out of sight; not even his name appears. In Hebrews Jesus is the Apostle as well as the High Priest of our confession (chap. 3:1), and under the name which He took in

manhood: Jesus, He is presented again and again. Hebrews is unique in that it gives the divine application of the Old Testament Scriptures. God Himself addresses His own; and the writer would show the Hebrew believers the infinite dignity of the Messiah.

Let us now consider the occurrences of the precious name of Jesus in Hebrews.

(1) "We see Jesus" (2:9). The subject from v. 5-8 is "the world to come," the millennial day, when, according to Psalm 8, our Lord's name will be excellent in all the earth, and everything be subject to Him as the Son of Man. This we do not see as yet, but "we see JESUS. . . crowned with glory and honour. . . ." the latter words being descriptive of the garments of glory and beauty for Aaron and his sons' priestly robes. (Exodus 28:1-2).

(2) "Wherefore, Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Jesus." (Hebrews 3:1. N.T.). Happy contemplation! The word apostle, meaning "sent" takes our thoughts to the Gospel of John where our Lord so often speaks of His being sent of the Father.

(3) "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. . ." (Hebrews 4:14). He alone can be designated as our **great** high priest. Yet He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities, having as a man

been tempted in all points as we are, sin apart. Thus may we all boldly approach the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace for timely help.

(4) 6 : 20. What encouragement there is for the true believer in this chapter from v. 9 to the end : strong consolation for those who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us within the veil, for there our forerunner has for us entered, even JESUS, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

(5) 7 : 22. “. . . by so much JESUS became surety of a better covenant.” This chapter shows the superiority of the Melchisedec priesthood over that of Aaron as to **order**. According to Psalm 110 the exercise of the former awaits the millennial day when the Lord will reign over all the earth as King of Righteousness and King of Peace. But Jesus is already the “surety of a better covenant” than that under law. The present exercise of our Lord’s priesthood answers to the pattern of Aaron, although heavenly.

(6) Here the worshippers reach what is perhaps the highest height of blessedness in Hebrews : boldness by the blood of Jesus to enter the holiest of all, the very presence of God. Under the old economy, as is well known, the holiest contained the Ark in all its grandeur and symbolical blessedness. There we are not to be silent, but are to offer the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name (Hebrews 13 : 15).

(7) 12 : 2. “. . . looking steadfastly on Jesus, the leader and completer of faith. . . .” A race demands certain conditions if it is to be won. Every hindrance must be set aside and the runner’s eye must be set on the goal. The form of the Greek word for “looking” employed here,

is found nowhere else in the New Testament : “It has the force of looking away from other things and fixing the eye exclusively on one” (Note in the Darby N.T.). The looker is enraptured and spellbound with what he sees, and has eyes for naught else but JESUS.

(8) 12 : 24. “Ye are come. . . to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant. . . .” In this passage Zion is contrasted with mount Sinai—grace contrasted with law, for Zion is the highest point of grace in the Old Testament. Then the chain of blessedness here extended, is complete, for we have come to Jesus and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

(9) 13 : 12. He suffered without the gate ! Such was the terrible character of sin that the very sacrifice for it had to be burned without the camp. He who knew no sin was made sin for us ! But, oh, the value of his redeeming and sanctifying blood !—placed upon the mercy seat within the veil ! Well may we be exhorted to bear His reproach, also to render our grateful thanks to God ; nor let us fail to do good to others for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

We know, too, from Philippians 2 : 6–11 that the name of Jesus is to be universally honoured. In virtue of His having :

“Come from Godhead’s fullest glory,

Down to Calv’ry’s depth of woe,” God has highly exalted Him and has given Him the name that is above every name. For at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and all beings celestial, terrestrial and infernal shall confess His lordship to the glory of God the Father.

Well might the psalmist sing of “The honour of His name !” (Psalm 66 : 2).

4. THE PROGRESS OF EVIL

(J. N. Darby thought fit to include in his lectures three—numbers V, VI and VII—dealing with the progress, characters and judgment of evil. They were evidently intended to combat the prevailing view that the preaching of the gospel would be the means of victory over evil, but they contain much that is extremely interesting on the subject of the political developments foreseen by the lecturer on the basis of his original study of Scripture. Although the lectures bear the date 1840, remarks on the subject of the establishment of the hereditary Egyptian kingdom under Mehemet Ali in 1841 indicate a date not earlier than 1845 for at least part of the lectures. Mehemet's dynasty lasted until 1952, when the monarchy was replaced by Nasser's presidency of a much more independent Egypt. The wording of this summary adaptation is left as though looking forward from this date—1840 to 1845. The original lectures are marked by bringing to bear a very wide range of prophetic Scripture. It has been thought desirable to abbreviate these considerably, resulting in an extremely condensed adaptation. The interested reader will do well to study carefully the passages only listed here.—ED.)

Evil must be expected to increase

What we are about to consider will tend to show that, instead of permitting ourselves to hope for a continued progress of good, we must expect a progress of evil; and that the hope of the earth being filled with the knowledge of the Lord before the exercise of His judgment, and the consummation of this judgment on the earth, is delusive.

I begin with Matthew 13 : 36, the

parable of the tares. It brings out this circumstance, that, whilst men slept, the enemy sowed tares in the field of the householder; and that, upon the demand of the servants whether the tares ought to be plucked out, the answer was, No—that the wheat and the tares were to grow together until the harvest. It is, then, the sentence of the Lord, that the evil which Satan has done in the field where the good seed of the word has been sown, shall remain and ripen there until the end. It is an express declaration, that the efforts of Christians shall not have the result of taking away the evil, which is to remain until the day of judgment: "Let both grow together until the harvest." The harvest is at the end of this age; that is, of the dispensation closing by the coming of Christ.

The tares are not simply wicked men, perhaps heathen who have never heard the gospel; the tares are some particular evil sown by the enemy after Jesus Christ has sown the good seed. The evil which Satan has produced by a corrupted religion will remain and increase until the harvest. All our efforts ought to be directed, not to pluck out the tares, but to gather in the children of God, to assemble together the co-heirs of Jesus Christ.

The expectation that evil in Christendom will remain and increase is confirmed in the following passages: 1 Timothy 5 : 1, 2 Timothy 3 : 1-5, 1 John 2 : 18, Jude.

This teaching can only be immensely re-inforced by the Bible picture of the end of the age, in connection with the final development of evil in both the religious and political powers in Antichrist. Alas!

it is evil, and not the gospel, which will gather together the world. "And I saw three unclean spirits, like frogs, come out of the mouth of the false prophet. . . to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." (Revelation 16 : 13, 14) The Spirit also says, "The ten horns (kings) which thou sawest upon the beast (the Roman Empire), these shall hate the whore (the religious power), and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." (Revelation 17 : 16, 17) Christians are desiring the destruction of the influence of the great whore upon the world ; but even should her external power be destroyed, would the kingdoms become the kingdoms of Christ ? On the contrary, the kings will give their power to the beast. The great whore has ruled the beast ; at length her power and her riches shall be taken away from her, but only that the ten horns may give their power to the beast, that all uncertainty may be dissipated, and that his self-will and blaspheming character may be fully manifested in his last apostasy. It is the power of corruption and seduction which will give place to the power of open rebellion against God.

We may observe that this Antichrist will unite in his person the characters of wickedness which have appeared from the beginning. First, man has always wanted to have his own will ; secondly, he has exalted himself against God ; thirdly, he has put himself under the guidance of Satan. These are just the three things which will be reproduced in the Antichrist — the king doing according to his will, the energy of man exalting itself against God, his

coming after the power of Satan. It is the ripened fruit of the human heart which is itself antichrist.

There were four successive beasts in Daniel 7 : Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and the fourth is the Roman empire—a beast with marks altogether peculiar to itself. That which we learn of this beast is, first, that from its beginning, the Roman empire has been guilty of the rejection of Jesus ; secondly, that later in the time of this fourth monarchy, there is a little horn that speaks great things, (Daniel 7 : 8) ; and, lastly, that this fourth beast, after having ceased to exist for a season, will reappear upon the scene out of the bottomless pit, and be destroyed on account of the great words which the little horn spoke (Revelation 17 : 8 and Daniel 7 : 11). This beast is connected with a power described in 2 Thessalonians 2 : 9 : "That wicked one whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders," whose destruction is found in v. 8.

The iniquity, then, of the heart of man arrives at its height in the last head of the fourth monarchy.

In all this, there is nothing to hinder us working for our divine Master. In the word I see an express declaration that the evil will go on to a greater and greater height, until that wicked one is destroyed by the coming of Christ, but all the time is to be seen the work of grace operating, deepening, extending, and God separating His children from the evil around.

The two characters of evil— Religious and Secular

There are two characters in the evil which manifests itself on the earth : the first is religious apostasy ; and the second, apostasy of the secular power. The tares present religious apostasy, the progress of evil in the Church on earth. Now I

am going to speak about the apostasy of the secular power, and the judgment which will come on it from God. At the end of the age, religious evil will in a sense disappear in the character of secular power. The religious power has been seen riding on the beast and ruling it, but after its destruction in this activity, it takes a more mysterious form, and hence a more dangerous one.

Scripture tells us that all civil power is of God. Now, in the same way that the Church loses its proper force and character by its rebellion against God, so the civil government will be found in a state of revolt and apostasy when, instead of confessing fealty to God, it sets itself up against God, who is the true source of its authority.

From the beginning to the end of the times of the Gentiles there is always a beast, but at the end there will be with the beast a false prophet. I will now deal with the Scriptures which support these observations.

In Revelation 17 the religious and the secular powers are distinguished as Babylon and the Beast. At first the woman, Babylon, rides the Beast, but eventually "the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast (the secular power), these shall hate the whore (the religious power), and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire."

Does this mean the end of evil religious influence? It does not. Revelation 17 is retrospective, and it is quite proper, therefore, to look back to chapter 13 for the germ of later developments. Reviewing chapters 13 to 19, we find that the second beast of ch. 13 later becomes the false prophet, and this latter would appear to be another form of the religious power, sub-

servient to, but supporting, the first beast, the Roman empire. The authority of Satan (the Dragon) is established in the first beast (the revived Roman empire), and the power of the first beast is exercised by the second beast (the religious power). It is the second beast who will seduce the inhabitants of the earth, and who will cause them to follow the first.

It may be alleged that the Roman empire does not exist in our days. It is an additional proof in support of what we have been saying. In Revelation 17 : 7, 8, the angel says, "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not:" the Roman empire, as an empire, exists no longer; but what follows? "And shall ascend out of the bottomless pit and go into destruction; and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder." It existed; next, it exists no more; then, it will come out of the pit. It will have a really diabolical character; it will be a full expression of the power of Satan.

2 Thessalonians 2 : 9 and John 5 : 43 are amongst other Scriptures which deal with these powers.

I have been endeavouring to open out the distinction, and at the same time the connection, between the secular and religious power and apostasy. The two are closely allied, because we read that the second beast exercises all the power of the first beast before him; and that the false prophet, which is the second beast, is thrown into the lake of fire with the first.

Meanwhile we may be certain that Christ will preserve His true Church from all these evils which menace the world, for His Church is united to Him, and, by reason of its participation in the first resurrection, will be entirely out of the world when these last calamities fall upon it.

The Judgment of the Nations, which become the Inheritance of Christ.

The last verse of Psalm 82 contains the subject which is now to occupy us: "Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations." I have spoken of Christ, Heir of all things, with the Church His co-heir; then of the coming of Christ, or the time when He will take His inheritance; and of the resurrection of the Church, which then participates with Him in His inheritance. We are thus led to consider the judgement of the nations, by which they become that inheritance.

We have seen that there are two beasts, and that the second is transformed into the false prophet. The scene now extends itself; for not only will the fourth beast be destroyed, but the nations will be judged. We shall touch on Scriptures which enable us to understand Matthew 25:31, 32, which speaks of the Lord sitting upon His throne, and gathering all nations, judging them, and separating them. All the races of men who inhabit the earth, which took their rise in the division of the children of Noah into their respective families, will be found at the end gathered together and judged by God, so that He, in full blessing, may enjoy the kingdom, and may have the inheritance of all nations. Study of the following Scriptures will illustrate this extension of the settlement to all nations: Psalm 2; Psalm 9:1-7; Psalm 10:15, 16; Zephaniah 3:8; Isaiah 26:7-11; Psalm 110.

We must note two features of this settlement. First, it is at Jerusalem that it will take place; secondly, God has named in His word all the nations which will participate in it. We shall see all the descendents of Noah, of whom we have the catalogue in Genesis 10, reappear on the

scene at the moment of this judgment. We shall find nearly all of them under either the Beast or under Gog, and thus in two opposing camps.

As to the passages which concern Jerusalem, see Joel 3:1 and 9-17; Micah 4:11 to the end; Zechariah 12:3-11 and 14:3, 4.

As to the second point, namely, that the nations, the descendents of Noah, will be ranged either under the Beast or under Gog—the two principal powers; if you consult Genesis 10:5 you will read, "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands." Much later, in Ezekiel 38, Gog is identified as the leader of one of the great confederacies of the future: "Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, prince of Rosh (Russia), Meshech, and Tubal." In the generations of the sons of Japeth are named Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. Of these we get Gomer, Magog, Tubal, Meshech under the same names in Ezekiel 38 as followers of Gog; you will also find there Persia which was united to Media (Madai), and Javan and Tiras have been united as Greece, which will be in the last combat. (Zechariah 9:13) Those mentioned above are the nations which comprise Russia, Asia Minor, Tartary, and Persia (all the people, in short, of which the empire of Russia is composed, or which are under its influence).

Similarly among the children of Ham and Shem (Genesis 10:6, 22) all but one or two of the names are identified with peoples named as represented in the great judgment. In the present day, we may observe Russia extending her power exactly over the nations which will be found under Gog.

Daniel introduces us to two other

powers, the king of the South (Egypt), and the king of the North (Syria). In v. 40 they are represented "at the time of the end" as disputing about the land of Israel. It is now nearly 2000 years since there has been a king of the South; and it is but a few years since he has appeared anew. In the same way a great people has appeared, of which the world a century ago hardly knew the existence, and which now rules over the exact countries of the Gog in Ezekiel. All nations have their attention occupied about Jerusalem, and do not know what to do about it. The kings of the North and the South dispute for the same country which they fought over 2000 years ago.

We find all western Europe occupied about Jerusalem, and preparing for war; and Russia, on her side, preparing herself, and exercising

influence over the countries given to her in the word; and all the thoughts of the politicians of this world concentrate themselves on the scene where their final gathering in the presence of the judgment of God will "gather them as the sheaves unto the floor." (Micah 4:12)

Let us recall once again to our memory the place of the Church. It is, that during these events, its place is to be with Christ, to accompany Him. The union of the Church in a single body was not revealed in the Old Testament; if we seek for it, it is Christ Himself that we find. It is always precious for us thus to understand our place, that of joint-heirs with Christ. Just as unbelief separates men entirely and for all eternity from Christ, grace by faith has united us entirely and for ever to Him; and we ought to bless God for it.

SEEK YE FIRST

J. S. BLACKBURN

12. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN AND THE CHURCH

WE owe to the Venerable Bede the story of how, in A.D. 664 a Council was convened at Whitby in North Yorkshire to decide whether the kingdom of Northumbria should give allegiance to the Roman usages or to the Irish or Columban forms received from Iona. Colman, for the Irish forms, appealed to the authority of the apostle John, through that of Columba of Iona. Wilfrid, for the Roman usages, pleaded the authority of the apostle Peter. After lengthy disputation, Wilfrid quoted in support of the claims of the bishop of Rome, the saying of the Lord which we have in Matthew 16:19: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of

hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

"When Wilfrid had spoken thus, the king said, "Is it true, Colman, that these words were spoken to Peter by our Lord?" He answered, "It is true O king!" Then says he, "Can you show any such power given to your Columba?" Colman answered, "None." Then added the king, "Do you both agree that these words were principally directed to Peter, and that the keys of heaven were given to him by our Lord?" They both answered, "We do." Then the king concluded, "And I also say unto you, that he is the door-keeper, whom I will not contradict, but will, as far as I know and

am able, in all things obey his decrees, lest, when I come to the gates of the kingdom of heaven, there should be none to open them, he being my adversary who is proved to have the keys."

The disciple seeking the Kingdom will still everywhere meet the claims of the See of Rome, even though less naively than in the story of Northumbria, and he ought therefore to be ready with an understanding of the passage now to be studied, Matthew 16 : 13–19. Moreover, what is more important, in these verses there bursts into Scripture the first explicit reference to the Church, which is seen to be the treasured and guarded possession of Christ, and one of the principal themes of the New Testament.

What brings this passage within the range of our present study is that vv. 18 and 19 immediately disclose a certain connection between the Church and the Kingdom of heaven. It will be most important to try to determine as exactly as possible what that connection is.

These verses contain the first mention of the Kingdom of heaven since the parables of Chapter 13. In spite of the absence of the phrase, the intervening chapters deal with themes bearing clearly on fulfilment of the mysteries declared in the parables. Prominent among these themes are (a) the development of Christ's rejection by the Jews, (b) His mighty works proclaiming His worthiness to reign, and (c) the inclusion of Gentiles in the blessing dispensed by Him.

Taking the verses in order, the first subject, (vv. 13 to 16) is Peter's confession, and this is the foundation for the great things which follow. Three titles of the Lord are joined in these verses : the Son of Man, the Christ, and the Son of the living God. The sources of the first of these

are Psalm 8 : 4–8 and Daniel 7 : 13, 14 : the Son of Man, made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, and afterwards, crowned with glory and honour, to be set over all the earth : also, in Daniel the glorious person to whom a kingdom over all the earth will be given at His coming. It signifies, therefore, a real man ; one who as such was to be rejected and suffer death ; and yet will rule over all. In the Lord's question, therefore, He was presenting Himself in a character which in its rudimentary meaning would be accepted by all—a real man—but had overtones of present suffering but universal authority. The answer of the 'man in the street' demonstrated recognition of some authentication of the preaching of Jesus by God, but complete blindness regarding His true majesty. (The story of Manoah and his wife in Judges 13 : 6 and 22 illustrates the immense difference between the two. They were interested in receiving a communication from a man of God, but prostrated with alarm at the realisation that they had seen God.) And then, in response to the question addressed directly to themselves, Peter made the great confession : "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

O Saviour Jesus, Thou art indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world ! Thou art indeed the long-promised destroyer of the devil, Son of Abraham, Son of David, and Fulfiller of all the promises ! Thou art in truth the Anointed Prophet, Priest and King ! The hearts of Thy people are inditing a good matter when they speak of Thee. Thou art fairer than the children of men ; grace is poured into Thy lips ; therefore God has blessed Thee for ever.

O Saviour Jesus, Thou art indeed the Son of the living God ! No man knoweth Thee, but the Father. Thou

art the brightness of His glory ! Thou art the perfect expression of His substance ! Thou art one with Him as the fountain of the all-conquering vigour of life. Death has no dominion over Thee. The gates of death shall surely fall before Thee, and Thou shalt surely triumph over the last enemy. All honour and majesty, all love and devotion be Thine both now and evermore !

“And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona : for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” Only the direct revelation from the Father could bring about such a conviction and such a confession. And now there are seen to be two Persons active in confirming such blessing to Simon. The Father had revealed, and now Jesus acts in His own Personal, divine authority : “And I also say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”

What was the rock on which Christ was to build His Church ? We are in the extremely happy position of being able to ask Peter this epoch-making question. Question : Whom did you understand, Peter, as the rock on which the Church was to be built ? Answer : (1 Peter : 2 :3, 4) “. . . if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house”. Peter further helps us by quoting a Scripture, Isaiah 28 : 16. “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation”. Without any shadow of doubt, therefore, the Rock on which the Church was to be built was Christ, just confessed by Simon

as the Son of God. In the second sentence quoted from 1 Peter 2, the relative ‘whom’ has its antecedent in the first sentence, and it is clearly “the Lord.” The Gracious Lord, the Living Stone laid in Zion, is the one great rock-foundation for Christ’s Church, and Peter, by the change of name announced by the Master, was made to partake in the rock-character, as also are the saints addressed in 1 Peter 2 : 5.

In the parable of the one pearl of great price we found a hint of an object for the heart of Christ in connection with the Kingdom of heaven. This hint is taken up and amplified in these verses : : “My Church”. At this point this name first enters Holy Scripture, and in clear connection with the Kingdom of heaven, which is at this moment our principal subject, and we must now address ourselves to enquire into the connection between the two.

The distinct personal action of the Lord is stressed : “I also say” (v. 18) ; “I will build” (v. 18) ; “I will give” (v. 19). In the sense in which the Church is considered in this primary passage, it is the sphere of the personal action of Christ. On the other hand, while the Kingdom commission remains under the authority of Christ, it is given by him to be the sphere of responsibility of Peter, and this in two parts, first, the power of the keys, and secondly the power of binding and loosing.

The Lord’s commission concerning the keys finds clear illustration in the gospels. Consider His denunciation of the Pharisees in Matthew 23 : 13 : “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them

that are entering to go in." A similar condemnation is found in Luke 11:52: "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered." Remembering that the power of the keys was committed to Peter personally and not anywhere repeated as applying to the other disciples, it is only possible to see in the choice by God of Peter for the first preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles (as well as separately to the Jews) the fulfilment of this particular commission, "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." And with this, something exclusively given to Peter, agrees his speech at the council at Jerusalem: "ye know that how a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe."

In contrast with this, the power of binding and loosing is repeated to the other disciples collectively in the 18th chapter; "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven". (v. 18) The sphere of the binding and loosing is on earth, not in heaven; but to such binding on and for earth, the authority of heaven will assure its approval and support. Edersheim (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*) gives an illuminating comment on the meaning of these functions. "In interpreting such a saying of Christ to Peter, our first inquiry must be, what it would convey to the person to whom the promise was addressed. And here we recall, that no terms were in more constant use in Rabbinic Canon-Law than those of 'binding' and 'loosing'. . . 'to bind' in the sense of prohibiting, and. . . 'to loose' in the sense of permitting. . .

But this expression is, both in Targumic and Talmudic diction, not merely the equivalent of permitting, but passes into that of remitting, or pardoning." We might readily find these interpretations in Scripture itself, but this simply makes the comment of Edersheim the more interesting. The apostles unquestionably exercised the right to declare what was permitted or prohibited, and we possess their decrees as the apostles of Christ in the New Testament. They also exercised the authority to remit sins or retain them **on earth**. This is seen in the cases of Ananias and Sapphira and the incestuous person in 1 Corinthians 5.

The new light this passage sheds, therefore, on our subject, which is the Kingdom, is that during the absence of the Lord in heaven, the Kingdom of heaven is administered by men. In that aspect of the Church, therefore, which comes before us in this passage, that is, in the aspect according to which it is assured of victory, perhaps, in a sense it is even assured of infallibility, then it is exclusively the work of Christ. In the sense in which the Kingdom of heaven is under human administration, it is assured of the support of heaven, but not of infallibility. This becomes clear if we examine the rest of the New Testament, as we have already done, to establish the meaning of these commissions and promises.

There are two dominant views of the Church in the later New Testament. One continues the aspect presented by the Lord in Matthew 16. We must surely take it as the primary one, that in which the Lord's heart will be satisfied, and His will secured. There is infallibility here, for all depends immediately on

Christ Himself, and His own 'I will'. Perhaps this view is found in 1 Peter 2:5 and Ephesians generally. But, for example, in 1 Corinthians 3:12-17 we have a very different view in which human administration is something for which abundant support is available, but all is to be tested, and much will be found to have come short. I quote an interesting comment by F. B. Hole: "In this great pronouncement the Lord spoke of His Church as being His own handiwork, against which all adverse wisdom and power could not prevail. What is done in the power of Divine life nothing can touch. Other Scriptures speak of the Church as the community professing allegiance to Christ, brought into being through the labours of those who take the place of servants of God. On that community failure was stamped from the outset, and it merges into the kingdom of heaven, of which we learn so much in chapter 13, and which the Lord mentions in v. 19 of our chapter. The keys of that kingdom were given to Peter—not the Keys of the Church."

The succinct conclusion of the matter is therefore that there are two broad ways in which the church is viewed: one according to which it is assured of final triumph, and one when it is seen to be permeated by failure from the beginning—a mixed condition in which individual faithfulness will always have its reward. It is quite unjustified to apply the unconditional assurances given to the first, as though applicable to the second. In the first, victory depends entirely on Christ's person and work. In the second, any measure of victory is the result of individual fidelity, in which, alas, there is only too evident failure. The Church in the former sense—My

Church, He calls it—will in all the beauty assured for it by the work of Christ be raptured to meet Him at His coming. After this, what remains of the Church as it depends on human responsibility will be spued out of His mouth. The Church in this sense appears to merge with the Kingdom of heaven, since both are seen to be administered by failing men, and both contain the admixture of evil.

One final word regarding the claims of the papacy. Its basic claim rests on an interpretation of Matthew 16:18 and 19 which is absolutely untenable. Furthermore, there is no trace afterwards in the New Testament of any primacy of Peter after his use of the keys. Only consider Acts 15, and the position of Peter at the council, or reflect dispassionately on his epistles, and any idea of such primacy simply vanishes away. Even if such primacy had ever existed, why should it be considered transmissible to the bishops of Rome? That Peter ever was at Rome rests on nothing stronger than tradition, and if he were, he could not have been its bishop in the sense that the pope is bishop of Rome, for no such concept of bishopric exists in Scripture, or existed at all for many years after Peter's death. Our faith rests on Christ and His word. Upon the rock of Peter's confession of Himself as the Son of the living God, made outside and prior to the Church, He is building His Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

* * *

“THIS IS HE THAT CAME BY WATER AND BLOOD” — F. W. BOYD

1 John 5 : 6

SOME of the explanations given for this verse are that it means (a) the Birth of Christ (b) His Baptism (reference to the water), and each explanation has been arrived at by careful thought.

Even in the early days men were trying to explain the person of the Lord, and some said, “Jesus was no more than a phantom in human form, and they denied Him a flesh and blood body,” (Introduction to John’s Epistle by William Barclay) and many today read the Epistle of John in the light of a reply to this error. This is the reason for the explanations (a) and (b) in paragraph one, and also the reason behind some modern translations, e.g. “the water of His Baptism as man and the blood of the atonement He made by His death. It is a mistake to think of Him only as the perfect Man—He made the perfect atonement as well.” (J. B. Phillips)

Whilst dealing with the setting in which to read Scripture, it may be mentioned also that some take John as writing “according to the philosophy of his time”. There is no spiritual gain in this.

There is no intention to belittle these paraphrasing translations. They make easy reading and are often a great help in understanding the Word. If there is any doubt about any passage one can always refer to a more literal translation.

Let us see clearly that while the Apostle’s writing refutes error, it goes far beyond this. The purpose in writing is a positive one, and a closer look will give us the light in which to read these portions. This is given by the writer of this Scripture himself through the Holy Spirit.

John 20 : 31 deals with the Gospel, and shows that its subject is the Son of God as the source of our possession of life. 1 John 1 : 3 deals with the Epistle, and indicates its subject—the enjoyment of *Eternal Life*.

To read the Gospel of John in this light is not only helpful in itself but we shall see has a bearing on the Epistle also. Considering the Lord as the Son of God, we find that in keeping with this revelation, certain facts mentioned in the other Gospels which are written from different viewpoints, are necessarily omitted, i.e. those relating to His human origin and pathway: His birth, circumcision, baptism, temptation in the wilderness, agony in the garden and the forsaking on the cross. On the other hand, John is the only evangelist to mention the blood and the water flowing from the precious side of the Saviour.

As both the Lord’s birth and baptism are omitted from John’s writings, it would be wise to look for other explanations for the verse which forms the subject of this paper. We have very little difficulty in understanding the meaning of the second term, the blood. 1 John 1 : 7 gives it; “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” “He that came by water” is not so clear. We have seen that John refers to the water and the blood when the Lord died, and he also has many other references to water in a symbolic way. Let us look at them and the application given to them. All deal with some aspect of life.

The first is the water of purification, John 2 : 6. It is connected with the third day, perhaps indicating resurrection; it becomes wine, the

source of delight. It is also the first sign by which Jesus revealed His glory.

The second mention is in 3 : 5, and deals with entry into the Kingdom. Flesh only gives birth to flesh. So here the divine Spirit is essential, and linked with water brings about the New Birth. Taken in isolation, the meaning of this water is rather obscure ; but the Kingdom, the New Birth and the Spirit are not tangible, physical things, so we must look at other references for help.

The thoughts expressed in 4 : 14 and 7 : 37, 38, 39 are similar in their bearing. "The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive)". Both episodes begin with thirst, a deep unsatisfied human need for something that neither the earthly wells nor the great feast can supply. The supply of water is from the Lord Himself. The well springing up into everlasting life in 4 : 14, and the drinking of the water in 7 : 37 both lead to the out-flowing of the Spirit of God.

5 : 1-4 deals with healing. The Lord bypasses entirely the virtues of the water of Bethesda. He brings immediate healing to the impotent man and sets aside the Sabbath in order to set before the religious Jew that the Father loves the Son, that the Son quickens whom He will, that eternal life is bound up with hearing His word and believing its message concerning the Father, and that judgment is committed to the Son.

In 9 : 7 again we have water connected with cleansing. This time the giving of sight is the first result, and this leads to the worship of the Son

of God.

Now we come to chapter 13. The Lord knew He was going to the Father and that all things were delivered into His hands. He takes a bason of water and a towel after the supper to cleanse the feet of His disciples. Eyes had already been dealt with (chapter 9), but now the feet need cleansing from the defilement of the way ; and notice that the purpose is fellowship, fellowship with the Lord, "part with Me".

The last reference to water in John's Gospel (19 : 34) can be taken in its meaning as the source and embodiment of all the others. Christ is dead. His work is finished. A soldier pierces His side and forthwith flow out blood and water. This receives great emphasis by being witnessed that we might believe.

Turning again to 1 John 5, we see that the Spirit, and the water, and the blood are joint witnesses, and their witness is that God "hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son". Does the birth of Christ give this witness ? Does His baptism ? They do not. But the witness of God Himself through these three, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood, is that we have eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The blood signifies judicial cleansing from the guilt of sin, or expiation. The Spirit and the water signify life itself and practical cleansing, the ability to see and to have part with the Son. Again our thoughts turn to John 20 : 31, "These are written that . . . believing ye might have life". In 1 John 5, however, God's witness is to life which is actually already given ; "God hath given to us eternal life".

By our faith God has gained a victory over the world which lies in the wicked one. By eternal life we are brought to know Him and to be in Him that is true. This life has no

existence apart from divine Persons. This life is inherent in the Lord Himself, but we are given the ability to have fellowship with both the Father and the Son. For this to be possible, life of the same order is required ; then the life must be maintained suitably to answer to the light of God's presence, hence the forgive-

ness, relationship and love which are explained in the Epistle. It is "that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us", to the end that we may have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ, and, says John, "these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full".

ABRAHAM

ROBERT THOMSON

"THINE ONLY SON WHOM THOU LOVEST"

UNDER the veil of this story of the sternest test of Abraham's faith we catch more than a glimpse of the supreme disclosure of Divine Love, that is, the Father's gift of His well-beloved Son in sacrifice.

Calling him by his new name, Abraham, father of many nations, God was about to teach and show him that everything relating to the new generation must be established on resurrection ground. Abraham is instantly ready to obey, "Behold, here I am," but could not have been prepared for the immensity of the request. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah ; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." This was to be the greatest possible testing of his faith and obedience, in that it was through his love for Isaac, involving nothing less than total renunciation before restoration. In figure, it meant the death and resurrection of Isaac. Mount Moriah was unknown to him, but God's word would direct him.

From that moment, Isaac was offered up in Abraham's heart and

mind, and the three days' journey perhaps hint at the development of Abraham's faith in resurrection. Then Abraham's eyes were lifted up to see the place afar off, an immeasurable distance in terms of love, and now father and son go on together to the place ordained for the sacrifice. This place is sacred, and the young men had to remain at a distance, but this gives occasion for Abraham to assure them that both he and his son will return after worshipping, a beautiful evidence of the faith in resurrection he already possessed. He also manifests a penetrating understanding of the true nature of worship, that is, the offering to God of a sacrifice acceptable to Him.

Taking the wood for the burnt-offering, Abraham laid it upon Isaac, and we cannot but think of the parallel in the gospel story, "And He bearing His cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha." (John 19:17) But it is Isaac's question which now gives occasion to one of the greatest of the promises. "And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father : and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and

the wood : but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering ? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." In Abraham's noble answer, true, we see how he had learned the lesson of committing all to God, and finding Him to be sufficient for all circumstances, but more than this we have a promise and prophecy the fulfilment of which runs right through Scripture, reaching to the song in heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." (Revelation 5 : 12)

When they came to the place, Abraham built an altar, the fourth built by him, and surpassing in importance all the others. Laying the wood in order, he bound Isaac his son, and placed him upon the altar, upon the wood. There is a pregnant silence in the record as to any resistance on the part of Isaac, although he must have been in the prime of life. In this also Isaac is a beautiful picture of Christ, the Lamb of God, submitting Himself to His Father, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done." (Luke 22 : 42)

"And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham : and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him : for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." In these words we see the trial triumphantly completed. Abraham's obedience to and faith in the God of resurrection has been fully proved, while Isaac stands forth as the figure of Christ, the risen Man out of death. A ram "caught in a thicket by his horns" is offered in Isaac's

stead, and typifies the strength of Christ's devotion unto death, even the death of the cross. We must also note that the ram was not mutilated in any way, and was thus a suitable offering and sacrifice for the occasion.

The place which formed the scene of these great events is naturally of interest in the light of later Scripture. In Genesis 22 it is one of the mountains in the land of Moriah. In 2 Chronicles 3 : 1 there is a reference to Mount Moriah as the place where Solomon built the House of the Lord at Jerusalem, and it is also identified as the site of David's sacrifice in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. In Genesis 22 : 14 "Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh," which means "the Lord will see, or provide." This name was really the application of Abraham's faith, "God will provide himself a Lamb," and in view of its magnificent fulfilment in Christ, "God's Lamb," as proclaimed by John the Baptist, we may well exclaim, What wonderful vision, and provision !

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with the confirmation by the angel of God's promise by Himself and His word, of blessing to Abraham and to his seed "as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand is upon the sea shore ; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies."

This particular confirmation seems to distinguish the heavenly and the earthly companies within Abraham's seed, and also to promise victory. Israel has already prevailed in the possessing of Canaan ; and will be supreme after the period of 'Jacob's trouble', being divinely appointed the leading nation in the earthly kingdom of Christ.

THE SUBSTANCE OF AN ADDRESS AT RIPON, 1968

Read : 1 Samuel 30 : 1-31

AN alternative, if somewhat less serious, title might have headed this paper, such as, "Playing into the wrong goal." Even experienced football players have known the chagrin of kicking effectively towards the opponents' goal. Christians, too, are not unknown to play at times into the enemy's hands and score a disastrous advantage for the wrong side.

The writer would implore those interested in this subject to read 1 Samuel chapters 27, 29 and 30 to get the complete picture of this fascinating and instructive story on which this paper is based. Familiar to some but perhaps not to all, this episode in the life of king David has a pertinent application to our lives and when understood could prevent many an unfortunate faux pas in our service and conduct.

Over the saga of Ziklag could be written the words, all too little heeded, of Proverbs 29 : 25, "The fear of man bringeth a snare." So completely had the terror of Saul struck into David's heart that we hear him say, "He's too strong for me and one day I'm going to die at his hands, so I might as well join the other side to escape his wrath." Colloquially this is expressed to-day in the often-heard phrase, "If you can't beat 'em join 'em." So with six hundred men he goes into reverse gear from Judah and arrives at Gath. What memories that city must have held for the young man who slew the giant Goliath whose home town it was ! And how unthinkable that he should now be seeking refuge in such a place !

The seemingly friendly Achish, king of Gath, gladly offers David political asylum but the sixteen months stay in Philistine country was none too comfortable for the refugee. Achish had subtly imposed the condition that David's military skill should be given full rein in his army and he would go out with him to battle against Saul. What crafty appeal there lay in that offer ! But David's compliance was not lacking in craftiness either. Having promised a nominal loyalty to Achish he requests the king's permission to move away a little from the royal city, ostensibly in deference to considerations of protocol. Magnanimously the king gave him Ziklag, a place much nearer to where David's heart lay, the land of Judah. From this city (which thereafter became the royal home of succeeding Judaen kings) David directed his attacks against Southern Judah, but in fact against the old enemies of that land and not against his own kith and kin in Israel. So the subterfuge appears to have been crowned with success on all hands. But how deceptively easy the path of the backslider can seem to be, and what sad dishonesty and confusion it confers on the one tempted to enter that course. How this underlines the constant need for us to pray as Jesus taught, "Lead us not into temptation."

When a crisis arises in our lives, or long trials wear down our patience and faith (as in David's case) danger lies in consulting our own hearts alone and not turning at once to the Lord for direction and

guidance. Expediency and compromise can only lead to hypocrisy and untruth, no matter how fair the prospect may seem. And let us learn once and for all that even "a man after God's own heart", like David, already anointed and destined for the throne of Israel by God Himself, can be lured into this very position. It was only God's mercy and His determination to carry through His own purposes, that prevented David from being brutally assassinated by the lords of the Philistines who deeply suspected that in battle their strange ally might defect to Israel again and turn against them. If we imagine for a moment in our trials that we might be more comfortable in the world's camp, we must remember that underneath its synthetic smile and cynical welcome it is hostile in character and intention. "We can't make this world our home any more." Its friendship is enmity with God. If we take sides with it we are truly playing into the wrong goal. It led David here to pretend, at least, to call Israel, his own people, "the enemies of my lord the king (Achish)" (see ch. 29 : 8)

The time had now come, however, for God to intervene in mercy and yet in discipline for David. How could He allow His anointed to remain in such a situation of shameful compromise? If David had forgotten his high destiny, certainly God had not, and He uses His own means to extricate him from the disgrace and fate of a mistaken choice. Resulting from the complaints of the Philistine lords about David's presence in their ranks (albeit at the safety of the reward) Achish now sheepishly begs him to return to Ziklag so as to placate the military hierarchy. David feigns to be thoroughly disappointed at this, while no doubt secretly glad of the

opportunity to quit the ranks of the ungodly.

Here the sad story of Ziklag begins (ch. 30). Far from returning to a conquering hero's welcome, he finds his royal city invaded by the Amalekites and razed to the ground with fire. Leaving his city unguarded to join the army of Achish against Israel, he had displayed a great lack of wisdom. And the avenging Amalekites were not slow to take advantage of his folly and his absence from home. Not only did they plunder and loot the place but they took away the women, including David's two wives. Is there any wonder that poor David was deeply distressed at this moment and wept with his friends "until they had no more power to weep." Look at his dire dilemma now. Saul had driven him from his own country, the Philistines had driven him from their camp, the Amalekites had destroyed his city, his wives were in the enemies hands, and now to crown all his trusted men, and closest friends, were ready to stone him.

This was surely David's all-time low and his desperate extremity. But here indeed was his moment of truth. The chastening hand of a God Who loved him had now done its work in bringing him to this point, and if he was at his wit's end he was certainly not at his faith's end. Have we ever been there? Have we ever been in company with Paul in Romans 7 and almost come to the conclusion that we were suffering from schizophrenia? "The good that I would, I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do. . . . O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me. . . ? How true to experience this is!

But how truly it has been said and re-said that "Man's extremity is God's opportunity", and this was no exception. David, now cognisant

that he had deeply dishonoured God, comes to the moment of his recovery. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God", only to find God unchanged toward him and ready to answer his prayer for direction. When discouragement and defeat are all around, do we find our encouragement there? Indeed, is there any where else to turn? How it must have thrilled David—the real David—to hear God's voice encouraging him, "Yes, pursue after the enemy for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all." Having seen David resembling ourselves in folly and defeat, we now see him resembling Him Who is David's Lord, our Lord Jesus Christ.

With four hundred men (two hundred now wisely left behind because they were too weak to cross the brook Besor) David pursues, but where would the enemy be found? God is with him, the God Who chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. A poor Egyptian lad is found dying in a field, left by his Amalekite masters to a cruel fate. Compassion marks the pursuing warrior and the lad is given sustaining food and by this kindness David gains a useful ally. He promises to take the king to the exact spot where the Amalekites were encamped. Soon they are located and utterly routed by David in abject defeat. "And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away; and David rescued his two wives." When the object of the heart is in the enemy's power what mighty incentives must inspire the fight for victory. When David's greater Son came into the world, His chief thought without a doubt was the securing of His bride. But she must first be delivered from Satan's grasp and that "without fail". How that

triumph was won at Calvary we know full well as those who through grace have been the objects of His affection.

And so "David recovered all"; the fact is repeated, lest we should minimise the greatness of this victory. His wives, his people and the entire spoils the enemy had taken were once again under his protection and power. In his triumph he proclaimed, "This is David's spoil," and proceeded to share that spoil with all who loved and trusted him. How like Him Who "came upon the strong man, took from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divided his spoils." (Luke 11: 21/22) He Who "led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men," is truly great David's greater Son. Thus it is of Him we read in Colossians 2: 15 that "having spoiled principalities and powers. He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it." Here is the victory that makes David's story pale in comparison and thrills us to know that He shares the spoils of that victory with the weakest of His own.

Ziklag leaves a great challenge to us who see in David's "fear of man" that which led him at one point to play into the wrong goal and to associate others with him in his mistaken choice. But David in his triumph presents the picture of Him Whose leadership inspired Paul to say, "but one thing—forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3: 13/14 J.N.D.) And he reminds Timothy (and everyone like him) that "if also anyone contend in the games, he is not crowned unless he contends lawfully." (2 Timothy 2: 5 J.N.D.)

Which David are we following? And to which goal are we pursuing?

13. THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

THE Olivet Discourse occupies the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of Matthew's Gospel, and deals with the future of the Kingdom in relation to the Second Coming of Christ. The direct references to the Kingdom are :— 24 : 14, the Second Coming will be preceded by the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom in all the world : the Second Coming of Christ is described in terms closely allied to the origin of the expression " Kingdom of God" in Daniel 2 : Matthew 25 : 1, the Kingdom of Heaven at that time shall be likened to ten virgins : and 25 : 34 and 40, when the Son of Man gathers all nations before Him, He will be the King. The blessed will inherit the Kingdom. The subject, therefore, is the future of the Kingdom as it will be consummated by the Second Coming of Christ. The Discourse is in three parts. The first, 24 : 1-42, deals with the Jews and Jerusalem. The third, 25 : 31-46, concerns the Gentile nations, and plainly resumes at the point where the first broke off. Between the two there are three parables having their application to Christ's disciples in the intervening period. Thus, once again, we see the interests of the Lord set out with relevance to the Jew, the Nations, and the Church of God, and are reminded that this framework for viewing events is that dictated by God's word in many instances, and is therefore the framework to be adopted by the disciple seeking the Kingdom.

Jerusalem and the Jews. Matthew 24 : 1-41 perhaps more than any other Scripture requires the reader to keep in mind the apostolic instruc-

tion, " rightly dividing the word of truth". It was for me dark and full of discord and difficulty until I learned that it deals with salvation, not as it is known by the believer to-day, but as it will come to the believing remnant of Jews in Jerusalem at the end of the age. Seen thus, it is one of the most useful frameworks of prophetic truth to be found in Scripture.

A careful reader of Matthew's Gospel will have already received a hint from 10 : 5-23 that when the Son of Man comes again there will be found Jewish disciples in the cities of Judah occupying the same relationship with Himself as at His first coming. In that chapter, sending out the twelve disciples to preach the Kingdom, and warning them of hostility and betrayal, the Lord concludes, " Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Judah till the Son of Man be come". This is quite in line with many Old Testament Scriptures, in which the Church period is simply ignored and the story of the past told as though it were continuous with the end of the age.

Viewed in this light, the story of Matthew 24 : 4-39 may be paraphrased in the following manner. Jewish disciples of Jesus, faithful to Him in His absence amid a generally hostile Jewish nation in Jerusalem, which is under a Roman tyrant, shall be subjected to all kinds of trials : deception by false Christs ; wars and rumours of wars ; famines, pestilences and earthquakes ; intense persecution ; treachery, deception and defection from among themselves. Their watchword was to be 'hold-out', because salvation depends on

endurance through these beginnings of sorrows to the end. The reason they must hold out is that the gospel of the Kingdom must be preached throughout the world : then the end comes. At the moment they see an idol set up in the temple, (a plain sign known to the faithful from the book of Daniel), their outlook changes, and the watchword is to be instant flight to the mountains outside Judaea. Then there shall be a great tribulation, so severe that if it were not shortened for the elect's sake, the human race would be exterminated. The tribulation will be accompanied by intensified deception by false Christs and by miracles. At the end there will be a breakdown of all government, and all mankind shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with great glory. He shall gather the elect from all the earth. Throughout this time eating, drinking, marrying and giving in marriage will continue until the judgment of the coming Christ falls.

The whole series of events outlined in the previous paragraph **must** be subsequent to the rapture of the Church to meet Christ in the air. If not, the two passages, (Matthew 24 and 1 Thessalonians 4 : 15-18) would be in flat contradiction.

It will be interesting to attempt a similar paraphrase and summary interpretation of Daniel's visions ; the ancient Roman Empire will become divided into ten kingdoms. At the end of the age, there will arise among these a new empire, worldwide and cruel. Its ruler will be a blasphemer of God and a persecutor of His saints. He will make a seven-year treaty with the mass of the Jews, but will break it after three and a half years. Thereafter he will abolish the

Jewish worship, and substitute an idol placed in the temple. He will persecute the faithful, and this will be a time of unprecedented trouble for the Jews. After a reign of a further three and a half years (the remainder of the seven) he will be destroyed by Christ at His coming in the clouds of heaven with glory. Christ will then set up a Kingdom which shall never give place to another, and His saints shall share His Kingdom with Him.

Reflection in these two accounts of the end of the age, both coming from God, will make it clear that they are telling the same story—in Daniel from the point of view of the external events of world history—in Matthew from the standpoint of Jewish disciples living through it, and able to read these very words, and to derive the fullest measure of strength and comfort from the Lord's assurances.

“Behold the Bridegroom”. The three parables of this middle section of the Discourse are the faithful and evil household servants, (24 : 43-51), the wise and foolish virgins (25 : 1-13), and the faithful and wicked servants of the absent master (25 : 14-30). The lesson, from these three standpoints, is watchfulness, wakefulness and diligence during the Lord's absence. The matter is in each case adjudged on the Master's arrival. For the moment we shall consider in particular the parable of the virgins, which, in common with so much that has come before us in Matthew's Gospel, is explicitly described as a similitude of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The central event of this is the cry in v. 6, **“Behold the Bridegroom.”** Since we have ten virgins, including

five who were wise, we have not here a representation explicitly of the one Church, the bride of Christ, but the teaching given is edging towards this truth, which is so prominent in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The character stamped upon the story is that of the Bridegroom and the joy of the marriage feast.

The parable presents four stages. First, a company takes up the position of going out to meet Christ. This company bears three important marks of the Church. They are separated from the world — they went forth. They are light bearers—they witness during the night. Their destiny is ostensibly to enter in with Christ. But all are not what they appear. They pass for being true until the test comes. At the second stage, they **all** went to sleep. That is, as for the meeting for which they had gone out at the first, they lost sight and sense of it. At the third stage there arises the midnight cry, “Behold the Bridegroom!”, accompanied by the call to take up again the original position, going out to meet him. The fourth and final stage is presented in v. 10, “the Bridegroom came”.

Within the limits of the parabolic method the intent is clear. The parable broadly sketches certain features of the course of events between the first ‘going out’ of the Christian profession and the moment when Christ, the Bridegroom, comes. Let us attempt to seize the main message.

That Christians everywhere lost sight and sense of the promise of His coming is only too sadly true to history. After the Bible days little was heard of the personal expectation of meeting Christ at His coming until long after the Reformation.

This is one vital element in which its works were not found perfect before God. The reformers, under God, uncovered the truth of justification by faith, but not the personal hope of meeting Jesus at His coming. One of the most widely known and loved of the songs of Christ, the Beloved, the Bridegroom, is that of Samuel Rutherford, as interpreted by Mrs. Cousins in her hymn, “the bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom’s face”. But the eye of his faith was explicitly on his going to Christ by his imminent death, and not on meeting Him at His coming. Up to this time and long beyond it, “they all slumbered and slept”.

A Critical Theology sees the fact that the personal expectation of meeting Christ at His coming was given up, and gives an interpretation: Christians found that they had been mistaken in ever expecting it. The word of Jesus in this parable foresees that the hope would be given up, and gives the true explanation: they all went to sleep. The event will prove that the Critical Theology is in error: they were not mistaken in expecting it. Jesus will certainly come again, exactly as His word has promised.

Without any question the midnight cry arose in the early years of the last century. Since that time, and not before it, hundreds of thousands of Christians in every land have been rejoicing in this personal hope of the Saviour’s coming. The exact form of the cry is to call attention to His Person: “Behold the Bridegroom!” It is part of the great universal theme of Scripture: “Ecce Homo”, “Behold the Man”. “Behold My Servant. . . in whom My soul delighteth”, cries Jehovah in Old Testament prophecy. “Behold the Lamb of God” says the voice of

one crying in the wilderness at His first coming. "Behold the Man", said Pilate as He went forth to Calvary. "Behold Me standing at the door", pleads the Lord to the Churches. And the glorious sight will indeed "gladden each waiting, watchful eye".

The details making up the outward form of the parable in vv. 10 to 12 surely teach, first, that from the beginning some were never really ready for the Bridegroom's coming; and second, that the receiving of the Holy Spirit must be a directly personal matter between each individual and the Lord.

The parable is obviously addressed to the disciples and not to the unconverted, and the message is contained in v. 13. All these virgins went to sleep. They were wrong to go to sleep, and the Lord is grieved about it. v. 13 seems to say, "Do not do as they did. Do not go to sleep in the matter of personal expectation of meeting the Bridegroom at His coming. Keep awake, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh". That 'watch' really and essentially means 'keep awake' is shown by the contrast in such a passage as 1 Thessalonians 5:10 where the same word is employed: "Whether we wake or sleep". They were wrong to go to sleep, and whether for the disciples at the beginning, or for ourselves between the midnight cry and the coming of the Bridegroom, the appeal is, "Do not be like these virgins, do not go to sleep as concerns our meeting with the Bridegroom". In the presence of this appeal from the Lord, we feel ourselves near to a flash of understanding of the Song of Songs 5:2, "I slept, but then my heart awakened: it is the voice of my beloved that

knocketh, saying, Open to me. . . my love. . . : for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night."

"The Bridegroom came." This is the event which lies before us, how near we do not know. "They that were ready went in with him to the marriage." The prospect of the joy of the marriage feast, so often a theme of Scripture, is calculated to keep the disciple awake in joyful expectation. And the closing of the door on all those who were mere professors, is the end of the day of salvation.

The Sheep and the Goats. The opening words of this prophecy clearly establish the time referred to. It is subsequent to the fulfilment of 24:30, when the Son of Man shall come with glory. 24:31 also speaks of His angels, and here in 25:31 all His holy angels are with Him. As we have already noted, the events leading up to this Advent are subsequent to the Rapture of the saints to meet the Lord in the air. From this point in time so clearly marked, this prophecy proceeds with new detail. Then, "He shall sit upon the throne of His glory, and all the Gentile nations shall be gathered before Him for judgment." There is no reason to doubt that this means the **living** nations. Thus the Olivet Discourse completely disposes of all the world. The Jews and Israel have already found their destiny at His Coming. The saints of the interval between the comings have entered in and the door is shut. The judgment here described extends the actual reign of the Son of Man to the uttermost bounds of earth. All nations not already dealt with are here, and for this reason the short passage in which the Lord describes the session

separating the nations one from another as a shepherd separates his sheep from the goats, is portentous in the extreme.

The criterion by which the individuals composing the nations are judged is most clearly postulated. They are sheep or goats, on the right hand or on the left, blessed or cursed, passing to the Kingdom prepared or to the fire prepared, according to how they have received the King's brethren. Since these have gone out into all the world subsequent to the Rapture, they are certainly His Jewish messengers by whom the gospel of the Kingdom will have been preached in all the world. This is a final judgment for all then living; the judgment of the dead is described in Revelation 20 : 12.

We shall take time only to look more carefully at the teaching of this passage about the Kingdom. In the first place, this is one of the rare passages in which the Lord is called the King. It is no longer the time of the mystery Kingdom, probably no longer the Kingdom of Heaven. The time of consummation is come, and the King is personally present on the throne of His glory.

Also, in v. 34 is a very interesting description of the Kingdom then present. It is "the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Let us compare this time scale with three other Scriptures: "for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world", (John 17 : 24) ; "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world", (1 Peter 1 : 19, 20) ; "he

hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world," (Ephesians 1 : 4). Our passage is in exactly the same terms as in Matthew 13 : 35 relating to the parables of the Kingdom, "things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world". Thus the Kingdom is to be distinguished on a time scale from certain other actions and events. This distinction is quite simple and unequivocal. The Kingdom belongs to earth and its history, that is, its planning dates **from** the foundation of the world, and this means after the work of creation was completed. (Hebrews 4 : 5) The actions and events which date from **before** the foundation of the world are (1) the Father's love for the Son, (2) the foreordaining of Christ's sacrifice, and (3) the election of the Church. The latter are the subjects of eternal counsel; the Kingdom belongs to the earth and time.

Finally, there is something for the heart of every disciple in the King's verdict: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me." During the period of His absence, what can we do which is personally for Him and pleasing to Him? (Is not this laying up treasure in heaven?) We can manifest to His brethren the care and love we would wish to show to Himself. His brethren here are His Jewish brethren, evidently in keenest suffering and reproach, wanderers, naked, sick or in prison. This is how the nations will treat the messengers of the Kingdom. In principle, however, is it possible not to apply these most moving words of the Saviour to the opportunity for ministration to His own at any moment?

WHY WERE THE GOSPELS WRITTEN? COLIN CURRY

THE third and fourth gospels each supply their own answer to this question. Their authors state their aims in unambiguous terms. Luke does this at the start, John towards the close of his gospel. Matthew and Mark give no indication of their intentions, though doubtless they too had their reasons for writing.

This even division of the four gospels, between those which do and those which do not disclose their aims, prompts the following observation. The theme of the gospels is quite as much worth presenting for its own intrinsic value and excellence, as it is for the effects it is able to produce. Luke and John, like Matthew and Mark, provide distinct accounts, each with their own outstanding qualities. Each no doubt had his own particular objective, and these were not all alike. Yet they also share a subject-matter of supreme worth and quality, and this is unquestionable quite apart from any impact they may produce upon those who read. The total combined effect of the four gospels, with their various approaches to the same theme, is to present the graces and perfections of the life and work of our Lord in a wonderful and unique way. Surrounding the Person Who is the central figure of the gospels, about His life and His death, there are virtues and glories of an inexhaustible kind. Here is a bright light which will never be extinguished. The Person at the centre of this story fills the eternal scene; the memory of what is recorded here is fadeless. Though it **does** have its effects upon others, and it is intended that it should, this incomparable

story stands in all its magnificence whether or not it is appreciated, whether or not its benefits are received.

Having stressed this point, we consider now the objectives of the gospel writers, in so far as they are made apparent by the writers themselves. If we are to avoid conjecture we are limited immediately to Luke and John: we do, however, have very clear statements about the purpose of these two gospels. The relevant passages are Luke 1:1-4 and John 20:30, 31. Some striking points of difference between the two gospels seem evident when these two statements are considered side by side. Their **authors** differ, in themselves and in their relation to their Lord. The dominant **objects** filling their minds as they wrote are decidedly different. The choice of **subject-matter** suitable to the ends in view naturally differs in the two cases. We may contrast their **methods**, too: each is characteristic of the particular writer, and well-suited for his purpose. We consider these points in turn.

First we note that whereas John writes as an eye-witness, Luke explicitly disclaims this for himself. Everywhere in John's gospel its value as a first-hand report of things actually witnessed is stressed. John is conscious of his special position as disciple and companion of the Lord, and of his particular responsibility to report faithfully what he had seen and heard. Again and again we see him in the rôle of observer; beholding, hearing, and wondering, in the presence of the words and works of Jesus the Son of God; reporting it all too, because he

knew its value and its truth. His object all along was that people who could never be in his own special position might also believe. "He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe." (John 19 : 35 R.S.V.).

Luke, however, claims only to be a person who had access to the truth in a less direct way. His gospel is, of course, divinely inspired no less than John's ; but he himself seems much less conscious of the special nature of the history he wrote. He considers himself as one of many who were attempting to write such narratives. It "seemed good" to him to write his own account. He rightly feels the need for care and accuracy in his approach. So far as he appears to be aware he writes for a single reader only. He is confident about what he writes ; he had searched for the truth before committing it to writing. He knows he has material which will bring certainty to his reader. He had gone right back to the beginning ; there is reliability and truthfulness here which puts his account on a higher level than others currently being attempted. But, so far as Luke understands the situation, he is in the second line of communicators of the gospel, coming after those who had originally witnessed the events recorded. In a sense he exemplifies the way in which the effect of the gospel still spreads today. What he had searched for and found for himself, in faith, he now communicates to another, to bring the same faith and certainty into reality there too. Perhaps it is not surprising to find a Gentile author (he could be the only one in Scripture) doing this for the benefit of another Gentile ; it is amongst the Gentiles that this self-

propagation of the gospel has mostly taken place. Of course nothing we have said in any way denies the undoubted fact that, though Luke may have understood his function in this way, the Holy Spirit has nevertheless put him right in the front line in communicating the gospel, not as an eye-witness but as an author of Holy Scripture.

We consider now the principal matters which seem to dominate the attention of the authors of these gospels. With Luke it was the **need of his reader** which moved him, and kept him going, in the task he set himself. This was in his mind from the outset ; and purposefully and methodically he sets out to meet that need. While John, too, has an end-point in the experience of his readers to which he is working, it is questionable whether this so completely dominates his thoughts from the start or at any other stage in the account. He seems often so absorbed with the **greatness of his theme** that his readers are in the background, so great is his preoccupation with the glory of the Person upon Whom he focusses. The effect upon his readers which he wishes seems likely to be brought about only as they stand alongside of him, not greatly conscious of other things, but attracted by the glory of the Lord. Certainly the great and eternal Person of Christ, and the wonder and mystery of the incarnation, seem to fill John's vision at the start. Later, he repeatedly recalls and recounts new demonstrations of His glory which he had witnessed. Only towards the close does he speak directly to his readers, and indicate the responses he might expect in the face of such disclosures. "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God ;

and that believing ye might have life through his name." Faith is what he is looking for, prompted, not by the direct view of these things (which only the few had experienced), but by reading the message which he presents. Life, even eternal life, consists in dependence upon this great Person Who filled John's horizon, and in absorption with His glories and His graces. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Though this appears in John's first letter, it comes close to describing what is happening in the gospel too.

In the light of these remarks, the nature of the contents of the two gospels is seen to be especially apposite. Luke writes a gospel which puts the **humanity** of the Lord Jesus in the foreground. His approachability, His readiness to draw near to all kinds of men (and women and children too!), His ability to sympathize and to cope with a multitude of distresses, to go after the lost until they were found and recovered, are among the prominent features. His tenderness, His compassion, His interest in mankind; becoming a Man out of concern for men, no class or kind of men being beyond His reach or unwelcome to approach Him; the grace of God, the gratuity and the universally-directed nature of His approach in concern and love for men are made plain. These objectives are achieved in a perfect manner in this story of humanity and the compassion and the sufferings of the "man of sorrows". Cleansing the ten lepers, though one alone was thankful to Him; praying for His enemies; encourag-

ing the repentant thief with a promise of a bright future with Himself, though on the verge of departure from this life; these are samples of the attitudes of our Lord shown in this gospel. The uncontainable nature of the grace of God, insisting on filling His great house to the full, compelling a response from weak and worthless people; this is only one of the **parable-pictures** characteristic of Luke's gospel. Yet along with this a real sense is imparted of the purity of that grace, of the uncontaminated holiness and sinlessness of that perfect Man Who demonstrated it.

It is encouraging to realize that, the more thorough the search, the more one goes back to the beginning to discover the facts, as Luke did, the more **this** kind of story is unveiled. Sinful men like ourselves (as well as Luke and Theophilus), have great reason for faith and assurance and for gratitude with such a Saviour exposed to our view.

John also made a deliberate selection from the available material. Many other signs had been witnessed, but he chose only those suited to his ends (20:30, 31). We notice from his remarks here that the "signs" he has included form the basis of his gospel; and when examined these are indeed found to have profound significance. They are far more than works of wonder, causing great astonishment: they are pointers to the glory of the Person Who did them. They are invitations to faith in Him. John's comment immediately after relating the first of these signs is revealing: "This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and **manifested forth his glory**, and his disciples believed on him" (2:11). Profound teaching also arose from the **per-**

formance of these mighty works. Some of it comes out in the ensuing controversies. There is more in John's gospel of face-to-face controversy between our Lord and His adversaries than in any other gospel. Truth about His Person is developed in the face of blindness and active unbelief, and shines out the more against this background. Some, however, had their eyes opened to the light that shone in the darkness, to the great revelation of the Father which He embodied. Sight to the blind, life from the dead, are enacted not only on the physical plane in the events related, though even on this level things unheard-of and almost unbelievable took place. But spiritual eyes are being opened here too, and people pass from death to life in the profoundest sense of the words. We see this happening in the narrative as we read it, through the words and works of Jesus. It is intended to happen still, as the account of these things is read. The dangers of unbelief, in all its obtuseness and blindness, are also still just as real.

If we extend our question (as it appears in the title of this paper) to the first two gospels, we are unable to give it a direct answer. Neither of these authors divulges his aims. If however, we ask what these gospels in fact achieve, and in what ways they supplement the contents of Luke and John, some comments are possible. We hope to pursue this in a further short paper. In conclusion here, however, we draw attention to the different ways in which the Holy Spirit may fulfil His ends in differing situations. Luke and John provide a striking contrast here. One way in which the Spirit of God

operates within Christian people is to take their thoughts away from themselves and others, and to focus them upon "the glory of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3 : 18). A transformation, and a reflection of that glory, begins to take place ; and, though witnessed by others, the persons immediately involved may not be aware that it is happening. John in writing his gospel seems to illustrate this, though in a special way, no doubt. On the other hand it is possible to set out, deliberately and purposefully, to produce something well-arranged, carefully planned, and designed for the good and spiritual profit of other persons. If the substance of such a project centres around Christ, this is quite as much a method which the Spirit of God uses. We have an excellent illustration of this in the way Luke approached his task. I Corinthians 14 can be quoted in support of this ; that passage stresses the features of clarity, understanding, orderliness, and self-discipline as evidences of a genuine prompting from the Holy Spirit.

The days of gospel-writing are past, and the call to such a service will plainly never come our way. Yet response to the Holy Spirit of God, within every Christian life, continues to be important. May we be ready for His leading in any of its various ways. May we be prepared to respond spontaneously to the transcendent glories and excellencies of our Lord ; and may we be willing also to devote ourselves, diligently and with thoughtful effort, to meet the needs which He makes apparent to us in the great field of opportunity for Him.

THE PLENARY INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES ROBERT DAVIES

“O Book ! Infinite sweetness ! Let my heart
Suck every letter and a honey gain,
Precious for any grief in any part ;
To clear the breast, to mollify all pain.” (George Herbert)

THE authority of the scriptures is of vital importance, whether in the field of evangelism or in building up within the church. Its authority is closely linked with the question of inspiration. For this reason, it will be of profit to look briefly into this and see what the scriptures have to say for themselves.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines inspiration as “---divine influence, especially that under which the books of scripture are held to have been written, whether **verbal**—(dictating every word), **plenary** (covering all subjects treated) or **moral**—(confined to moral and religious teaching)---”.

Our starting point may well be 2 Timothy 3 : 16 “All scripture is given by inspiration of God---” (A.V.). “Every scripture is divinely inspired---” (J.N.D. Trans.). “Inspired” is the important word : it means literally “God breathed” or “Breathed out from God.” The emphasis is on the divine operation. In the second epistle of Peter, we read that “Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (1 : 21). Here the important word is “moved” ; it suggests a ship borne along by the wind (cf. Acts 27 : 15 “We let her [i.e. the ship] drive”). In the first epistle, the apostle speaks of the Spirit of Christ being within the Old Testament prophets (1 : 11). In the light of this, it is not surprising that, on a number of occasions in the New Testament, we find the Holy Ghost presented as the Author of

the scriptures. In Hebrews 3 : 7 a quotation from Psalm 95 is introduced by the phrase “---as the Holy Ghost saith” and again in Hebrews 10 : 15 a passage from Jeremiah (concerning the New Covenant) is similarly introduced. (Only once in this epistle is a quotation introduced as by a human author—Hebrews 2 : 6 “But one in a certain place testified saying---”). The Lord Himself precedes a reference to Psalm 110 : 1 with the words “for David himself said by the Holy Ghost” (Mark 12 : 36). We may quote a further example, this time from the Acts of the Apostles. Concerning the rejection of the gospel by the Jewish leaders in Rome, Paul says “Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet---” (Acts 28 : 25 cf. Isaiah 6).

To any reader of the Old Testament, phrases such as “The Lord spake,” “The Lord said,” “The word of the Lord came unto” and “Thus saith the Lord” must be familiar. Their number has been given as approximately 3,800. Well may the Apostle Paul speak of the Old Testament as the “oracles of God” (Romans 3 : 2).

It is not denied that there were false prophets purporting to speak in the Lord’s name, wishful thinkers who proclaimed peace, when there was no peace. Jeremiah encountered such “Then the Lord said unto me, the prophets prophesy lies in my name. . . therefore, thus saith the Lord. . . I sent them not” (Jeremiah 14 : 14, 15). Jeremiah himself in obedience to God’s call

and in the face of bitter opposition prophesied only "famine and the sword". There is a wonderful passage in Isaiah concerning the "true" word of the Lord, which turns upside down the prognostications and wisdom of this world. "Thus saith Jehovah. . . that frustrateth the tokens of the liars and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; that confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers:" (Isaiah 44: 24-26).

So far we have been concerned primarily with the Old Testament. What of the New Testament? Did the writers regard themselves as writing authoritatively? Certainly the apostles were specially chosen and commissioned by the Lord Jesus and therefore had a special place of authority e.g. Ephesians 2: 20 "built upon the foundations of the apostles and the prophets" and Revelation 21: 14 "---twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb". "The apostles were called immediately of Christ Himself, as the prophets in the Old Testament were called of God Himself" (Luther on Galatians 1: 1) Paul, doubtless because of attacks made upon his authority, is specific about his calling. He writes "am I not an apostle? . . . have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" (1 Corinthians 9: 1) and again he opens his letter to the Galatians "Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father)". "As for me, I am called and sent neither of men nor by men. My calling is like in all points the calling of the apostles and I am indeed an apostle" (Luther on Galatians 1: 1). Similarly, the gospel he preached was from God and not according to men "Now

here is the principal point of this matter: My Gospel is not according to man, neither received I it of man, but by revelation of Jesus Christ. Upon this he standeth, this he urgeth. . ." (Luther on Galatians 1: 11, 12). Concerning the Lord's supper, Paul claims that what he taught the Corinthian Christians, he had received from the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 11: 23). He introduces the fact of the Lord's coming in the first epistle to the Thessalonians with the words "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord. . ." (A.V.) "Here we have a definite message from the Lord." (J. B. Phillips). At the close of 1 Corinthians 14, the apostle reminds his readers that he has written to them the commandments of the Lord (verse 37). The apostle John writes "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us" (1 John 4: 6). We shall return to consider these verses again: for the present we are concerned to point out that the apostles claim to be "of God" i.e. their message carries divine authority.

So far we have looked at the claim which the scriptures make for themselves in general terms. Does this "inspiration" extend to the mode of expression? In mundane things the importance of being able to "communicate" is widely recognized. This certainly includes a d e q u a t e expression of one's thoughts. A written instruction, for example, will fail in its purpose if the language is ambiguous or not readily understood by those for whom it is intended. In this context, content and language are intimately connected. By analogy can we reasonably divorce the inspired message from the writers' language? If the scriptures are intended to convey (as they claim) vital instruc-

tion concerning salvation, is it unreasonable to expect that such all-important instruction shall be adequately expressed? To allow that divine control stops short of the language or mode of expression is illogical to say the least. In dealing with this subject there are, no doubt, many things "hard to be understood" but let us see what light the scriptures cast upon it.

Moses, at the burning bush, was concerned about his inability to deliver the message committed to him ". . . I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue" was his plea. "The Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? . . . Now, therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (Exodus 4:10, 11, 12). Similarly, Jeremiah felt himself too young and inexperienced for the task laid upon him "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. . . Then the Lord put forth His hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord saith unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth" (Jeremiah 1:6, 9). Ezekiel, prophet of the exile, was encouraged in much the same way "And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them . . . And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear" (Ezekiel 2:6, 7). In the beginning of the next chapter, Ezekiel is offered a scroll and told to eat it. "Son of man. . . eat this roll. . . and fill up thy bowels with this roll" and then the command follows—"Speak with my words unto them" (i.e. the house of Israel) (Ezekiel 3:1-4).

In the New Testament, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul writes about his coming to the city "in weakness and not with enticing words of men's wisdom". However, says the apostle, amongst the mature

we do impart **divine** wisdom, in marked contrast to that which the world calls wisdom. This **divine** wisdom is imparted "not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:13).

Does this mean, then, that the writers acted automatically or that the process was simply one of dictation? Certainly not. It is clear that the writers' personalities were not over-ruled or set aside. They wrote as individuals: their personalities, problems and difficulties 'come through' to us. This is true of both the Old Testament and the New Testament writers. Jeremiah, for example, was deeply affected by his message and shrank from delivering it "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears . . ." and later in the prophecy "I am in derision daily. . . Then I said; I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire" (Jeremiah 9:1; 20:7, 9). The prophetic message and personal sorrows of Hosea are interwoven; his wife was unfaithful—was not Israel likewise unfaithful to the Lord her God? "And the Lord said to me, Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress; even as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods. . ." (Hosea 3:1 R.S.V.).

Of Daniel it is recorded that he was grieved and anxious in spirit and troubled (or alarmed) by the visions he had seen "and the visions of my head alarmed me" (Daniel 7:15 R.S.V.). On another occasion he mourned and fasted three weeks (see Daniel 10:2, 3).

(To be continued)

“WILT THOU GO WITH THIS MAN?”

THE chapter, Genesis 24, begins with the goodness of God, as seen in blessing upon Abraham in all the testings of his pathway. Not only had he been delivered out of difficulties, and given earthly prosperity, but his experiences provide wonderful lessons regarding the purpose of God in Christ. By the offering up of Isaac he had been allowed to rehearse before God all that would be yet fulfilled in the delivering up of the Son of the Father for us to accomplish the work of redemption (chapter 22). Also, in the death of Sarah there was to be the setting aside of Israel and the promises (chapter 23), in order that the way might be opened up for the bringing in of the precious truth of Christ and the church, according to divine purpose. Finally, in chapter 24, we behold in type the securing of a bride for Christ, the risen Man, and the present activities of the Holy Spirit in the period of God's grace.

Let us consider the chapter and see the delightful manner in which the servant's commission is carried out. First of all Abraham called his faithful servant, who had charge of all his goods, and instructed him to go forth and find a wife for his son, a bride suitable for union with Isaac. This, in figure, is what the Holy Spirit is doing at the present moment: bringing to light by the ministry of the assembly, what there is for the pleasure of Christ. The servant had to seek a wife from Abraham's own country and kindred, for she must be of suited generation and origin, and not of the Canaanites. Along with this, the sternest note is given twice over, that if the woman be not willing to come,

Isaac must not be brought thither again. The work of the cross can never be repeated, for "This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12). So Abraham, in the blessedness of faith's certainties, assures his servant that the Lord God of heaven will send His angel before him successfully to accomplish this mission. The bride must be found and brought to Isaac, and not Isaac to the bride and she must also be willing to come with the servant.

The servant then took his departure with ten camels of his master's, and all the goods of his master were in his hand. This, no doubt, is figurative of the holy responsibility of the Spirit of God in seeking, preparing, and bringing the church to Christ. Guided aright, the servant reached the city of Nahor, in Mesopotamia, where was a well of water. The moment of arrival too, was right, for it was the time when women came to draw water. Shewing his complete dependence upon the Lord God of Abraham, he asked that a sign be given him, for the selecting of the truly appointed bride for Isaac. This was to be manifested in her willingness to help in the refreshing of thirst, both for servant and camels. Very simple, and yet, how selective!

Our introduction to Rebekah is extremely significant, for she was a suitable person because of divine generation. Having the true spirit of grace she met the need of the servant and the camels. Her name possibly means "captivating." These features marked her out as the one to receive the ring and the bracelets, with which the servant gladly

adorned her, signifying the spiritual ornaments which are for the moral beauty of the bride in union with Christ. Rebekah was of good countenance, a virgin, gracious, kind, and of Abraham's kin. Bearing the pitcher, she was not only a water carrier, but at the request of the man, was willing to refresh those in need. By this loving service, the Lord God makes it clearly known that here is the one for Isaac. She hastened to do this kindness, and the servant is left in no doubt that his journey is being made to prosper. The golden jewel for the forehead, and the golden bracelets upon Rebekah are figurative of the divine righteousness seen in the saints of God, the bride of Christ, even before we are actually with Him at the marriage of the Lamb. Then she will be clothed in garments clean and white, which are the righteousnesses of the saints, the product of the Holy Spirit's work in us, forming and fashioning us after Christ.

In answer to the question, "Whose daughter art thou?" Rebekah was able and ready to declare her pedigree. "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the-son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor". Not only was there a declaration of her birth, but also a readiness to hospitality and a making room for the Holy Spirit of God. The scene is one of thanksgiving and worship as the man bowed his head, recognizing the goodness and leading of Jehovah in this matter. The thought of the bride had its beginning with the Father, and the work and service of the Holy Spirit is to bring her to Christ. The words and activities of Rebekah, too, seem to declare spiritual intelligence, the moral features of the bride worthy of Isaac.

Rebekah's brother, Laban, ran

out to meet the man at the well, and the scene was one of happy welcome. This must be so when God is working. The jewels of the bride-to-be were shown and her speech was comely as she declared the words of Abraham's servant. Immediately and faithfully the servant spoke of the object of his mission entrusted to him, and beginning with his position as Abraham's servant he sought no honours for himself. Making much of his master and his greatness, he told also of Sarah and the son of their old age to whom his father had given all his possessions. Then he told of the solemn vow to find a wife for the son from the kindred of Abraham, for none other would be acceptable. So in prayerful dependence he found Rebekah, who graciously and kindly responded to his requests, thereby being marked out as the one suitable, and worthy to wear the jewels which were upon her. Thus was the important matter declared in the hearing of all in the house, even before partaking of the ordinary household hospitality.

The decision now rested with the household so that the success of the servant's mission might be assured. He must not be hindered in any way, for this was a concern of great significance. How pleasing to the servant was the reply that this thing proceedeth from the Lord, "Take Rebekah and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken." This called for further worship from Abraham's servant, and he brought forth other jewels of silver and gold for Rebekah, and presented her with raiment. These can be connected with Christ in resurrection; silver—redemption; gold—fulness of God; and raiment—the character of Christ as seen in His own. What a scene of joy and delight! Yet, the journey must begin, for the business of the Holy Spirit is to bring home

the Bride for Christ. On the morrow the servant prepared for departure, refusing all overtures of kindness to stay longer. The decision was Rebekah's. She was brought and asked the momentous question, "Wilt thou go with this man?" Without hesitation, and with the joy of determined affection, her answer was readily given, "I will go."

Rebekah received the blessing of the household, they pray for her a vast posterity, her seed victorious over all enemies. How very true this will be when Christ takes to Himself His great power and reign, and His wife, the Church, will be with Him, the object of His affection and holy delight.

As she accompanied the man along the wilderness way, the conversation would be, no doubt, of Isaac, the son of Abraham. As for Isaac, he was abiding in a delectable

place, the south land, and by the well La-hai-roi. (Him that liveth and seeth me). The scene typifies one of resurrection.

Going forth to meditate, he lifted up his eyes and saw the caravan bringing to him his bride. Also, at the same moment Rebekah lifted up her eyes and saw Isaac walking toward them. To her question, the servant answered, "It is my master," thus declaring his equality with the father. Her beauty is now solely for him, and she veiled herself. The journey over, the quest satisfactorily completed, the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. What a wonderful unfolding! Rebekah became Isaac's wife and he loved her. It is perhaps not without meaning that the second mention of love in the Scriptures is the love of the bridegroom for the bride.

QUESTIONS

From Mr. T. Tyson of Crewe:—Regarding the seventh chapter of Leviticus, I find that most commentaries associate the breast which was waved as depicting the affections of the Lord. My difficulty is that I cannot find any good reason for associating the 'breast' of an animal with affection. I understand the Hebrew word used in Leviticus is reserved for this part of an animal and another word is used for the human 'breast' or 'breasts.' Is there a confusion of thought here because the English word happens to be used for both, or is there a sound reason for the interpretation?

Answer. I have studied carefully the words used in the book of Leviticus, and do not think a clear and definite answer to your question is

possible. I tend to conclude that the notion that the 'breast' in Leviticus 7:30, 31 and 34 symbolises the affections is acceptable, for reasons as follows.

First, as to the words. In Leviticus 7 'breast' is Hebrew *hazeh*, which is only used of animals and only in the Pentateuch. 'Breast' in, for example, Canticles, is *shad*.

The linguistic question really comes down to the possibility of confusion between 'breast' in the sense of that part of the surface of a body reckoned near the heart, and in the sense of a woman's breast. Not only in English, but in Greek also, and perhaps in most other languages, the same word is used for both purposes regarding the **human** body, for the very good reason that the parts of the body meant are the

same.

In the animal body the parts are quite separate and distinct. There is no possibility in any language of confusion of the portion of the surface near the heart with the udder, because they are remote from each other.

What I am suggesting is that the word **hazeh** means the part near the heart, which unquestionably symbolises the affections, whatever the liberal theologians may say. **Hazeh** is perhaps used only of animals because the Old Testament does not appear to have the equivalent of 'beating the breast', or of 'leaning on the breast'. In the New Testament, when John leaned in Jesus' breast, few would doubt that the affections of the Lord are symbolised, and I am suggesting that **hazeh** means breast in this sense.

The view suggested receives some confirmation from the Greek equivalents used in the LXX for the Old Testament Hebrew. The word used in John 13:25 for 'breast' is **stethos**, and this word in LXX is the equivalent of the Hebrew **lev**, which means 'heart'. The LXX equivalent of **Hazeh** is **stethunion**. This word is not employed in the new Testament, but it is obviously akin to **stethos**.

Question from Mr. R. H. Neil of Hounslow:—The abolition of Capital Punishment. Is it justifiable on Scriptural grounds? "Whoso sheddeth Man's blood, by Man shall his blood be shed. For in the image of God he hath made Man". (Genesis 9:6. New Translation) I have heard it said that this obligation has never been revoked and in the dispensations that have followed on from Noah no alteration in this original requirement by God has any Scriptural warrant.

Answer. I think you have correctly stated the case, and will add only one or two remarks. By the position of these mandates by God after the flood they appear to have the same permanence as seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night, that is, "While the earth remaineth". (Genesis 8:22)

Christians have no part in maintaining this, of course, except by prayer. The principle on which this latter is founded finds immediate exemplification in Genesis. In chapter 12, we read for the first time in Scripture of the call of God, by which Abram was separated from the world of human government, to live apart as a pilgrim and a stranger, having no longer any part to play in "the gate" of the city (Genesis 19:1), that is, in government. Romans 13:1 to 7 is the passage in the New Testament giving directions to the Christian about governments. They exist, ordained by God and His ministers. This is the continuation of the position established in Genesis 9, and the expression "he beareth. . . the sword" can only mean capital punishment. It is part, (and a very serious and fundamental part) of the mounting tide of lawlessness everywhere foreseen in the Word, that governments have renounced this foundation of all human government as set up by God. They have done so on the ground of specious arguments not really worth considering in detail, since they are overthrown by one word of God. It is the Christian's part to pray for governments and to spread the word of God. When the Word of God is honoured, government is improved, although this is not the prime aim of spreading the word, any more than cleaning up the house was the object of the sweeping in Luke 15:8.

5. ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

The Promises to Abraham

IN Romans 11 : 1 this question is put by Paul as to Israel : "Hath God cast away His people" ? The question does not concern His spiritual people, but His earthly people according to the flesh, Israel. The Jews are enemies as to the gospel, but beloved on the principle of a national election on account of the fathers. The Jewish nation is never to enter into the Church ; on the contrary, "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in", until all the children of God composing the Church in this dispensation are called. Then Israel as a nation will be saved. The root of the olive tree is Abraham, to whom the call of God was addressed, and he was separated, elect, and made the depository of the promises.

In order to help you to understand the root of the promises, which is Abraham, I will touch on the dispensations which preceded. In the first, man was left to himself. The earth became full of violence and corruption, and was ended by the Flood. Second, under Noah, government and vengeance were put into the hands of man, and to this was added a blessing to the earth. But Noah failed, and after Noah came idolatry (Joshua 24 : 2). Third, out of this idolatry God called Abraham to separation from the state of affairs on earth to God. Henceforth all God's dealings on earth centre on Israel. (Deuteronomy 4 : 35) We must see two principles distinctly presented, first, the promises made

to Abraham unconditionally and second, Israel receiving them on conditions, and so losing all. But this did not invalidate the promise made to Abraham 400 years before Israel at Sinai received the promise on conditions, and failed. I am not now alluding to the spiritual promises made to Abraham, which have found a partial fulfilment by the gospel in this dispensation, but I allude to the promise giving Palestine to Israel.

Let us begin our citation of these promises with Genesis 12. They include earthly promises as well as spiritual ones. The spiritual part is only once repeated (22 : 17, 18), but the temporal ones often. In Genesis 15 there is an absolute gift of an enlarged Palestine without condition, with the exact limits of the country, and a numerous posterity (Genesis 15 : 5, 18). The gift of the country is renewed in ch. 17 : 8, and confirmed to Isaac in ch. 26 : 3, 4, and to Jacob in ch. 35 : 12. If we say that the spiritual promises are without condition, then the promise of Palestine to Abraham's seed is also.

In Exodus 19 there is an immense change. Until then, all (manna, water, victory) had been given gratuitously, and the 'if' of a condition is introduced in 19 : 5. In Exodus 24 : 7 the first covenant was founded on Israel's obedience. They promised "All that the Lord hath said will we do", and immediately fell into the idolatry of the golden calf. It was when Moses besought God to remember the promises made to Abraham (Exodus 32 : 13),

that God averts the evil threatened. It was through Moses' intercession based on the promises made to Abraham that Israel entered at all into Canaan, and even after their fall in the promised land as narrated in 2 Kings, there remain still to be applied to them, as to their final establishment in the land, all the promises made to Abraham.

Failure and Dispersion

The vision of the Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37 exhibits very forcibly that God in His goodness will yet restore Israel, but before considering this restoration, we shall have to see how this nation broke down and was dispersed after their first establishment in the land. First they were given victory under Joshua, but then lapsed into abject failure under the Judges and Samuel. Under Eli, they came to Ichabod, and while, under Samuel there was prophecy, they soon rejected him, and God gave them a king in anger. Thus Israel has failed to make good under prophet, priest and king.

David was God's gift to Israel, but his son turned away his heart from the Lord. They subsequently divided themselves into two nations, and finally, Israel first and then Judah lapsed into idolatry, and were removed into captivity.

Such, in a few words, was the behaviour of Israel, and even of Judah, until the captivity in Babylon. The Spirit of God sums up the history of their crimes, and of His patience, in this impressive language (2 Chronicles 36:15, 16): "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and

despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." This was the end of their existence in the land of Caanan, into which they had been introduced under Joshua. The name Lo-ammi (not my people) was at last written upon them.

Promises of Restoration

[Two errors are frequently and tenaciously held on the subject of the promises of restoration now to be considered. One is that they have been already completely fulfilled in the partial restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah. We shall see that some prophecies were thus fulfilled, but that there are clear and definite cases in which it cannot possibly be maintained. Much remains to be fulfilled in a yet future restoration of Israel to the possession of Palestine. The other is that these promises are being fulfilled in the Church, and nothing remains to be fulfilled in a future possession of Palestine by Israel. This last position is totally untenable, except by a wholesale disregard of the whole tenor of Scripture, including the promises to Abraham already considered. The tenor of these remarks underlies the lectures, but they are not to be found in the lectures in this form.—ED.]

A prominent assurance is to be noted before we turn to the prophets. It is given in two forms in 2 Samuel 7:10 and 1 Chronicles 17:11-13. The first concerns Israel and the other the application is directly to Christ. "Moreover, I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them that they may dwell in a place of their own; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more as beforetime." The other form is: "and it shall come to

pass, when thy days are expired, that thou must go to be with thy fathers, and I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons ; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me an house, and I will establish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son." In Hebrews 1 : 5 application is made of these words to Christ.

Of the many pertinent passages in Isaiah, let us read a few extracts relating to Jerusalem. "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities : thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down ; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken." (33 : 20) "But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion ? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." (49 : 14, 15) "And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people : and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying." (65 : 19) It has been asserted that in these chapters Zion means the Church. Impossible ! There can be no question, but that earthly blessings such as are hitherto unknown on earth are to be the portion of the earthly Jerusalem when God Himself will rejoice over it. (See also Isaiah 1 : 25-28 ; 4 : 2-4 ; 11 : 9-12)

Let us look at Jeremiah. "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem : neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of

Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto their fathers". (Jeremiah 3 : 17, 18) Certain happenings have looked like the accomplishment of many of the prophecies relating to the restoration of Israel to Palestine ; as, for example, the return from Babylon ; but God has given His own marks ; He has linked together circumstances which have never yet had fulfilment ; as, in this passage, "All nations shall be gathered unto it." It is certain that this did not take place at the return from Babylon. But you will reply, It is the Church. No ; for "in those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together . . . to the land which I have given for an inheritance to your fathers." We see, in a word, three things happening together, which most surely have not yet had a simultaneous accomplishment : namely, Jerusalem the throne of Jehovah ; Judah and Israel united ; and the nations assembled to the throne of God. When the Church was founded, Israel was dispersed ; when Israel returned from Babylon, there was neither Church nor assemblage of nations.

Jeremiah 31 : 28, 38. "And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict ; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the Lord. . . Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the city shall be built to the Lord from the tower of Haneel unto the gate of the corner." Who is it that the Lord has broken down, and destroyed ? The same that he will build and plant. It is a little unreasonable to apply all the

judgments to Israel, and all the blessings which concern the same persons to the Church. And if the Church be indeed here spoken of, what is the meaning of "from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner"? (See also Jeremiah 30 : 7-11 ; 32 : 37-42 ; 33 : 6-26)

Ezekiel 36 : 23-28. "Then I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean : . . . and I will put my spirit within you, . . . and ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers". This passage contains almost the very same words as were used by the Lord in John 3 : 5. Note also v. 12 of the same chapter, "If I have told you earthly things, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" As if He had said, If I have told you that Israel must be born again to enjoy those earthly promises which belong to her (that is, the final and inalienable possession of Palestine), and you have not understood me, how will you comprehend about heavenly things— about the glory of Christ exalted in heaven, and the Church, His companion, in this heavenly glory? The earthly blessings and the heavenly blessings have this in common, that you must be born again to possess them. Israel must be renewed in heart to receive the promises of Canaan. In this chapter in Ezekiel, the details of earthly things such as "fruit of trees"— "increase of the field", confirm that it is the land promised which is here referred to. (See also Ezekiel 34 : 22; 37 ; 39 : 22-25).

Space will not permit even the enumeration of extracts from other prophets, but they will be found in the Psalms, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah and Zech-

ariah. One passage however, calls for special comment, Isaiah 18. [The quotation is from the New Translation. ED.] "Ha! land shadowing with wings, which art beyond the rivers of Cush, that sendeth ambassadors over the sea, and in vessels of papyrus upon the waters". Here is a nation taking God's people under protection, under its wings. The rivers of Cush are the Nile and the Euphrates, and a call is made to a country which is beyond them, to a distant land, which at the time of the prophecy had never come into association with Israel.* "Go, swift messengers, to a nation scattered and ravaged, to a people terrible from their existence and thenceforth". "In that time shall a present be brought unto Jehovah of Hosts of a people scattered and ravaged, . . . whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of Jehovah of Hosts, the mount Zion." (vv. 2 and 7). It is a description of Israel returning into Judaea by the help of this distant nation. We do not say that it is France, Russia, or England. "All ye inhabitants of the world, and dwellers on the earth, . . . see ye. . . and . . . hear ye! (v. 3) The nations are to have their eyes upon Israel; they are summoned by God to pay attention to what is taking place as to Jerusalem. "For thus hath Jehovah said unto me: I will take my rest, I will observe from my dwelling-place". (v. 4) Though the Israelites have returned to their land, God takes no notice of them. They are abandoned to the nations, and vv. 5 and 6 show that what the world is invited to watch will be judgments executed by the Gentile nations. "For before the harvest. . . he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning-knives, and take away and

*William Kelly wrote about 1870, "the second verse shows. . . that this future ally of the Jews is a maritime power."

cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the mountain birds of prey, and to the beasts of the earth; and the birds of prey shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them."

Finally, it is fitting to touch on the order of God's dealing with Judah and Israel in their dispersion and restoration to their land. The first to be gathered are those who rejected Jesus and were guilty of His death. The ten tribes were not guilty of His death; they were dispersed before the four monarchies began their rule of the world. One thing is evident, that those who rejected the Christ will be subjected to the Anti-christ. Having united themselves to Antichrist, they will undergo the consequences of this alliance, and at last will be destroyed, but a remnant saved.

With the ten tribes the events are different, as we know from Ezekiel 20:32-39. When God gathers the house of Israel from the countries wherein they have been scattered, He will cut off those amongst them

continuing rebellious so that they do not enter into Caanan at all. Then, "saith the Lord God, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, serve me."

We add two principles, very simple and clear, which distinguish all preceding blessings (as, for instance, the return from Babylon) from the accomplishment of the prophecies of which we are now speaking. These are, first, that the blessings flow from the presence of Christ, Son of David. (In other words, they are subsequent to the Second Coming.) Secondly, that they are a consequence of the new covenant. (That is, that Israel must be truly converted before entering upon them.)

Neither of these conditions was fulfilled at the return from Babylon, nor has it been since.

These prophecies are not fulfilled in the Church, since the gospel does not occupy itself with the possession by Israel of Palestine, which is the matter of these prophecies.

THE PLENARY INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES ROBERT DAVIES

(Continued)

WE have already referred to Ezekiel. He sat among the exiles by the river Chebar almost overwhelmed by the task set before him viz the nature of his message and the unwillingness of the people to listen and obey. ". . . I sat where they sat and remained there astonished. . . seven days" (see 3:14, 15). Habakkuk pondered deeply over God's ways: he could not reconcile the evil he saw around him, with the fact of God's holiness

and righteousness. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil. . . wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" (Habakkuk 1:13). Nevertheless this prophecy closes with a wonderful declaration of faith: though all natural resources fail yet will he "joy in the God of my salvation" (see Habakkuk 3:17-19).

When we come to the New Testament, it is apparent from the English versions that Paul's style and John's style differ. They present the truth in their own appointed ways and to a large extent in their own terms. Did not Paul's first letter to Corinth cause him great mental anguish? "I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus. . ." (2 Corinthians 2 : 13) but later he was comforted "by the coming of Titus. . . when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervant mind towards me" (7 : 6, 7). By way of contrast, do we not catch something of the apostles' joy at the fidelity of the Philippian Christians? ". . . my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown . . ." (Philippians 4 : 1). I think we see also occasions when the writers' experience is reflected in the epistles. Does not Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 4 : 6 "For God. . . hath shined in our hearts. . ." reflect something of the Damascus road? Again in 1 Peter 2 : 4, 5 the metaphor "living stones" may owe something to his first meeting with the Lord (see John 1 : 42) and one cannot escape the conclusion that 1 Peter 1 : 3 "begotten. . . unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" had a special significance for the apostle. After the bitter tears shed outside the High Priest's house, who better than Peter knew the value of that living hope?

We also find that the writer sought out information when necessary. Luke, for example, does not claim to have been an eye witness of our Lord's public ministry, but he does claim to have enquired closely from those who **had** seen and heard Him. He has been called "the patient and careful Luke" "It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some

time past, to write an orderly account. . ." (Luke 1 : 3 R.S.V.).

The Old Testament also makes reference to other writings with which some of the writers must have been familiar e.g. the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel (See 2 Kings 15 : 31), and the Book of Jasher—(see Joshua 10 : 13 and 2 Samuel 1 : 18.)

The foregoing passages are sufficient to show that the writers of both the Old and the New Testaments were men of 'like passions as we are' and yet in a way which we cannot fully understand, they were chosen of God, motivated by His Spirit and made adequate channels of the Divine revelation. It is true, of course, that to the Old Testament prophets there were things of the Spirit's revealing which transcended their natural understanding. "They enquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them. . ." (1 Peter 1 : 11). They may be likened to travellers standing on the foothills of a great mountain range and catching glimpses of high and hitherto unexplored peaks. As the Lord Himself said, Abraham (though not a 'prophet' in the narrow meaning of the word) rejoiced to see His day "and he saw it and was glad" (John 8 : 56). Isaiah also saw the glory of the Lord Jesus "and spake of Him" (John 12 : 41). The whole process of revelation is something we can only attempt to **describe**, and not to **explain**. One cannot do better than quote from J. N. Darby's introduction to his New Translation (Revised preface to Second Edition. 1871) "I believe the scriptures to be the inspired word of God received by the Holy Ghost and communicated by His power, though, thank God, through mortal men; what is divine made withal thoroughly

human, as the blessed Lord Himself whom it reveals, though never ceasing to be divine”.

We have referred to the Holy Spirit guiding and controlling the writers, but the same Spirit dwells in every Christian. “your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost” (1 Corinthians 6 : 19). It will be of value to see what bearing this has on the authority of the scriptures. This is twofold. Firstly, without setting aside human teachers, the Spirit enables the believer to understand divine things ; He is the Spirit of truth who guides into all truth (John 16 : 13). Man left to his own resources cannot attain to the ‘deep things of God’ “. . . the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” “. . . the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him” (1 Corinthians 2 : 11, 14). In ‘A Prologue or Preface to the Bible’ Cramner bids his readers consider the ‘eunuchus of Candace, queen of Ethiopy’ who, though he confessed freely his lack of knowledge, read the scriptures God saw his willingness and sent Philip “Therefore let no man be negligent about his own health and salvation : though thou have not Philip alway when thou wouldest, the Holy Ghost which then moved and stirred Philip will be ready and not fail thee, if thou do thy diligence accordingly.”

Secondly, the Spirit confirms the authority of the scriptures. This He did at Thessalonica “. . . our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance” (1 Thessalonians 1 : 5). Paul preached ‘the gospel of God’—i.e. the good news from God (2 : 2) and it was received as such. “. . . when you received the word of God. . . you accepted it not

as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God. . .” (2 : 13). Spiritual authority is rightly discerned as such by those in whose hearts the Spirit is working “My sheep hear my voice. . .”.

Let us now return to the two passages referred to earlier, viz 1 Corinthians 14 : 37 and 1 John 4 : 6. Is anyone inclined to argue with Paul ? Does such a one regard himself as ‘spiritual’ ? “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a commandment of the Lord”. Similarly it is the man who ‘knows God’ who listens to the apostolic message. “He who is not of God, does not listen to us.”

Perhaps a word of warning is necessary here : we must be on our guard against a purely **subjective** approach. The Spirit confirms to the believer the **intrinsic** authority of the scriptures.

A subject upon which we must touch briefly is the way in which the Old and New Testament scriptures have come down to us. This is not the place to discuss the transmission of the text, nor is the writer qualified to do this. Before the invention of printing in the 15th century A.D. books had to be copied out by hand. A scriptural example is Proverbs 25 : 1. Granted that respect for the scriptures would engender careful copying, no copyist is infallible and there are, without doubt, scribal errors in the existing manuscripts. Does this mean that the texts are confused and unreliable ? Can we speak of having God’s word today ? That there are difficulties in the texts cannot be denied, but I believe (on very good grounds) that for all practical purposes we have reliable texts and we can speak of having the word of God in our hands. Concerning the

question of scribal errors, in his booklet "Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?" Prof. F. F. Bruce writes ". . . if the great number of M.S.S. increases the number of scribal errors, it increases proportionately the means of correcting such errors, so that the margin of doubt. . . is not so large as might be feared. The variant readings about which any doubt remains among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice".

We may now return to the main stream of our subject by looking at our Lord's attitude to the Old Testament scriptures and that of the New Testament writers generally. The Lord Jesus came not to destroy the law or the prophets, but to fulfil them (Matthew 5 : 17) ; it is easier for heaven and earth to pass than one tittle of the law to fail (Luke 16 : 17). The basic error of the Sadducees was that they did not know the scriptures (Mark 12 : 24). The scriptures speak of Him (John 5 : 39) ". . . the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10 : 35).

Above all, the Old Testament looks on to Christ ; in the New Testament the promises of the Old are fulfilled in Him ". . . all the promises of God in Him are yea and in Him, Amen" (2 Corinthians 1 : 20). We may quote the well known words of Augustine of Hippo "the New is latent in the Old ; the Old is patent in the New". In the synagogue at Nazareth Jesus said, with reference to Isaiah 61 : 1, 2 "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4 : 21). At the close of the same gospel, the position is summarised with final authority : "and beginning at Moses and all the prophets He (i.e. the risen Lord) expounded unto them in all the

scriptures the things concerning himself" and again ". . . all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning me" (Luke 24 : 27, 44).

It is worthy of comment that in verse 27 the Lord speaks of "all the scriptures" and in verse 44 to the three sections into which the Hebrew bible is divided, viz the law (5 books of Moses) ; the prophets—which includes some books we might classify as historical e.g. Samuel and Kings ; and the Writings (Hagiographa) of which the Psalms is probably the most important part.

We have said earlier that the apostles were specially commissioned. Like the Master they served they acknowledged the authority of the scriptures and they had learned that it was to Him that the scriptures bore witness. Undoubtedly the Holy Spirit enlightened their hearts, as the Lord Jesus Himself promised. ". . . the Holy Ghost. . . he shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said" ". . . the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he will testify of me" (John 14 : 26, 15 : 26).

When we see Christ as the Central Theme of the bible, so we grasp its essential unity, in spite of the variety of human authors, the different forms of literary composition used, and with particular reference to the Old Testament, the long period of time during which the books were written and compiled. The bible has been rightly called "a text book of redemption" and this redemption is in Christ "In whom we have redemption through his blood. . ." (Ephesians 1 : 7). ". . . his dear Son, in whom we have redemption" (Colossians 1 : 14). The 'red line' of

redemption runs through the scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

Much of what has been said has been said before, but it is well that we should be reminded of these things. We began with 2 Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." The whole chapter anticipates a day of breakdown and confusion "... in the last days, perilous times shall come" (v. 1), ("times of stress" R.S.V.).

In such circumstances, the Christian needs a reliable guide, a compass by which a right course can be steered; he needs equipment to meet the surrounding dangers, false cults etc. This the Inspired Word provides; it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (verses 16 and 17).

MATTHEW AND MARK

COLIN CURRY

THIS paper is to be considered as supplementing the previous one, in which the question was asked "Why were the gospels written?" A direct answer to that question was possible only for Luke and John. Though we cannot answer the question in the same way for Matthew and Mark, we may nevertheless give some consideration to these gospels. We endeavour briefly to pick out their prominent characteristics and special contributions to the total picture presented by the fourfold gospel.

Matthew, more than any other gospel, stresses the continuity of the New Testament story with the past. He focusses attention upon "Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). His claims and credentials as King of Israel are established. Scripture is repeatedly said to be fulfilled in the events related. Here was the One upon Whom the promises centred, Who has the right to rule. Yet soon it is made clear that the favoured nation had no inclination to welcome Him. The gospel speaks of a King rejected, yet in no sense relinquishing His authority. Indeed, His authority shines out from start to finish here;

certainly it is in no degree diminished by the fact of His rejection. In face of His refusal He speaks with a calm dignity of deeper purposes to be fulfilled by this very means. His rights, refused at the moment will in due course be insisted on; but meanwhile, while He is rejected, God's rule is to be recognized in a different and less open sense. For those who are to be His subjects in this kind of situation there are heartening words of instruction, principles of thought and action for His disciples, guidance regarding suitable attitudes during His absence and in view of His return. There are also strong (and equally authoritative) words against those who reject Him: these, however, do not soften their animosity towards Him. There are scathing words rebuking their hypocrisy; there are unexpected and astonishing replies to their insincere questionings; there are unanswerable and challenging words in return. In the closing words of the gospel, risen from the dead, all power is in His hands in a way which is beyond dispute; though the plain truth of this is still avoided by many. Not yet is it to be used in subduing opposition, however, but rather in directing and encouraging

His emissaries in spreading His fame and His rule in wider fields. Opportunities of voluntary recognition of His authority and lordship are to be given on the widest scale before the day arrives when it will be insisted upon.

Though it is not said that this was its purpose, the special suitability of such a gospel for the Hebrew reader of the time is evident. The book of Acts shows that the message of the gospel was almost invariably offered "to the Jew first", even in the remoter places to which it was taken. The old Jewish scriptures were referred to and their fulfilment in the coming of Christ was asserted. Acts 13 is a prominent example of this (see, for instance, verses 27, 29, 32, 33). It seems in agreement with this that the first of the four gospels should have the same kind of emphasis. With its searching analysis of the guilt of Israel in refusing her King, and with its stress on the moral strength of the One Who was rejected, there is much here to give pause to any Jew who might read it, whether in the homeland where these events had occurred or in some distant community to which the news travelled only slowly. There is a presentation here, too, of One Who commands subjection and devotion on a far deeper level than that of national loyalty or traditional allegiance: many a Jewish reader must have found the need and the opportunity personally to reverse the common verdict of his nation, and to humble himself beneath the gracious authority of Christ. Discerning readers of all kinds (Gentiles, Jews, twentieth-century and first-century readers alike) have cause to marvel at the deeper truths that this gospel reveals, so clearly does it demonstrate that all developments (even the apparently adverse

ones) are well in control. Rejected by His people our Lord speaks of building His church, a work soon to begin which the strongest adversary could not destroy (chapter 16). There is a glimpse, too, of the true glory of His kingdom in its real quality and scope (chapter 17). The irresistible nature of the true purposes of God, and the truth that Christ holds the reins in every sense, are facts known to faith today, but soon to be evident in a breath-taking way, for all to see and none to deny.

The gospel of Mark has characteristics of yet another kind. It is the most forthright of all the gospels, getting straight into the business in hand from the opening verse. It puts its emphasis upon the **activity** of our Lord. It is a swift-moving account of an active life which was brief but full; full of continuous and perfect **service** and devotion to God and men. There is more emphasis in Mark on His deeds than on His words. It is a brusque story, which wastes no words, about a life which had no idle moments. It is packed with incidents, with demands upon our Lord which He never failed to meet. *Hard-pressed* though He was, we see Him finding time for prayer, guarding the need for it carefully, rising "a great while before day" to ensure adequate time for it (1 : 35). We read of Him resting only once, in a boat during a tremendous storm! The gospel stresses His **power** and readiness to cope with all manner of human problems. We are not given the impression of naked or easy power, however, though it is always effective. Always **compassion** prompts its use; always we sense the **cost** to Himself of this ceaseless concern for people. The leper, the paralytic, the fevered, the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the diseased, all experienced this compassionate

power of His. Individuals, each in their own personal plight, came or were brought to Him. Multitudes, with a vast mass of troubles, knew His kindness and felt His healing power. Demon-possession finds a prominent place in this gospel; repeatedly we read of His ability to release men from that awful bondage. Every kind of power, seen or unseen, yields to His complete control. He has power over the devil, power to raise the dead, to quell the winds and the waves, to walk the sea Himself. He has the ability, too, to defeat finally the adversary and to vindicate God in the utmost sense. At a cost to Himself which is immeasurable, we see Him (at the close of the gospel) meeting the enemy on the ultimate battleground, going down into death to wrest the power from him.

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). These words could be used as a summary of Mark’s gospel, and are part of one of the first recorded preachings of the gospel to non-Jewish hearers. The immediate audience for Mark’s gospel is perhaps more a matter of conjecture than for any of the others. It has few of those special features which distinguish Matthew’s gospel, placing the story in its Jewish background. Nor does it stress so plainly as Luke’s gospel the sympathies of the Saviour on the broadest possible front, and the suitability of its message for the widest readership of all. Though we cannot say much else about its immediate recipients, it certainly falls in place between these two positions, and adds a distinctive contribution to the whole.

We have picked out the authority,

the power, the grace, and the glory, of the Lord Jesus, as key-words to the respective themes of the four gospels. This admittedly oversimplifies the matter; there are other ways in which the special characteristics of the gospels could be highlighted. It does, however, help us to realize the benefit gained from this multiple presentation of the one incomparable story. About that life and death there are countless features which blend together in a perfect way. The very account of it reflects this fact. We may be sure that there would have been great loss had the method of recording it been different. Though the individual gospels stress different aspects of the story, none of them is too heavily weighted in its own particular direction. We can read about the deity of Christ in the synoptic gospels as well as in John. We can find that He is the true Messiah in John, and in the others, though Matthew has most about this. His humanity and His perfect attitude of service pervade all the gospels, even though they receive special emphasis in Luke and Mark respectively. This perfect blend of common agreed material, together with the separate emphases which come out in the different narratives, is remarkable in its total effect.

One Lord, one common Theme, unites the four authors; yet each has his own special appreciation of the Person he calls attention to. In a sense this is true of all who really know our Lord, whether of that day or this. Ours is a common faith; one Person alone is at the centre of the common fellowship into which we have been drawn. There are great benefits and privileges which are equally shared by all who are in this favoured position. Yet our responses to Him should be personal

ones, arising from our own distinct link with Himself of gratitude, wonder, and appreciation. May we not fail each to take our own real line of response to Him (and to co-

operate where possible in doing this), and thus to add to the variety and the completeness of that full and unending response which alone is worthy of Him.

SEEK YE FIRST

J. S. BLACKBURN

14. THE KINGDOM IN THE EPISTLES

IN Paul's epistles the writer assumes that his readers know about the Kingdom of God. Its existence and meaning underly his teaching and instruction. Particularly is it clear that his readers knew already that there is a present form of the Kingdom, and yet the Kingdom in its power remains to be present in a future dispensation. The future form will be in power and glory, while the present form consists in personal and individual allegiance to God in Christ.

One section laid its spell on students of Scripture both ancient and modern, mainly because of what it says about the subjection of the Son to the Father. In 1 Corinthians 15 : 24-28 we shall for our present purpose concentrate on its remarkable teaching on the Kingdom. The paragraph uses three points in time as its scale of reference. First, the resurrection of Christ. "Now is Christ risen from the dead." (v. 20) Secondly, the resurrection of His saints at His second coming. "Afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." (v. 23) Thirdly, the end, when death is destroyed. (vv. 24 to 26) If we had been entirely dependent on this passage, who would have thought that two thousand years were to intervene between the resurrection of Christ and His second coming? Yet so it has been already. It is evident that the "he must reign" of v. 25 comes between the

resurrection of His saints and "the end". During this interval Christ will possess the Kingdom, and at its close He will deliver it up to God because its purpose will have been accomplished, that is, to put down all authority and power and to destroy every enemy. The exact agreement of all this with Revelation 20 is very evident. There we have prophesied the first resurrection, (v. 5) ; the thousand years reign of Christ with His saints, (v. 4), and the end, when death and hell are destroyed. The only additional knowledge supplied in the Revelation is the exact duration of the reign, a thousand years.

For the remainder of the allusions to the Kingdom of God in Paul's epistles, let us think of them in the ways suggested in an introductory Chapter : first, those containing the phrase, "unto the Kingdom of God"; second, those including the phrase, "inherit the Kingdom of God"; and third, those beginning, "the Kingdom of God is. . .". It will prove helpful to consider the first as presenting actions or events which will have results in the future Kingdom of God ; the second as stressing the character and behaviour which marks out those who are sure to enter on their inheritance in the future Kingdom of God ; and the third as portraying the nature and essential being of the present Kingdom.

To the Thessalonians, recently converted, Paul writes that God "hath called you unto his kingdom and glory". The context is dealing with the conversion of the saints addressed, how they had "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven". The agency had been the Word in Holy Ghost power, the gospel, and it is already implied that such a call and destiny demanded a certain standard of behaviour—"to walk worthy". That it is the future Kingdom which is here mentioned is proved by the added "and glory". It is the Kingdom as it is to be established when Jesus comes in glory with all His holy angels. Paul also writes that workers with him in the gospel field were working towards the establishment of the Kingdom. "These only are my fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God." By analogy with the previous quotation, this probably also means the future kingdom, but may also include the present form.

The next class of citations includes the word 'inherit', and this is at a first approach defined in 1 Corinthians 15:50, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God". Inheriting the Kingdom of God cannot take place in this life: that is to say, it cannot come about before "the dead shall be raised. . . , and we shall be changed". This statement gives the basic clue to understanding the passages using this phrase. Somewhat earlier in 1 Corinthians (6:9-11) we have a most instructive passage on this theme. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor

revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God". The context is going to law with fellow-Christians. V. 1 contrasts going to law before the unrighteous and before the saints. The latter will judge the world; "we shall judge angels". The individuals at fault not only went to law, but they themselves defrauded others and so became unrighteous. Such people shall not, says the apostle, 'inherit the kingdom', that is, shall not enter into possession by right of the exercise of divine authority in governing the world. Thus, clearly, what is envisaged is a time when God by His saints will operate His Kingdom, that is, administer by His saints the law of His will. Such is the meaning of the Kingdom of God, and of inheriting it, in the setting of this passage.

It should have been a basal axiom, well-known to Christians, that persons of such characters and actions will never inherit the Kingdom of God, and this becomes a most earnest appeal to Christian believers not to be such people. Here is the firmest possible stand against the possibility of Christians thinking of themselves as influenced by a permissive society around them. The characters and actions of vv. 9 and 10 provide a description of Corinthian society notorious in Bible times, in the classical age of Greece, and long before. It is the more remarkable that we have preserved in Holy Scripture relating to Corinth a standard of Christian behaviour and discipline applicable in every time and place. There is no excuse for either laxity or despair when we are confronted by a society as permis-

sive as that of Corinth, the byword of dissipation and corruption of manners.

Some of the very people addressed had been formerly numbered amongst the ranks enumerated, but now they were washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. The burden of this quotation is repeated almost word-for-word in Ephesians 5 : 5.

How is so immense a change in behaviour to be effected, and how maintained? The answer is suggested by the last phrase of the quotation from 1 Corinthians 6 : 11 ; "by the Spirit of our God". This is the answer and is the burden of Galatians 5 : 21. After listing the foul progeny of the flesh, the passage continues, repeating former warnings, "they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God". In this case the positive watchword of victory had been already disclosed : "walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh". What is the flesh? And is it still alive in the believer, indwelt by the Spirit of God? The flesh is that portion of my spiritual being where sin dwells, and which is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. The flesh is still very much alive in the believer, though he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The matter is explained at length in Romans 7, and by this concept of the flesh, Paul's underlying appeal to the Kingdom of God is integrated with the general basis of his moral teaching, centred on the Cross and the Spirit. For this reason Galatians 5 : 21 is a most important part of our study of the Kingdom of God.

Romans 7 : 15-23 is the record of a most interesting and important introspection, the observations made, and the conclusions drawn. The

writer, using the first person, records that on looking within, observes an 'I' which delights in the law of God, but that this 'I' is not in control of the 'I' which acts. Reasoning by the Spirit on these empirical facts, he concludes that it is no more 'I' which does wrong, but indwelling sin. The abode of indwelling sin is the flesh. The two notes of victory are that God has condemned sin-in-the-flesh through the Cross, and that He has given His Spirit to dwell within, and to be the dominant power.

In Galatians 5, once the characters and actions which prevent a man's inheriting the Kingdom of God are unmasked and identified as the works of the flesh, then the parallel truth is brought forward that love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance are the fruit of the Spirit. The works of the flesh are to come under the Cross, in order that when the believer walks in the Spirit, this lovely fruit may be seen. This triumphant conclusion is a hint of a truth we shall dwell on later, that the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. This leads us to the third class of Pauline references to the Kingdom of God, those which, by including the phrase, "the kingdom of God is. . .", give instruction on the nature of the Kingdom.

The first of these to which we refer is again in 1 Corinthians. (4 : 20). "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." At this point, once again there flashes out an appeal to a known fundamental truth, that where the ministry which is Christ's service is concerned, there is the Kingdom of God, and therefore there is power. The meaning of this appeal is not in doubt. The opponents of Paul and of his message at Corinth thought they could

flout him. He was in their eyes a spectacle to the world, a fool for Christ's sake; weak and despised, labouring, reviled, persecuted; his bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible. They were mistaken in seeing only this view. These matters did not concern the world, to which their estimate belonged. They concerned the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God is in power. He was able to come to them with a rod. He could deliver a man to the power of Satan for the destruction of the flesh. The things he wrote are the commandments of the Lord. The weapons of his warfare were mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalted itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. In these phrases, "the commandments of the Lord", "the obedience of Christ", is the very essential being of the Kingdom of God, and therefore there is power with it, the power of God.

In Romans 14:17 we have what is perhaps the most far-reaching of these Pauline references to the Kingdom of God. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink: but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost". These words occur in the context of some who tended to give high priority to their right to eat and drink certain things, to the harm and stumbling of other believers. There is the distinction between the 'weak' (v. 1 and ch. 15:1), and the 'strong', (ch. 15:1), and Paul identifies himself with the latter. But there were snares for the strong as well as for the weak. The snare of the weak is to judge the other. The snare of the strong is to despise the other. Both are corrected in 14:3, "Let not him that eateth despise. . . Let not him that eateth

not condemn". It is the former, despising, which is in the end the burden of the apostle's message. "If thy brother be grieved with thy eating meat, now walkest thou not charitably." The matter is brought to the touchstone of love, but also to another criterion equally fundamental, the authority of God, the lordship of Christ, as embodied in the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is the acknowledged framework within which the lives of true disciples unfold themselves. To adduce its nature is the last word. The Kingdom of God does **not** consist in eating and drinking. This is the negative. The disciple must eat and drink so long as he is flesh and blood. And his eating and drinking come under the authority of God. But the essential being of the Kingdom of God as already established in the hearts of men and women by the Word is not in such externals as eating and drinking. The essential nature of the Kingdom is within, in the realm of spiritual qualities and realities, righteousness, peace, and joy. Action is indeed controlled by Kingdom allegiance, but actions which are in themselves neutral, such as eating and drinking, are to be appraised by whether they spring from, or issue in, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

At this point there appears to be a close connection between the present and future forms of the Kingdom, and since the Old Testament deals very fully with righteousness, peace and joy in the Messianic Kingdom, what it says will cast light on the verse we are now considering. The descriptions of the future earthly Kingdom of God stressing these qualities are particularly frequent in the Psalms and in Isaiah.

Psalms 96 to 99 are amongst those which celebrate the time when it shall be said, "The Lord reigneth."

Look at vv. 10 to 13 of Psalm 96. When the Lord reigns, He will judge the people with righteousness, and on this score the heavens and the earth, the fields and the trees of the wood enter into joy and gladness. In Psalm 98, because He has shown His righteousness, therefore the hearer is called to make a joyful noise, to rejoice and sing praise.

In Psalm 72, the mountains shall bring peace to the people because of righteousness: and in the days of the great King the righteous shall flourish and abundance of peace so long as the moon endures.

In several parts of Isaiah there occur hymns in praise of Messiah's Kingdom, and in almost every case these three qualities are prominent. Chapters 25 to 27 form one such extended passage. In that day, the righteous nation shall enter in, and there is the promise, "Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee". The inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness, and the Lord will ordain peace.

Look at Chapter 32. When a King shall reign in righteousness, then "the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. And My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings and in quiet resting places". When the Lord shall have filled Zion with judgment and righteousness, then "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad, and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as a rose," and rejoice with joy and singing. "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away".

At the end of Isaiah, (ch. 66), the heaven is called on to rejoice with

Jerusalem, to be glad with her, and rejoice with joy, "for thus saith the Lord. Behold, I will extend to her peace like a river."

Two observations spring to mind on reflecting on these lyrical descriptions of the future Kingdom. There is joy because there is peace, and there is peace because there is righteousness. This is in perfect accord with the way of joy and peace in the early part of Romans. "Therefore being made righteous by faith, we have peace with God. . . , and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

A second observation is that these blessings are made available to the people of God because they are in God. God's righteousness is a theme of Scripture from the beginning. God's peace is promised to those who pray. The righteousness and peace which lead to true joy are rooted in the being of God and of Christ. And therefore, where God rules, these things are the very essence and nature of such a Kingdom. Eating and drinking, and all other neutral actions fall into place when the authority of God and Christ are at the deepest level acknowledged, and accepted, and acted on. God's righteousness is available to faith, through the blood of Christ; and once that righteousness is known by faith, the believer has all joy and peace in believing.

We return in these thoughts to the point made earlier, that when the believer obeys Christ in all the details of life and service, (and that is the Kingdom of God), then such obedience links him with all that is in God. All the breadth and length, and depth and height of all that is in God's heart and towards which He is working is immediately available by and in the acceptance of God's authority, that is, in God's Kingdom.

15. OCCUPY TILL I COME

ABOUT thirty years before the Saviour gave the parable of the pounds (Luke 19 : 11 to 27), a deputation of leading Jews came from Judaea to Rome to seek an interview with Augustus. The occasion was a journey to Rome taken by Archelaus on the death of Herod, to petition Augustus for Herod's title of King of the Jews. The Jews had seen enough of Herodean rule to wish at all costs to put an end to it. So far as Herod the Great was concerned, his whole career was crimson with the blood of murder, which extended even to the strangulation of his favourite wife, Mariamne, the only human being he passionately loved. As his life drew to its close every dark and brutal instinct of his character seemed to acquire fresh intensity, and he ordered the death of all the children under two years old in the environs of Bethlehem. The wail of anguish which arose from the mothers robbed of their infants, "Rachel weeping for her children," could not be hushed. Shortly after this frightful crime, the wretched old man lay in a savage frenzy awaiting his last hour. Knowing that no one would shed tears for him, he determined that tears would be shed at his departure, and he had the principal families of the kingdom driven into the hippodrome, to be massacred at the moment of his death. Herod had named his son Archelaus as ruler after him. It is small wonder that when Archelaus went to Rome "to receive his kingdom, and return", that his citizens sent a message to Rome, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us".

In the parable, by immeasurable contrast, it is the Lord Jesus, the true nobleman, who, after His death and reurrection, has gone into the far country of heaven to receive a kingdom and to return. No reader of these lines took his place amongst those who crucified the Lord of glory, but our lives send a message after Jesus every day. What is that message? Is it "Thine we are, thou Son of David, and on Thy side", or is it "We will not have this man to reign over us"?

"A certain nobleman" is the subject of the parable, and there is an immense contrast between the low-born tyrants who occupied the Herodean throne, and Jesus, "King most wonderful". We can most fully agree with R. C. Trench : here "the epithet 'nobleman' has its highest fitness ; for who was of such noble birth as He who, even according to the flesh, came of earth's first blood —was the Son of Abraham, the Son of David ; also besides all this, was the eternal and only-begotten Son of God ?"

In the negative sense, (v. 22), an utterly false knowledge of the nobleman, as a kind of Herod-character, was a disincentive to serving him wisely and faithfully. By implication, a true knowledge of him was the foundation motive for the good and faithful service of the other two servants mentioned. The entirely mistaken impression of his character was that he was an "austere" and grasping master ; a strict, severe, and harsh person to account to. The good and faithful servants were so habituated to his presence and

company that they knew him differently. The slothful and wicked servant had no experience of his company to awaken his heart, and his knowledge was ignorance. For the disciple seeking first the Kingdom, it must be clear that there is no substitute for devotional habituation to the company of Jesus.

Isaiah 42 : 3 and 4 depict something of the character of the true Nobleman. "A smoking flax". There is a point at which one touch can extinguish a smouldering wick, or gentle care may re-ignite the flame. There is a point at which the temper of a touch means everything. The Servant of the Lord does not quench the smoking flax.

"He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth". At this point in Isaiah, A.V. obscures one of the gems of the passage. Were the words translated as in v. 3, v. 4 would read, "He shall not burn dim, or be crushed, until he have set judgment in the earth." The two words translated in v. 3 "smoking flax" and "bruised reed" are the words used of the Servant himself in v. 4. He shall never burn low or dim. He shall never be crushed in the sense of being on the point of breaking down. There is here the most charming contrast between this Servant and all the Herods of this world. The man who would himself never show weakness, is often unsympathetic to the weak. Our Saviour is perfect : opponents in millions are to be overcome before His Kingdom is secured ; but He is perfect in His love and wisdom in restoring our souls, in speaking a word in season to him that is weary, in giving power to the faint : but perfect also in that He is the everlasting God, Creator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth not, neither is weary. He shall not fail

until His kingdom is won.

Such is the true Nobleman. To know Him is to love Him. To love Him is to serve Him.

"And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds." (v. 13) There is a very instructive comparison to be made at this point between the parable of the Kingdom of God in Luke 19 and that of the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 25 : 14-30. In the latter, three servants are mentioned, and "unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one ; to every man according to his several ability." In Matthew's parable, the servants are differently endowed, each in proportion to his ability. In Luke, each servant is equally endowed. It is clear that both parables present truth, but each presents a different facet of the truth about the endowment by the Lord of His servants for His work. The distinct views are doubtless in accordance with the individual purpose of each evangelist. Taking Matthew first, it is essential to distinguish between (a) each man's several and natural ability, and (b) the talents given him as something distinct and additional. The latter are in proportion to the former. In considering the service of the Lord, we easily ignore these facts. The natural endowment of ability is important, and is the result of God's forming vessels for His service. He formed Moses by his inherited ability, and by his training in the court of Egypt. It is nonsense to think that Moses had to undo the training he had received in Egypt. His confidence in it and in himself was wrong, and had to be surrendered, but Moses, trained in all the wisdom of Egypt, was the vessel formed by God for His use when thoroughly weaned from confidence in himself in meek consecration to

God. In like manner God formed Paul with his innate ability and by his schooling at the feet of Gamaliel. The opposite error is to forget that such natural ability is useless to God, without the washing of regeneration, the charismatic gift of the Spirit, and the purgation by which "vessels meet for the Master's use" are produced. The Lord can and does discipline and teach His servants in order to remove all confidence in the flesh, and to root their service in true knowledge of Himself and in dependence on His Spirit.

In Luke's parable each of the ten servants receives in equal amount the capital required for trading. This draws attention to the equality of the servants as servants, and to the sense in which all are equally endowed. Examples of this equal endowment, (not, alas, often attended by equal diligence in their use) are the immeasurably great gift of the indwelling Spirit and the possession of the Word. In the availability to them of these superlatively effective endowments, all the Lord's servants are equal, and these gifts are unquestionably sufficient for the fulfilment of "every man his work".

And now, in v. 13 we come to the verse I have chosen to be the closing message of this study of the Kingdom of God: "Occupy till I come."

"Occupy." This word means "employ in trading", and the object of the verb is the pound which each servant had received. An explanatory paraphrase might read, "Take this pound and employ it in trading until I return". Spurgeon has a stirring sermon on this parable, and especially on the request to trade. The parables of the Kingdom began with the concept of sowing and the metaphor dominates the earlier parables on which we have dwelt in detail. The metaphor of Kingdom

service presented in this last parable is that of trade. Perhaps our normal habits of thought encourage a discreditable view trading, but there are other sides which should be prominent in our thoughts of this parable. What they had to do was perfectly clear. Since they were surrounded by enemies of the absent king, they might have thought it essential to **fight**. "I dare say they were inclined to argue, 'Our master's cause is assailed, let us fight for him': yet he did not say 'fight', but 'trade'. Peter drew his sword. Oh, yes, we are eager combatants, but slow merchants."

"The work he prescribed was one that would bring them out. Trade develops a man's perseverance, patience and courage; it tests honesty, truthfulness and firmness. It is a singularly excellent discipline for character. When this nobleman gave his servant the pound, it was that he might see what stuff he was made of. Trade with small capital means personal work and drudgery, long hours and few holidays; plenty of disappointments and small gains".

Creditable trade meets human need. Where would any country be without those who find their livelihood in providing food, clothing and housing? Trading with the Lord's pound meets human need in its most profound form, the spiritual. It brings light in darkness, life in place of death, tranquil peace in place of anxiety, hope instead of despair, and security within the veil.

Trade, in this case, was their selection ground for ruling. In setting them to trade, the nobleman was selecting those suitable to rule in his kingdom. "For see, when he came to the man who had earned ten pounds, he gave him ten cities! There is no proportion between the poor service and the rich reward. A

pound is rewarded with a city. The rewards of the millennium will evidently be all of grace, because they are so incomparably beyond anything which the servant's earning could have deserved."

Notice also the implication that there was power in the pound. "Thy pound hath gained ten pounds," The hint is that the pound possessed a dynamic of its own. And we have only to cast our minds back to the power of the Word entrusted to the sower to see how the different figures unite with each other.

"**Till I come.**" It is simply obvious that the parable cannot combine in one the 'down-to-earth' end-point for the service of the vast majority of the individual servants of the absent king with the end-point for the service as one whole. The former is death, by which each passes into the immediate presence of the waiting Saviour. Nevertheless the parable does present the Second Advent as both the end-point for the service as one whole, and also the hope which animates each servant throughout the period of the Lord's absence.

This is a thought on which we must pause. Our lot is cast in sombre times. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold. The contrast is a stark one between the bright early days and the aspect which Christendom now presents. Then, the disciples did all things 'with one accord'. Now, the great house is indeed a present reality, with its utter confusion of vessels to honour and vessels to dishonour. What truly cleaves to His Name and Word presents so obscure an aspect, and is so much in reproach. What marches with banners across the stage of the publicity media and the affairs of nations bears the plainest marks of the approaching apostasy.

Is it conceivable that among the dimly discernable vestiges of a Bible christianity, we should find it a viable proposition to continue steadfastly with the attempt to make good the commandments of the Lord?

In the most explicit answer to this question, and in full knowledge of the obscurity and confusion which would come to pass in the last days, the Lord in His mercy has marked out certain aspects of life and service, and has so linked them with His second coming as to leave us in no possible doubt that we are to continue in and with these essentials to the end.

(1) "If I will that he tarry **till I come**, what is that to thee?" (John 21 : 22) The disciple is to act on the absolute certainty that the Lord is disposing the lives of His own—For how long?—until He comes! There gleams here the personal relation of the Lord to the totality of the life of each individual disciple. (Here is the true existentialism—a human life in its totality.) Every manifold detail of the life of each disciple depends simply and solely on this phrase, "If I will". No confusion, no darkness, no futility exists in the realm, "If I will". There is only peace, light, certainty and victory.

(2) "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death **till He come.**" (1 Corinthians 11 : 26) The second direction couched in these terms refers to the central ordinance of Christianity, the Lord's Supper.

In each of the synoptic gospels there are recorded sayings of the Lord connecting the institution of the Supper with the Kingdom. "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until the day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."

(Mark 14 : 25) "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the Kingdom of God shall come." (Luke 22 : 18) It is perhaps significant that this is one of the cases in which Matthew does not use "the Kingdom of heaven". "I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." (Matthew 26 : 29) In a mysterious way these phrases seem to assign a place to the Supper to fill the whole amount of time until the coming Kingdom.

It is most remarkable that this last of the parables of the Kingdom of God should so clearly answer the vital questions conditioning a true understanding of the Kingdom, and therefore a fitting response. Have we been correct in making so much of the two forms of the Kingdom, the present and the future? Indeed we have. The parable proclaims in-

escapably that the period of the future Kingdom, with the presence of the King is preceded by a period when His authority is acknowledged and acted on by a few in the midst of His enemies. Have we been justified in insisting on a yet future earthly Kingdom of God? Most certainly we have. The Kingdom and the cities over which the faithful servants rule, is in the same place where they said, "We will not have this man to reign over us". "The saints shall judge the world". (1 Corinthians 6 : 2) Have we rightly understood the other Scriptures that the Second Advent is the moment when we pass from the one to the other? Unquestionably it is so. "When he returned" is the dividing point in the parable, (v. 15) between their serving Him in His absence, and their reigning with Him in His presence. Let us therefore "occupy till He come."

ROYAL OCCASION

J. STODDART

Some thoughts on 1 Kings 10 : 1-13.

THE State visit of one monarch to another is usually an occasion of great public interest and concern. Even if the event is only viewed and understood from a distance by the majority, many still feel a sense of involvement and preoccupation with the significance of the royal visit. Such, for the student of Scripture, is the enthralling story of the visit to Solomon by the queen of Sheba.

Doubtless the inspired narrative of 1 Kings 10, although enacted so long ago, has held the interest of Christians down through the ages and has inspired much comment and instructive teaching. That this

is fully justified is to be learned from the Lord's Own reference to the Old Testament passage as He spoke to the scribes and Pharisees in His day (see Matthew 12 v. 42). And significantly He added, "And, behold, a greater than Solomon is here," thus indicating that a foreshadowing of His Own greater wisdom and glory were intended in the story of long ago. The details of this story have thus become significant to the believer in Jesus.

Assuming the reader's acquaintance with Solomon's story, therefore, we note that a **quandary** distracts the mind of the queen of Sheba and

stimulates her interest in the report of Solomon's fame. His wisdom and knowledge of the Lord had become widely published — even in the absence of modern means of communication — and had spread as far as the South East of Arabia to the province of Sheba over which the queen reigned. We can only imagine the nature of the "hard questions" with which she proposed to "prove" Solomon's wisdom. Some of these may have been questions of state and government but other questions must have arisen, for "she spoke to him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon explained to her all that she spoke of : there was not a thing hidden from the king that he did not explain to her" (J.N.D.)

Little or no comment is made with regard to the queen's long and possibly hazardous journey except in the words of Jesus that "she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon", whereas in His day, as in ours, few would take the slightest trouble to seek Him Whose greatness exceeds Solomon's. But a real sense of need counts no cost too dear to have that need satisfied ; and costly in every way was the royal undertaking to reach the man whose "wisdom excelled the wisdom of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt, for he was wiser than all men, and his fame was in all nations round about." (1 Kings 4 : 30-31). So the queen's quandary drove her to seek Solomon at great cost, and surely our problems and deep need have driven us to Him, "in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge", but how much has it cost us ? What trouble have we gone to to reach Him ?

The first part of the queen's interview with Solomon was thus necessarily connected with settling all her

questions, none of which apparently taxed the wisdom of the king. Wonderful as this was, the visit could not terminate with the answering of her questions, nor could our acquaintance with Christ end with the solving of our problems. Doubtless this aspect of our coming to Him is amply dealt with in the epistle to the Romans, where more questions are asked and answered than in any other epistle. Here is a source of much joy and satisfaction to the believer whose heart and conscience are thus set at "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5 : 1)

But now set free from her quandary, the queen of Sheba observes the **quality** and richness of all that surrounds Solomon. There was a wisdom far beyond that required for her problems, but exhibited now in the magnificence of the king's house that he had built and the regal splendour of its appointments, including, not the least, "his ascent by which he went up into the house of the Lord." Relief from her anxious burdens now enabled her to concentrate on things undreamed of even in her own royal palace. So great was her astonishment at this juncture that we read, "there was no more spirit in her." No words, no exclamation could befit such wonderment. Surely this is paralleled in the experience of the believer in Jesus who steps out beyond the experience of relief from sins forgiven and personal blessings to find himself captivated by the greatness of Him Who forgives and blesses. He is "Son over His Own House" (Hebrews 3 : 6) and everything related to that House befits His personal glory. Thus, if the Epistle to the Romans settles all our quandaries, it might be suggested that the Epistle to the Colossians

takes us beyond this point to engage the heart with Him, "Who is the Firstborn of all creation (ch. 1 : 15 J.N.D.), by Whom and for Whom all things were created (v. 16). As Head of the Body, the Church, and as Firstborn from the dead He is to have the pre-eminence in all things. He sits on the right of God (ch. 3:1) and this heightening sense of His glory corresponds to Solomon's "ascent by which he went up into the house of the LORD". He leads our hearts into that place to which He has ascended, and our thoughts are "lost in wonder, love and praise." We have come to a "greater than Solomon" in very truth, and the **quality** of His glory exceeds all else.

As the queen of Sheba remained in contemplation of Solomon's glory, noting that it far exceeded the reports she had heard in which "the half had not been told," she becomes aware of the men and servants who stand continually before Solomon. How favoured was their position, how happy their lot to be so near to the king and to hear his wisdom. Doubtless they would take character from him and comport themselves suitably for such high calling. There is more than a suggestion here of the place of dignity and favour into which believers, have been called in this day as "sons with Him Who is the Son," and "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." How beautifully C.A.C's hymn expresses this—

"As Thy brethren we surround Thee,
 Firstborn of a heavenly race ;
 He Who has with glory crowned
 Thee,
 Called us to this blessed place."

Does it not challenge our hearts as to the image we present to those like the enquiring queen of Sheba ? Do we impress them as His "happy men" in a position of enormous favour to hear His wisdom ?

Finally, the thoughts of the queen rise even beyond Solomon and his men to His God Whose delight it was to set him on the throne of Israel (v. 9). This surely is the top-stone of this fascinating story, when the heart rises to the appreciation of God Himself and His purpose in His Anointed. It is immensely interesting to notice that this is the point at which the queen offers her own gifts of gold, spices and precious stones, an act in abeyance until now. In connection with One greater than Solomon, this finds its answer in I Peter 2 : 4-5 where His preciousness to God leads the holy priest to "offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." Such indeed is the true worship sought by the Father from those who have been forgiven and brought into favour and whose hearts rise to Him with the abundance of sacrificial praise. What is noted in 1 Kings 10 is the **quantity** of the queen's giving. "There came no more such abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon." Is it the abundance of our hearts that we express in worship or is the quantity somewhat less than is worthy of so great an Object ? Let us reflect again on the exhortation of Hebrews 13 : 15, "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God **continually**, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name."

But the queen of Sheba returning to her own country took back with her more than she gave to Solomon, for he gave her "all her desire, whatsoever she asked, beside that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty." How beautiful is the typical picture, but how infinitely more so that which it typifies ! We have come as suppliants for His grace and have received "grace upon

grace", have offered our humble gifts of praise, only to discover that we have been "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ". Would it not be true to call this "royal bounty," that is, "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." (Ephesians 3 : 20) Thus the Ephesian epistle leads us upward to God Himself as the Source of all blessing Whose

wisdom, love and kindness surpass our highest praise. May we, like the queen of Sheba, take back to our own country the evidence of such "royal bounty" for the enrichment of those around us whose "hard questions" (and there are many) have never yet been brought to Him Whose wisdom, love and power make Solomon's fade like a dim shadow.

THE CHURCH OF GOD 4.

HERBERT HIRST

SCRIPTURES such as 1 Corinthians 12 would show that the place the church of God occupies as the body of Christ calls for a serious grasp of the fact that its present function is to display in very practical ways the moral virtues that are found in their perfection in Christ the living Head of that body. But the truth, also found in the New Testament, of the relationship of the church to Christ as His bride, tells not primarily of the responsibility of that assembly to the Lord Jesus but rather of His own peculiar love and devotion to the one who is to be His nearest, dearest companion and counterpart throughout the endless ages to come. She will be competent, when He has completed His gracious preparation of her, to respond to His love, to share His every thought and confidence, in a manner which will satisfy His heart. Could any prospect be more attractive to one whose affections have been captured by the self-sacrificing love of Christ than that of having a place in the company destined for so high an honour?

The term "bride" is found, in direct reference to the church, in the Revelation 21 : 2, 9 and 22 : 17.

In one of these verses, as also in 19 : 7, she is referred to as "the Lamb's wife", i.e. the wife of the holy Sufferer who dies to make her His own. The value and beauty His eye will discern in her when "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready" were indicated by the Lord to His disciples in Matthew 13 : 44-46 in His parables of the **treasure** hid in a field and the merchantman seeking goodly **pearls**.

The "man" of verse 44 and the "merchantman" of v. 45 found in the "treasure" and the "pearl" of great price an object so engrossing as to render further search unnecessary. And each was prepared to sell "all that he had" to be able to possess the unique and heart-satisfying find. Did not Christ empty Himself having taken a bondman's form and relinquish all to which He had title as man, His kingly rights, His rights as Messiah, and indeed His life in order to take possession of the world which contained the treasure? He forsook all in order to redeem us and have for Himself the one pearl of great price—the assembly He spoke of as "My church". Next to the Bridegroom, the prominent one in

Revelation 19 : 7 is His chosen bride, the church of God.

It would seem that "His wife hath made herself ready" gives her the credit of having given great care to be clothed in the only way that could command His approval. This is not the kind of dress in which the corrupt woman of Revelation 17 : 4 was arrayed ! It was granted to her that he should be clothed in fine linen "pure and bright". This is not the splendid, ornate, bejewelled display of human glory ! The church of Christ has known Him better than that. Does His word not say "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself even as He is pure" ? (1 John 3 : 3). The fine linen "is the righteousnesses of the saints". As another has said "the practical righteousnesses of God's people, wrought in the power of the Holy Spirit during their pilgrimage here below, form (so to speak) the threads of that beautiful garment of spotless purity that shall array the Lamb's wife on that crowning day of her hope and joy". No regret will then trouble her in regard to the constant effort she made to make herself acceptable to her Beloved.

But in order, however, to produce this spiritual beauty and value in those who comprise the church, Christ has devoted Himself unceasingly to the assembly of His choice from the outset. She could never have achieved this result by her own efforts. Indeed, the history of the church as visible to the world's eye would give little idea of her place in the effecting of her Lord. This unremitting service of Christ is beautifully set out for us in Ephesians 5 : 25-33. Mark the stages of it. The motive for His willingness to die for the church was His love for it. But death could not terminate His service. Alive

from the dead He sanctifies it, sets it apart from all others, and cleanses it by the purifying agency of His word. Should we not give our unflagging attention, therefore, to the Holy Scriptures as long as we are left here, so that this cleansing process may continue ? "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way ? By taking heed thereto according to thy word" (Psalm 119 : 9). Shortly He will present His assembly to Himself, and it will then be not only in glory but it will be a "glorious" church, having no spot, no stain or flaw, nothing which could be a matter for reproach, no furrows left by sin and the passage of time here, but it will evidence eternal freshness, free from all defect or imperfection. The holiness of verse 27 has reference perhaps to our state ; as a result of His patient service it will then be such that we no longer think of ourselves but only of the One whose love is and will for ever be everything to us.

The actual presentation of the church by Christ to Himself and the marriage are not described for us ; they are matters for heaven alone like the "unspeakable things" heard by Paul when caught up into Paradise. All heaven is called upon to "be glad and rejoice" at the occasion (Revelation 19 : 7) and those who are guests called to participate in the "marriage supper of the Lamb" are described as "blessed" indeed (v. 9). Nothing is said of the feelings of the bride, the Lamb's wife, and certainly nothing is called for. In such a relationship to Christ they are doubtless summed up by the Bride in the Song of Solomon when she said "I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine."

Ephesians 5 : 22-28. These verses leave one with the impression that the marriage bond between the

Christian husband and wife can be rightly maintained at the high and holy level intended for it only if the husband has for his standard of behaviour towards his wife nothing less than the self-sacrificing love of Christ for the church; and only if the wife has the subjection of the church to Christ as her standard of behaviour towards her husband.

Verse 31 of this remarkable chapter (a quotation from Genesis 2 : 24) in conjunction with verse 32 can only mean, we judge, that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit our first-parent Adam was moved to utter a word of great importance : a word which had its first application to the then union of the first man and wife under the direction of God but which also contained a prophetic pointer to the profound truth that in due time the Lord Jesus would leave the heavenly

scene of glory which was native to Him, and associations that were dear to Him, in order to come into manhood in this world of need, to undergo the "deep sleep" of death (Genesis 2 : 21) so that out of that death there might spring into life the "much fruit" of John 12 : 24, the saints of God destined to be united to Him as His bride. The blessed God clearly had purposes for the eternal joy of His Son, long before the world was made and man appeared on the scene. May the day soon come when these purposes shall reach their glorious conclusion in the marriage of the Lamb, and in the meantime may we endeavour to hold ourselves prepared and ready for our destined portion in that day.

"The Bridegroom comes !

Bride of the Lamb awake !

The midnight cry is heard ;

Thy sleep forsake.

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

Adapted from J. N. DARBY

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Objections against studying Prophecy

PROPHECY is given to detach us from the world and to make us intelligent of the character of God. Many are the objections made to its study. To one Satan says, Follow morality, and do not meddle with doctrine, because he knows that doctrine will free a man from his power. To another he suggests the neglecting of prophecy, because in it is found the judgment of this world, whose prince he is. But to neglect prophecy is to find fault with God, who has given it to us.

Prophecy frees us from the law, and what hinders the freedom of our souls towards God more than con-

founding the law and the gospel, the past dispensations with the existing one ? Whilst it maintains free salvation by the death of Jesus, it enables us to understand the difference between the standing of the saints now and that under the law. It lights up with all the counsels of God the road along which His own people have been conducted, whether before or after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Some say that looking into prophecy is the idle curiosity of prying into hidden things, but the truth is that without it our thoughts cannot go beyond the present. It is a man's hope which acts upon his heart and makes his rule of conduct. Of what vast importance it is, then,

to be filled with hopes according to God.

Another passage constantly used as an objection against the study of prophecy is 1 Corinthians 2 : 2. "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." This objection is due to taking the verse out of context, and, (though we may not recognise it), as an excuse for standing still in the things of the Lord. It is obviously not true that we are to limit ourselves to the knowledge of Jesus Christ crucified. We ought to know Jesus Christ as much as possible !

Resumé of the Dispensations

In order that the Christian may be in a position to occupy himself with the things of God, it is first needful that he should be in happy certainty as to his own position before Him. The Lord Jesus came in order that the certainty of salvation should be introduced into the hearts of the faithful. The Holy Spirit, the seal of this salvation, reveals to them things to come, as to the children of the family and heirs of the family estate.

The whole history of man only served as a clear attestation that man was lost. The study of the dispensations shows how this fact had manifested itself under every possible circumstance. We have seen that man's lost estate has shown itself under the government entrusted to Noah, through the call of Abraham, under priest, prophet and king, even the house of David, and above all in the rejection of Christ.

On the failure of the kingdoms of Israel, God gave governmental power to the Gentiles, and the four successive monarchies, (Babylonians, Medes and Persians, Greeks, and then Romans), showed themselves to be 'beasts', the oppressors of God's

people. The fourth monarchy consummated its crime at the same instant that the Jews consummated theirs, in being accessory, in the person of Pontius Pilate, to the killing of the Son of God and King of Israel.

In the meantime, through that death of Jesus, God has brought about the salvation of the Church, and in it the children of God are being gathered together. Our review of prophetic events takes its start from the moment when the Church is taken to join the Lord in heaven, and there the marriage of the Lamb takes place.

Review of Prophetic Events

Up to this moment, Satan has not been driven out of heaven, and all has been deteriorated by the exercise of his baneful influence. As soon as the Church shall be received to Christ, there will follow the war in heaven. (Revelation 12 : 7) The result will be that Satan will be expelled from heaven, without being yet bound ; he will be cast down to earth, "having great wrath, because he knoweth he hath but a short time". (v. 12) Under the conduct of the first Beast, (ch. 13 : 2b), the revived fourth monarchy will become the sphere upon which the activity of Satan will then be displayed, who will unite the Jews with this apostate prince against heaven. The result of all this will be the judgment and destruction of the beast and Antichrist, the heads of evil among the Gentiles and among the Jews, the secular and religious heads of mischief and rebellion on the earth.

Jesus Christ will destroy, in the person of Antichrist, the power of Satan in that government, which we have seen was confided to the Gentiles. This wicked one, having joined himself to the Jews, and

having placed himself at Jerusalem, as the centre of government on the earth, will be destroyed by the coming of the King of kings and Lord of lords ; and Christ will anew occupy this chief seat of government, which will become the place of the throne of God on the earth. But although the Lord is come to earth, and the power of Satan in Antichrist is destroyed, and the government established in the hands of the Righteous One, the earth will not yet have been reduced under His sceptre. The remnant of the Jews is delivered, and Antichrist destroyed ; but the world, not yet acknowledging the rights of Christ, will desire to possess His heritage ; and the Saviour must clear the land, in order that its inhabitants may enjoy the blessings of His reign without interruption or hindrance, and that joy and glory may be established in this world, so long subjected to the enemy.

The first thing, then, that the Lord will do will be to purify His land (the land which belongs to the Jews) of the Tyrians, the Philistines, the Sidonians ; of Edom, and Moab, and Ammon—of all the wicked, in short, from the Nile to the Euphrates. It will be done by the power of Christ in favour of His people re-established by His goodness. The people are put into security in the land, and then will those who remain till that time among the nations be gathered together. When the people are living thus in peace, another enemy will come up, namely, Gog ; but he will come only for his destruction.

It would seem that in those times—probably at the commencement of this period—besides the personal manifestation of Christ in judgement, there will be a discovery much more calm, much more intimate, of

the Lord Jesus to the Jews. This is what will take place when He will descent on the Mount of Olives, where “his feet shall stand”, according to the expression of Zechariah 14 : 3, 4. It is always the same Jesus ; but He will reveal Himself peacably, and show Himself, not as the Christ from heaven, but as the Messiah of the Jews.

Afterwards there will be the world to come, prepared and introduced by these judgements, and by the presence of the Lord. Those who have seen the glory manifested in Jerusalem will go and announce its arrival to the other nations. These will submit themselves to Christ ; they will confess the Jews to be the people blessed of their anointed, will bring the rest of them back into their land, and will themselves become the theatre of glory, which, with Jerusalem as its centre, will extend itself in blessing wherever there is man to enjoy its effects. At this time Satan will be bound, and in consequence the blessing will be without interruption until “he is loosed for a short season.”

The glorified Church will fill the heavenly places with its own joy ; and its service will constitute the happiness of the world. Behold the heavenly Jerusalem, witness in glory of the grace which has placed her so high ! In the midst of her shall flow the river of the water of life, where grows the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Meanwhile, upon the earth, is the earthly Jerusalem, centre of the reign of the righteousness of Jehovah her God, witness of the character of Jehovah, as the Church is of that of the Father. God will also realize the full force of that name—“The most high God, possessor of the heavens and of the earth” and Christ will fulfil, in all their fulness,

the functions of High Priest after the order of Melchisedek.

There is an infinity of details into which I have not entered ; for example, the circumstances of the Jews who will be persecuted during the troublous times in Judea, of which we have some instruction in the word. This general sketch will engage you to read the word of God for yourselves on the whole subject. The more we enter into the minute details of the works of God, the more

does perfection appear.

May God perfect in you, and in all His children, this separation from the world, which ought to be the fruit of the expectation of the Church, at the discovery of these its heavenly blessings in store, and of the terrible judgments which await all that which still binds man to this lower world. May God also perfect the desires of my heart, and the witness of the Holy Ghost !

PSALM 19

ROBERT DAVIES

PSALM 19 falls into three sections.

The first section (1-6) is concerned with God's glory as revealed in creation. Perhaps nights spent out on the Judæan hills had given the Psalmist ample opportunity to study the unspoilt glory of the sky. He is convinced of the majesty of the divine Creator, "The heavens declare the glory of God ; and the firmament sheweth his handywork."

David could hardly have known the enormous distances involved—that the nearest fixed star, for example, is about $4\frac{1}{3}$ light years from the earth. Nevertheless he may be said to have done his "space research" and his conclusion is that although there is no audible voice, the heavens have a message to declare, one which transcends barriers of language and nationality—the glory of Him Who created them. "There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (verses 3 and 4).

If then there is a Creator Who has spoken through His creation, this raises the question of the responsibility of the creature. It leads one to

the apostle Paul's argument in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans that the testimony of creation renders inexcusable man's "ignorance" of the one true Creator-God. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead ; so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1 : 20).

The Psalmist is especially attracted by the glory of the sun. In the Middle East he would be well acquainted with its power. He is impressed with the splendour of its rising and the amazing velocity with which it travels from east to west. "His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it : and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof" (verse 6).

No doubt it is the searching power of the sun's rays which leads the writer, almost abruptly, into the second section (verses 7-11). As the searching and health-giving sunlight, so is the law of the Lord. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul. . . the commandment of the Lord is pure" (verses 7 and 8).

We might, at first, ask with C. S. Lewis what is there so attractive about the ten commandments which are largely concerned with things which we must not do? I do not think that the "law of the Lord" in this psalm means only the ten commandments, but the whole law or Torah covered in the first five books of the Bible. This law covered all aspects of the life of the children of Israel. It laid down their duty to the Lord their God and their duty to their fellow men. It required justice for rich and poor alike. It contained provision for the needy and protection for the afflicted and for the stranger, e.g. "Thou shalt not oppress a stranger" (Exodus 23 : 9) and "Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God : " (Leviticus 19 : 14).

The law also governed the food which the people should eat and laid down standards of hygiene to be observed. Animal welfare was not overlooked for "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn" (Deuteronomy 25 : 4).

No doubt many of the rules were suited to Old Testament times, but underlying these are basic moral principles of enduring value. Prof. William F. Albright has written "Indeed the law of Moses. . . has had a greater impact upon modern civilization than any other comparable body of law" and again "Although the civil law of pagan Rome. . . underlies all Western jurisprudence, it became influenced by the basic morality of Mosaic law. The humanitarian tone of our contemporary laws can be traced directly back to the Torah" (Life International—April 1965).

Our Lord Himself made it clear that the twin bases upon which the law and the prophets rested were

love to God and love to one's neighbour, (see Matthew 22 : 34-40) and writing to the Romans, Paul said (in a rather different context) that "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13 : 10).

Returning to our psalm we must also bear in mind the unclean and evil practices of the nations surrounding Israel in Old Testament times. Their worship involved Temple prostitution, sodomy, and human sacrifices and when Israel and Judah departed from the Lord and worshipped the false gods of the Canaanites, they also adopted these practices. This is clear, for example, from the reforms undertaken in the reign of Josiah and described in 2 Kings 23. The faithful Jew might well say "The statutes of the Lord are **right**. . . the commandment of the Lord is **pure**. . . the fear of the Lord is **clean**" (verses 8 and 9).

A modern writer (R. Haughton) argues that it is only because things and people stay the same that a child can learn to feel at home in himself and in his world. The bars of his cot are always solid and always the same distance apart. His mother comes to feed him. She goes away but she always comes back again, "This regular and stable nature of things and people and times is part of what is meant by Law. It makes people feel safe and it makes it possible for them to discover who they are". (Author's emphasis). This stability characterises the divine law. Here is something upon which the psalmist can rely, a rock upon which to plant his feet, "The fear of the Lord is clean, **enduring for ever** : the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (verse 9).

This aspect of the law or judgments (rulings) of the Lord is emphasized in Psalm 119 "For ever,

O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven" (verse 89), "The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting:" (verse 144).

The New Testament confirms this stability, for in his first epistle, Peter speaks of the word of God as living and abiding for ever, "The word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Peter 1 : 25).

This quotation sets the word or rulings of the Lord in a wider context than that of the psalmist's. There is no doubt that for the apostle it embraced the revelation of God in His Son Jesus Christ. This is equally true for the Christian today: we think of both the Old and New Testaments as comprising the word of God, Did not the Lord Jesus tell His opponents that Moses wrote of Him? (See John 5 : 46). In Luke 24 : 44 the law of Moses is mentioned as well as the prophets and the psalms. We are reminded that Christ Himself is the great theme of Scripture.

In this broader context the fear of the Lord is no less pure and wholesome. Divine grace in the gospel has a higher, not a lower, standard than the law as the rule of life for the Christian. "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation (in all your conduct—RSV)" (1 Peter 1 : 15). "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4 : 7).

Is it not one of today's great problems that in the lives of many this important element of stability is lacking? Many people do not "feel safe" and they cannot discover "who they are". This age has been described as disenchanted and disillusioned and there is no doubt that

to many life does not "make sense".

The need for an objective or standard at which to aim is widely recognised. Statistics have been quoted as showing that in times of financial depression there is less crime and less suicide, because *people are facing a greater challenge*. People who possess a strong faith by which to live and which they seek to pass on to their children are to be envied. For the psalmist this support and challenge is found in the statutes and commandments of the Lord. For the Christian it is in the word of God, using this phrase in the broader context outlined above. The word of God is both a support **and** a challenge. "The judgments of the Lord are true. . . more to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward." (verses 9-11).

Bearing in mind that the Apostle Peter links the **gospel** (good news) with the word of the Lord, we may consider briefly its four-fold action (verses 7 and 8).

(1) "**Converting the soul**". We need conversion first of all: "Except ye be converted. . . ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18 : 3). We also need refreshment and restoration.

(2) "**Making wise the simple**". 2 Timothy 3:15 states that the Scriptures are able to make one "wise unto salvation" i.e., they contain that which, if acted upon, will bring salvation to the individual. "Simple" suggests lack of wisdom; it may also imply a willingness to learn. It certainly excludes those who are "wise in their own eyes" (see Proverbs 3 : 7). To obtain the promised blessing the Scriptures

must be approached in the right spirit: an attitude of intellectual superiority can be a bar to real understanding; "lean not unto thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3 : 5). The wisdom imparted by the word of the Lord is that described by James as "the wisdom that is from above." It is characterised by being pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity (see James 3 : 17).

(3) "**Rejoicing the heart.**" It is a popular misconception to equate Christianity with gloom. This is **not** supported by Scripture: "The Kingdom of God is. . . righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14 : 17). The Apostle John states at the beginning of the first epistle, "These things write we unto you that your joy may be full" (1 : 4).

(4) "**Enlightening the eyes**". This covers more than imparting knowledge. The expression is used in 1 Samuel 14 : 27, 29 when Jonathan tasted the honey. Had King Saul not made his ill-advised oath, the people could have eaten and had the strength to consolidate their victory over the Philistines. "Enlightening the eyes", therefore, is equivalent to "refreshing, reviving the heart" (Horace Howard-Furness—note to his translation of this psalm). Here is the remedy for the believer when he is weary and discouraged. The word of God can help him to go on to victory. This reminds us of the Lord's saying recorded in John 6 : 63 "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

The **third** section of the psalm (verses 12-14) gives us the psalmist's personal exercises. We should go

back again to the sun and its searching rays described in verse 6. The psalmist is conscious of the law of the Lord searching his heart—nothing is hid from it—hence his confession and desire for cleansing: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults". There is nothing here of the self-righteousness or pride of knowledge that we encounter amongst the scribes and Pharisees in the gospels (cf. Luke 18 : 9-14 and John 7 : 49). "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me" (verse 13). This verse has been translated, "Especially preserve your servant from pride, never let it dominate me."

We should always be on our guard against studying the Scriptures in a purely objective way and ignoring the subjective side, that is, the effect which they have upon our conscience and upon our way of life. As James puts it, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (1 : 22), like men who see our natural faces in a mirror and then go away and immediately forget what we were like (James 1 : 23, 24).

We will conclude this study of Psalm 19 with a challenging passage from Hebrews 4 : 12, 13 : "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight : but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."