

“Set thee up waymarks, make thee high heaps, set thine heart toward the highway, even the way which thou wentest” (Jer. 31:21)

The Living Way

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**Upholding the Original Christadelphian Faith concerning:
“The Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12)**

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“I saw, and behold, a white horse; and he that sat up on him had a bow: and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Rev. 6:2)

Observations Concerning Political Elections

“Exhort one another daily.”—Paul.

A voice from the past: This article was written in 1880 yet contains much relevant material for today.

During the past week, there has been much casting up of mire and dirt from the bottom of the ocean. It is the Scriptures that say: “The wicked are like a troubled sea, casting up mire and dirt.” We have seen the saying illustrated in the popular upheavings consequent on the general election that has been going on. As the brethren of Christ, we should have no interest in these motions of the turbid sea around us were it not for their relation to another ocean movement described by the prophet Isaiah, when he speaks of a “multitude of many people making a noise like the noise of the seas, and a rushing of nations like the rushing of mighty waters.” This belongs to the latter day, as the context shows, and is part of the crisis that witnesses Christ’s return to the earth. It is a different movement of the waters from what we have seen during the past week. It is a rush of a different sort—a military rush—a rush of armed nations to fight against the Lamb when manifested on Mount Zion at the head of the 144,000.

But it is preceded by events of which the electoral upheaving is a part. The electoral upheaving that is going on has an important bearing on the situation that is in process of development in the East. This, in a special sense, is appreciated in every capital of Europe. Every statesman—every crowned head—every European government is watching its progress with a strained and eager interest. So are the brethren of Christ, but for a different reason. The men of the present world are anxious about the way in which their special aims and policies will be affected by the issue of the appeal to the verdict of the English people on the foreign policy of the Beaconsfield Government. The brethren of Christ are only anxious to see that government in power that will best promote the events that bear promise of Christ’s return.

From this point of view, some of us were expecting the continuance of the Tory government, as apparently more fitted than the peace-loving and non-intervening Liberals, to do the part appertaining to Britain in the latter days. In this expectation, events have proved us wrong, or, at least, are likely to do so. The Liberals appear to be coming into power with a rush. What shall we say? Why, that this is one of those things to which the maxim applies: “Whatever is, is right.” If the Liberals come into power, it is because the purpose of God requires them. It is not a question of whether the purpose of God is to be carried out or not: it is merely a question of “how.” God’s way of reaching a result is sometimes the most unlikely that could be imagined, and the very opposite to what men would devise. Take for example the arrangement made to preserve the family of Jacob from destruction in a time of dearth—the sending of Joseph into Egypt beforehand. Joseph said to his brethren, “God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” How did He send him? As a favourite transferred by court influence from the sheep pastures of Syria to the Egyptian metropolis? —as a powerful and prosperous Israelite? The very opposite. Had we been there when God “sent a man before them” (Psalm

105:17), we should have seen a broken-hearted boy in the hands of unfeeling slave merchants, on their way to the slave market. We should not have imagined this was God's sending of a man to preserve a posterity for Israel in the earth. So in many other cases, and so in the matter in hand. Intelligent faith is prepared for any form and disposal of public events that divine wisdom may employ in the execution of the divine purpose. This purpose, in its main features, has been revealed, but not the details leading to it. The restoration of the house of Israel, under Christ, is as certain as the continuance of the sun, and so is the development of the latter-day situation among the nations of the earth—that will lead up to it; but as to how that situation is to be brought about, we are simply in the position of interested spectators, with differing degrees of discernment. God has given to some a wonderful penetration of the tendencies of things. Dr. Thomas was a striking illustration of this. His surmises as to the unrevealed process by which the revealed upshot in certain matters would be reached, have been wonderfully verified.

OUR POSITION

The position belonging to most of us is simply that of standing still and watching the providential evolution of the predetermined results. In this spirit, the interesting event of the general election has been watched. The expectation — (universal in the country)—was that the Beaconsfield Government would come out of the ordeal with renewed strength. This expectation, though entertained by the watchers of the signs of the times, was not very confidently entertained. There was a reservation in favour of the possibility of a Liberal triumph, because of the possibility of the purpose of God requiring their accession in the present posture of events. It was not supposed, however, that the Liberal triumph, if it came, would be so complete. The result is as much a surprise to every one as the Conservative triumph of six years ago. The only conclusion the servants of Christ can come to is that the Liberals are needed to complete the work begun by the Tories. The Liberals would never have done the work that has been done by the Tories: and the Tories, it may be, lack the qualification to carry on to its divinely-appointed issue the work which their advent to power was necessary to lay the foundation for.

The Liberals will have a less tender regard for Turkish interests and independence, and will probably apply with a firmer hand the Tory arrangements for reform (affecting a wide stretch of country that includes the Holy Land), which have been allowed to languish from a fear of reforming Turkey entirely off the scene. Probably also, the Liberals will keep England out of European strife, where the Tories would have embroiled her, while the finishing touches are being put upon the latter-day development of the Scarlet-Coloured, Seven-Headed, and Ten-Horned Beast that goes into perdition. It is pleasant to see these possibilities in the change that is taking place. It enables us to feel that the advent of the Liberals, so far from involving a further postponement of our cherished hopes, may betoken their imminent realisation. It may be that Mr. Gladstone, more than Beaconsfield, is the man to extend that co-operation of England's power to Christ which is involved in the statement that "the ships of Tarshish first" will bring Israel's sons from far, with their silver and their gold. Mr. Gladstone is, doubtless (though only in a traditional way), a fearer of God and a believer in Christ in a heartier way than his rival.

These are interesting views to indulge in: but whatever view we may take, it remains that Christ is nearer with every day's flight.

Every European event must tend more and more to pave the way for the event of events on which our hearts have been fixed by the gospel—the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from that event, the affairs of the nations would be of little interest to us. When that event occurs, the politics of the world will suddenly and completely lose their interest. The signs of the times will have lost their significance when the event they are pointing to is no longer a matter of expectation. Their value and their importance are very limited and short lived. We ought to think of this in the midst of all our watchings of them. It is better to be interested in the coming of Christ than to be interested in the signs of the times. It is possible to be interested in the signs of the times and not interested in that to which they stand related. It is better to see a man much in love with Christ and the hope of the kingdom, and in much zeal for his service in the obedience of his commandments, even if he have little understanding of the signs of the times, than to see a man well up in the politics of the time of the end but of a callous heart towards the person and work and principles of Christ. Of course, it is better to see both aspects combined, but if there must be extremes, it is better to love Christ and be ready for him, knowing little of the political indications of his approach, than to be abreast of all the signs of the times with but feeble attainments in that saintship which alone will qualify for companionship with Christ in the day of his glory.

THE EXHORTATION OF PAUL

This view of the case gives great importance to the exhortation addressed to us by Paul in the portion read from Galatians this morning (chap. 5.) “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” It may be said that the liberty Paul is speaking of, is a liberty from the Mosaic yoke to which we have never been subject, in which therefore we are in no danger of reentanglement. The criticism would be perfectly true, but the exhortation is applicable nevertheless. There is a liberty with which Christ has made us free, and there is a yoke of bondage in which we are in danger of being re-entangled. The freedom conferred upon us by Christ is a freedom from sin and all that at last comes of it Our sins have been forgiven and we have received a part in the heirship of the life and glory of the ages to come. This is a great liberty—a liberation from the grim dominion of death, and a promotion to the rank of sons of God, involving friendship with God and joy in the boundless prospect of unmingled and unutterable goodness that lies before his children. But is there no danger of reentanglement? Let Peter answer: “If after they have escaped *the pollutions of the world*, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again *entangled therein* and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning: for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than after they have known it to *turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them*.”—(2 Peter 2:20.) Here the danger is plainly recognised and its nature defined. We stand in no danger of the Mosaic yoke: but a mere glance will suffice to convince wise men who have escaped the pollutions of the world, of the possibility of being “again entangled therein and overcome.” Surely there ought to be no difficulty in recognising what is meant by “the pollutions of the world.” The phrase does not refer to anything appertaining to the physical world. It is not in air, earth or sky that “the pollutions of the world” are to be found, but in the world of living people—the world of which John said “The world lieth in wickedness,” and further that “all that is in the world” is but the incorporation of “the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life:” in this world, styled by Peter, “the world of

the ungodly” (2 Peter 2:5), the pollutions are to be found from which we have escaped and in which we are in danger of being “again entangled and overcome.” It is very important to be able to discern these pollutions. It is part of “pure religion and undefiled,” as defined by James “to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.” How shall we do this if we are unable to discern what this means?

THE POLLUTION OF THE WORLD

The pollution of the world may be recognised in the various lists given in the Scriptures. Jesus categorises them thus: “Evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.”—(Mark 7:21–22) Paul described them thus: “all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, debate, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful” (Rom. 1:29). He also defines the works of the flesh thus: “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness” (Gal. 5:19), of which he plainly says, “They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” The lists demand our careful consideration. On the principal items, we may be pretty safe: but unless we are safe on all points, we are in danger. We may be in comparatively little danger of murder, drunkenness, fornication, and the grosser offences, but what if we are guilty of pride, boasting, wrath, hatred, variance, envy, covetousness, covenant breaking, whispering, backbiting, &c.?

Perhaps we may be disposed to say concerning these commandments, like the young man that came to Jesus, “All these things have I kept from my youth.” Suppose it be so, there is another test to apply. It is not enough to abstain from evil: we must also be characterised by that which is good. A man is a very neutral and uninteresting sort of character of whom it can only be said, “He is not a bad character.” He must have positive good points. There must not only be no weeds: there must be a growth of garden flowers and fruits. What are these? The fruits of the Spirit. What are the fruits of the Spirit? Paul enumerates them in this same chapter: “Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” This is a beautiful catalogue, in wonderful contrast to the fruits of the flesh. They constitute the portrait of the new man in Christ. They must, in some measure, be exemplified by those who are to be heirs of salvation. They will be possessed in varying degrees by different members of the family, but all will exhibit them in some degree. They are the family likeness. Every item is an essential feature. Every son and daughter of God is a person of love in the divine sense of the term. They love as God loves. They love with a benevolent love. They do good patiently to all, even to the unthankful and the evil; and this love is a fruit of the Spirit; that is, it is a sentiment generated in the mind by the teaching of the Spirit. It is not the offspring of natural impulse. The natural man is governed by his likes. As Jesus expresses it, “Sinners love those that love them.” Saints are not governed by their likes, though they have their likes. Their constitutional peculiarity in all ages is to do the will of their Father who is in heaven, and who commands them, by the mouth of Christ, to love and bless with the love and patience which He shows to all the world, Joy is the result,—not joy of an ordinary sort, but joy in God, the satisfaction of resting in Him in the performance of His commandments,

with the assurance of the exceeding joy awaiting all who will be presented with gladness before the presence of His glory, in the day of Christ. Peace comes of this, and as a consequence, long-suffering towards others, and gentleness, and goodness: for what can compare with a living faith in God for power to engender a meek and quiet spirit, and temperance in all things?

A body of men, accepted through Christ and trained for a lifetime in these self-restraints and these benignities towards others, are the fit and glorious governors-elect of the ages to come. The world will be blessed under their guidance and leadership. Their love will mollify and predispose the nations to obedience; their joy will inspire all men with a noble ideal: their peace will diffuse calmness and bestow rest on the weary world. Their gentleness and long-suffering and goodness will tame the turbulent and bring the indisposed into submission, while the rod of iron inside the velvet will guarantee the stability of their righteous rule, and give security to all men against the insurrection of lawlessness or the movements of overthrown ambitions. What language can express the glory of having a place in such an order of men. If the glory is great, the terms of admission among them are stringent if simple. They are briefly comprehended in one of the concluding statements of the chapters read—a statement deserving, nay demanding attentive consideration day and night. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.”

Robert Roberts, The Christadelphian 1880 page 213-217

FREE BIBLE TALK

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“The Full Assurance of Hope”

The Scriptures state regarding salvation, that “it is of faith that is might be by Grace; to the end that the promise *might be sure* to all the seed ...” (Rom. 4:16). The fact of God’s Grace being extended to us through faith is something that is ordained in order for the promise to be “made sure”, that is, not to be uncertain, or doubtful. Occasionally, those of the churches ridicule us for having an uncertain hope: i.e. that we do not know whether we will be approved at the judgment seat or not. Indeed, we ourselves can look towards the judgment seat with vexation and uncertainty as to whether or not we will be admitted to the Kingdom. But our chapter for today on the other hand, speaks of the hope of true believers as being definite and certain:

“... the *full assurance* of hope ...” (Heb. 6:11).

“... which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, *both sure and steadfast* ...” (Heb. 6:19).

If we trust in the Word of God and believe that He is able to perform that which he has promised, then we are hoping in a thing that will become a definite reality. Our hope of having a place in God’s kingdom is a “full assurance” being “sure and steadfast”, not an uncertain possibility that might or might not take place. Of what use is an anchor if it is not sure and steadfast? Even so, our faith should be “an anchor of the soul”.

TWO WAYS

The Master likened a person’s walk in life to traversing down a particular path, either broad or narrow:

“enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which *leadeth unto life*, and few there by that find it” (Mat. 7:13-14).

Notice, which destination is ultimately reached depends solely upon what path is being followed. The narrow path does not lead to more than one place, to both destruction and life, depending upon the exertions of those who walk along it. The way of life leads only to life and not death - and therefore if we are walking along that Way, arriving at the correct destination is guaranteed!

In the case of Noah, who “prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Heb. 11:7), entering into the Ark was his guarantee of salvation. Just so long as he remained in the ark, his salvation from the flood of waters was also guaranteed!

The Master exhorts us to “seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock, for *it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you*

the kingdom” (Luke 12:31-32). The fact of the kingdom being given is something that enables Messiah’s brethren to “fear not”, and not cower in doubt and uncertainty. It is the Father’s “good pleasure” to give them the kingdom, and so they must trust in faith that it will indeed be given to them.

The Apostle Paul speaks of the love of Christ as something that is definite and unchanging:

“who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able *to separate us from the love of God*, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35, 38-39).

The only thing that can separate us from the love of God is if we deny Him, and turn back to fulfilling our own lusts and desires: if we choose to leave the narrow way, and walk down the broad way which is more interesting to the flesh. “Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (Jas. 1:14). If we choose to be drawn away by our lusts, that is the only thing which can jeopardize our standing before God. So long as we enter and remain in the antitypical Ark and walk along the Way of Life, our salvation is absolute and guaranteed. As we already cited, truly we have *“a strong consolation*, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, *both sure and steadfast*” (Heb. 6:18-19)

ARE WE SAVED ALREADY?

We have heard the voice of rebuke from those who should know better, concerning the certainty of the hope we have in Christ’s coming kingdom. To say that we believe unwaveringly that by the Grace of God we shall be given a place in His Kingdom, makes us liable to be called “arrogant”, “presumptuous”, “conceited” and other epithets. But not only do the Scriptures clearly speak of our hope as an absolute certainty, it also speaks of eternal life in terms of being a present possession. Consider the following testimonies:

“... this is the record, that God *hath given to us* eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1Jno 5:11).

“... these things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that *ye have* eternal life, and that ye may believe in the name of the Son of God” (1 Jno. 5:13).

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, *hath* everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; *but is* passed from death unto life” (Jno. 5:24).

“giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: **who hath delivered us** from the power of darkness, **and hath translated us** into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col. 1:12-13).

There is a principle in Scripture, that when things are of an absolute certainty, God speaks of them as though they were already so. An example of this is the promise God gave to Abraham, “who is the father of us all (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and **calleth those things which be not as though they were**” (Rom. 4:16-17). Though in chronology the promises to Abraham would not take place until the future, such was the certainty of them being fulfilled, that God speaks as though they were actually accomplished. This is the sense in which the testimonies cited above speak of our Hope as if we were already in possession of its fulfilment. Other Scriptures speak of it as something yet to come:

“If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, **we shall be** saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10).

“every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterwards they that are Christ’s **at his coming**” (1 Cor. 15:23).

And so on, examples could be multiplied. The system and process of salvation as appointed by our Father does not conclude until the resurrection of the dead, and the bestowal of immortality. Until then, we are **being** saved, and the only sense in which we are saved already, is in a prospective sense. But so long as we do not stray from the path of life, our salvation is so certain, and so absolute, that it is as though we were already saved in the purpose of God.

An interesting passage in this context is Hebrews 3:14:

“for we are made partakers of Christ, **if** we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end” (Heb. 3:14).

In this verse, the certainty of our Hope is again expressed in the present tense – we are already made partakers of Christ – but it is not unconditional. It is only **if** we have confidence and remain steadfast unto the end. There is a warning: we must take heed, lest we “fail of the grace of God” (Heb. 12:15) by turning aside from the Way of Life – for then we will “remain in the congregation of the dead” (Prov. 21:16).

We saw earlier that salvation is by Grace to the end that “the promise **might be sure** ...” (Rom. 4:16). A little reflection on these things reveals the wisdom of this arrangement. If left to our own devices, we would truly be in a miserable state, being constantly unable to achieve a satisfactory standard of righteousness. But we are not

left to our own devices: the promise is “sure” because it is based upon God’s own Grace extended to us, and not of ourselves and our feeble abilities. It is not dependent upon human endeavours. From time to time, we might lament our own inabilities, and with the Apostle Paul, say “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24) Sometimes the burden of sin seems to be so great and we feel so unworthy that we cannot see ourselves being in the Kingdom. But it is precisely because salvation is not of ourselves, but of Grace, that we can lift up our heads in hope – a sure and certain hope, not reflective of our own personal failures.

The Master told a parable of two men who went to pray – a Pharisee and a Publican, and they both approached God with two different attitudes of mind. The Pharisee sought salvation by works, saying: “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.” The publican however, was too weighed down by his sense of sin that all he could do was to throw himself upon the mercy of his Lord. His prayer was: “God, be merciful to me, a sinner”. The Master concludes the parable, saying, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Lu. 18:9-14).

THE JUDGEMENT SEAT OF CHRIST

The point we wish to make from this is that perhaps the Judgment Seat will be different to what we might imagine. Sometimes the idea is presented that acceptance is based on what works we have done, and that if we have marked up more good works than bad, that will result in us being granted entry into the kingdom. Conversely, if we have more bad than good points, we will be rejected. But through the weakness of human nature, this concept will inevitably lead to a sense of failing and uncertainty about the Judgment Seat, with all the depression and anxiety that such a state of mind brings. This parable suggests that the accepted ones are not who we might think – not those who trust in their own perceived righteousness, but those who trust in the Grace of God to save them from their sins.

Being that the salvation of believers is secured and “made sure” and certain by the sacrifice of Christ, there is no need to feel inadequate, for the Grace of God will cover all of their sins. There is no need for us to lament our position as “we poor sinners” as the hymn has it, but we can rejoice with peace of mind that the Sacrifice of Christ – the greatest extension of Grace to man - is all sufficient to cover our sins. So the Apostle speaks of our situation in our Lord Jesus Christ:

“By whom also we have access by faith into ***this grace*** wherein we stand, ***and rejoice*** in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom. 5:2).

And again,

“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, ***Rejoice***” (Phil. 4:4)

The Hope that the brethren in Christ have, is not shrouded in doubt and uncertainty. It is written in the Proverbs: “the desire of the righteous *shall* be granted” (Prov. 10:24). This being so, Messiah’s brethren can truly “rejoice” in the hope that they share with each other. Once we recognize and understand the Bible doctrine of Grace, there needs to be no uncertainty about our salvation: as we said earlier, if we walk along the narrow way, there is only one destination that it will bring us to. There is no need for us to fear the Judgment Seat, for we trust in the power of God to save us, rather than to wallow in self-pity for our own inadequacies.

THE ROLE OF WORKS

Speaking of our salvation, the Apostle writes:

“if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

This being so, belief and confession go together for our salvation. We confess our belief in Messiah when we are baptized, and the life that we live subsequently. Comparing our salvation with that of Noah, the Apostle speaks of “the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us” (1 Pet. 3:21). Being that baptism “saves us” it is logically necessary for us to be baptized to be saved. But notice that here again, we have our salvation spoken of in the present tense: “... doth also *now* save us”. Such is the certainty of our salvation if we remain in the Christ-Ark.

The comparison in 1 Peter is with the Ark that Noah built. Noah and his household, we are told, were saved by faith:

“By faith, Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, *prepared an ark to the saving of his house*; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Heb. 11:7).

Notice that in Noah we have another example of justification “by faith.” But notice also, that Noah had to act upon that faith. In order for him to be saved, he needed to construct the ark. Truly it was his faith that saved him, and motivated him to build – but the work of building was also necessary: not to earn salvation by works, but rather to manifest the faith that he had. So James tells us:

“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works: (Jas. 2:18).

What we are required to do to have salvation is to believe and be baptized. And the joy of knowing this will provoke us to keep Christ’s commandments and do good works. It is the logical outworking and extension of our faith that we will seek to

please the One who has called us by His Grace, out of love and joy for the salvation that we have in Him. Again, Abraham is an example:

“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how ***faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?*** And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed in God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (Jas. 2:21-23).

Abraham believed in God, and because of that belief, he trusted in Yahweh’s power to save his son Isaac, and raise him up from the dead (Heb. 11:19) – hence his willingness to sacrifice him. Even so, we must show our belief in the promises of God, by actions that demonstrate our faith. Our works by themselves are not enough to save us, for “by grace ye are saved through faith, ***and that not of yourselves ...***” (Eph 2:8) but however feeble they may seem, they will nevertheless testify to the hope that is within us, as rejoicing in faith we seek to show that faith to those around us, by the way that we live our lives.

SHOWING GRACE TO OTHERS

Just as the members of Christ’ body stand in the Grace of God, they must endeavour to show that Grace in our relationships with others. So, the Apostle exhorts: “Let your speech be alway with Grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col. 4:6). In the things we do, and the things we say, the believers should show forth the Grace of God to those around them. Again, it is written: “as every man hath received the gift, ***even so minister the same one to another,*** as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10). We must forgive as we have been forgiven for Christ’s sake, and rejoice in the hope of coming glory.

In our considerations, we have sought to present the basic principles that lie behind the Bible’s doctrine of Grace. The system of salvation appointed by Yahweh rests upon the extension of His Grace, or Favour, in providing Messiah as a sacrifice for our sins, and in bringing us to hope in his Promises for the future. But there is also a practical outworking of the doctrine of Grace: we need not look to the future judgment seat with fear and uncertainty, and angst, thinking that perhaps we are not good enough. Our being accepted is predicated upon faith, not the merits of our works, and because of this, it is “made sure” – guaranteed to all who choose to walk along the Way of life. Let us therefore rejoice in the certainty of the Hope, believing and trusting that it is the Father’s good pleasure to give us the Kingdom, and that it will be granted to us in due course. Then we can have confidence that we will live and reign with our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the ages to come.

Christopher Maddocks

Colossians – An Exhortation for Unity in Love (3)

JESUS CHRIST – THE FIRSTBORN OF EVERY CREATURE

It is one of the unfortunate features of our age, that certain passages of Scripture are examined most frequently against a background of controversy. It is inevitable that the Christadelphian will find him/herself in conversation with those of other persuasions, who believe the standard church fables, such as the immortality of the Soul, the existence of the personal Devil, the Trinity, and the Pre-existence of Christ. And in order to give a semblance of support for their notions, these people (many of them sincere in their own convictions, we have no doubt), take hold of certain “stock” passages which, to them, give evidence for what they say, presenting them to us to “prove” their point. Take for instance, the Thief on the Cross, used to “prove” the immortality of the Soul, the Temptations of Christ, to “prove” the existence of a personal Devil, etc. And likewise, we form our own “stock” answers to rebuff the claims, to demonstrate that in so using those Scriptures, our acquaintances are in fact, wresting them to their own destruction (2Pet 3:16). Now this is all well and good when speaking to such, for we can form standard arguments to refute their theories, that we might enlighten them to the Truth. But the problem arises, when we become so accustomed to our own “stock” answers, that we begin to always look upon those passages in that light. For instance, instead of arguing about the punctuation of the Lord’s response to the Repentant Thief, how often do we stand back to behold this man’s words – which comprises one of the most condensed statements of Faith in all of Scripture? How often do we reflect upon the Scripture uses of the term “devil”, to understand why the Spirit chose to speak in this way – and what we are being taught by it?

Another case in point is the latter part of the 1st Chapter to the Colossians, one of the most frequently cited passages for Trinitarians, speaking of the Lord Jesus: “who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col 1:15-17). Here, it is contended, is proof to show that the Lord Jesus is God, that he is the Creator of all things; and that therefore, he existed before the Creation of the world. But in response, we need not just to be able to regurgitate standard replies, to rebuff this theory, but to also to appreciate the real beauty of what these verses are actually designed to teach us.

THE STATUS OF “FIRSTBORN”

To begin with, it is easy to prove that these verses are not speaking literally. Jesus is the “firstborn of every creature”. Taken literally, being the “firstborn” – who gave birth to him? By citing this passage, and presenting a literal interpretation, the Trinitarian must concede that the pre-existent Jesus was born first, before all creatures, which suggests he must have had a pre-existent mother! Again, is he literally the firstborn of “every creature”? Of the beasts of the field, the fishes in the sea, and the

fowl of the air – is he their firstborn? To affirm such would be nonsense – how absurd it would be to place the Lord Jesus as being both the firstborn of the animal creation – and their Creator! But away with such absurdities, What do the Scriptures teach?

It is true that the Word shows how the Lord Jesus, being both Son of God, and Son of Mankind, was literally born through Mary, but that is not the birth being alluded to here. This birth, is something which elevated the Lord to the status of Firstborn, which his natural birth did not – he is the “only begotten Son” (Jno 3:16) of God, not the first begotten. But there was another “birth” which our Lord experienced – an emergence from the “womb of the morning” (Ps 110:3), or the grave – life from the dead. The Spirit of Christ in David thus wrote: “my substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them” (Ps 139:15,16). And again, in speaking of the promises made to the fathers, the Apostle Paul taught “God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Acts 13:33). So it was, that on the day of resurrection the Lord Almighty is said to have “begotten” His Son – that is, raised him up out of the bowels of the earth, to be “the Firstborn from the dead” (Col 1:18).

BEING MADE THE FIRSTBORN

The Lord Jesus then, was not naturally born as a “firstborn”, but was made such by virtue of his being the first to emerge from the grave to be given Immortality. It is a position of His Father’s appointing, rather than a biological statement of fact. Thus it was prophesied: “He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth” (Ps 89:26-27).

The Lord Jesus, the Apostle informs us, is “the firstborn of every creature”. The fact of him being the firstborn is suggestive that other sons are to follow – and the fact of him being the firstborn of every creature, suggests that the Exalted Lord is the head of a New Creation. Not a new planet earth, with new oceans, and new marine, animal and bird life, but a new creation of Christ’s brethren, being “born of the Spirit” (Jno 3:5,6), to be “the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36). In the days of the Apostles, the Gospel “was preached unto every creature which is under heaven” (Col 1:23), that is, to those who had ears to hear, under the existing constitution of things. And those “creatures”, who hearkened to the word thus preached, were thereby introduced into a new state of affairs, the opportunity to separate themselves from the mortal, sinful sons of Adam, to become members of a new, ultimately, Immortal Family, with Christ at the Head.

Adam was the “firstborn” of the Human Race, through whose offence, all mankind inherit a dying, sinful, condemned nature. But the Lord Jesus overcame that nature, destroying Sin in death, that he might become a new Adam, “the Last Adam” through

resurrection to glory: “so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit ... The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from Heaven” (1Cor 15:45,47). This being so, those who join themselves to the family of the “last Adam”, through a typical burial (Rom 6:4) and rebirth (Jno 3:3,5) in Baptism become New Creatures (Gal 6:15), as it is written, “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new” (2Cor 5:17). They become “renewed in knowledge” (Col 3:10), having been begotten “by the word” that they “should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (Jas 1:18).

In Psalm 89, we read that in being made Yahweh’s first Immortal Son, the Lord Jesus was elevated to be “higher than the kings of the earth”, an aspect of the Lord’s present status which is examined elsewhere in this issue. This same point is made by the Apostle to the Ephesians, speaking of how Yahweh “raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph 1:20-21). There are then, principalities, powers, and a dominion in the Age to Come, over which the Lord Jesus will be placed – and this is what is being referred to in Colossians, “by him were all things created ... Whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him: and for him” (Col 1:16).

Those who take this passage as literally referring to a pre-existent Christ creating the dominions, principalities and powers of the present Creation really do present themselves with immense difficulties. Did the Lord Jesus “Create” the dominion and principality of Rome, which crucified him? True it is, that “the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan 4:17), but nowhere in Scripture do we read of a pre-existent Christ, let alone one who created the power which executed him. No, the Creation of which the Apostle speaks, is the New Creation of which the Lord Jesus himself is the Firstborn. He is to be the future King over that Creation, and it will be he who appoints thrones, authorities and powers, for his brethren to reign with him. And such is the certainty of these events taking place, that “God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom 4:17), spoke these words through Paul in the present tense. So it was that John saw the immortal saints in his Apocalyptic visions rendering praise to their Lord “Thou are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev 4:11).

(To Be Continued)

Christopher Maddocks

Thoughts on Matthew Chapter 1

READ Matthew 1. There is no greater guarantee of the genuineness of anything than a genealogy. If one is heir to an inheritance, one must of necessity show his genealogy—that he is the son of such and such a father, deceased. There is no difficulty in doing that; one has only to turn to the “book of generation,” and there it is written, and the identity of the heir being established, the inheritance is righteously his.

So in this “book of the generation of Jesus Christ,” the most important of all such records, in fact the only really important one; it is the greatest guarantee of the genuineness of it all, and dry as these records may at first sight seem, the older we are in the truth, the more we value them, and thank God for them. It may be that there are difficulties,—there are, but they are not great, and the fact that the nation to which this record belongs is with us,—and I do not think that the Jews dispute the genealogy of Jesus,—is sufficient for us, and of course the attestation of all the prophets, and all the records of history, leave with us not the least doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ is he whom God has appointed to be Prophet, Priest, and King: the son of David, and more than that, the Son of God. That latter phase of the matter is increasingly doubted and denied. Under the influence of Trinitarian doctrine on the one hand, and mere fleshly rationalism on the other, the truth has been greatly obscured.

There are those who say, while they would not for a moment deny the possibility of the virgin birth, they cannot see the “ethical necessity” for it; if I mistake not, Sir Oliver Lodge is one of those. The truth has given us to understand the necessity for it, in the wisdom of God. In few words it is this—so stated in fact in the scriptures—that God may be at once just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus; that His majesty may be upheld, and His kindness revealed in the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ, whom He has given to the sons of men,—“the arm of the Lord” revealed, the Son of God revealed, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. So that when we find ourselves confronted by these modern denials, we are saved from the religious confusions, or the mere negations of rationalism.

Let us simply go back on the Word, and ponder how from the beginning God has proposed this. In the very outset, when sin entered, God upheld His majesty by the fulfilment of the sentence upon the transgressors; but, at the same time, He promised a remedy. “I will put enmity,” said God, “between thee, O serpent, and thy seed, and her seed (the seed of the woman). He shall bruise thy head, but thou shalt bruise his heel.” There was the earliest promise of what is here recorded as a matter of initial fulfilment; for it is expressly told us in this chapter we have read (Matt. 1.) that Jesus Christ is the seed of the woman,—“Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

From that initial promise right through the scriptures runs this doctrine of the virgin birth, — that God would thus, without the intervention of man, give to Israel a Son of God. Very early in Israel's history that was typically revealed in the giving to Abraham of a child of promise. We are familiar with the circumstances of the birth of Isaac, when Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah a woman of 90; and yet at that time, after so long a waiting period, in which hopes would seem to be disappointed,—after so long a time, Sarah bore a son, of whom it is said by the apostle Paul, that he was “born after the Spirit.” Of course, that expression is used with reference to the actual circumstances that are recorded in Genesis, and does not cover the like of what we read of Jesus Christ; still, there is that divine expression applied to Isaac as a type of Christ. There never would have been an Isaac unless God had interposed, and by the Spirit strengthened Sarah to conceive seed when she was past age. And the matter was a matter of faith, as Paul argues in the epistle to the Hebrews.

So here, in the case of Isaac, is a direct typical foreshadowing of this very matter of which we are reading, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ; and also that offering of Isaac is likewise a typical foreshadowing of what we thus bring to mind this day, —the laying of God's only begotten Son on the altar of sacrifice. Then in the law likewise, this same feature was brought to mind, in the provision of the altar of unhewn stone. The law was: “If thou wilt build an altar of stone unto me, thou shalt build it of unhewn stone, for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.” And of the “Stone” it was afterwards said, in the prophet Zechariah (the figure of a stone relating to the Lord Jesus Christ, he is the “tried corner stone”), “Behold I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day,” so that God would provide the altar,—the Lord Jesus Christ, not of man's begetting, **THAT MAN SHOULD NOT BOAST**. Supposing for a moment that Joseph had really been the father of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh, would he not have boasted in such a son? Surely, but it was not to be so; there was no boasting according to the flesh. It was the “arm of the Lord that brought salvation,” and boasting was excluded altogether. So it is that flesh is humbled, and we are invited to draw near upon the basis of what God has done for us,—humbling ourselves, confessing our sins, acknowledging that what He said is true: He looked to Israel, and there was no man, none to save Zion of all the sons she had brought up, and so He interposed, and gave to Israel a Deliverer.

The seventh chapter of Isaiah is referred to in this first chapter of Matthew, and we know how vain it is to attempt to escape the meaning of its terms. The Jews have all sorts of fantastical expositions of this chapter, —trying to apply it to Hezekiah, and so forth, but it is all in vain. When, apart from Jesus, was anyone revealed in Israel whose name was Emmanuel? Who, among all Zion's sons, save he, ever claimed to be God revealed in Israel? Jesus did claim it, and, more than that, he substantiated his claims; the words he spake, the works he wrought, bore testimony. He appealed especially to the works: “Believe,” he said, “for the very works' sake, if ye will not believe me,” but they would not. Again he said, and none could contradict him, that he was of a

higher origin than man, —“I am from above, ye are from beneath.” What mere man could talk like that in Israel? And therefore he said to his disciples, when they stumbled over his hard sayings in the synagogue at Capernaum, when he said he was the antitype of the manna, and the bread he would give for the life of the world was his flesh, and his blood for drink,—the disciples stumbled, and he appealed to them in this way: “What if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?” And they did see it. The one question remaining is, In what sense are we to understand his words, “ascend up where he was before”? They afterwards saw him ascend; but at the same time of speaking in Capernaum Jesus expounded the statement. “It is the spirit that quickeneth—or maketh alive—the flesh profiteth nothing. The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.”

So that in all these things we look back to the very beginning, and forward to the words of Christ himself, and the crowning proof of his divinity, —his resurrection and ascension. We see this purpose of God upheld and illustrated, we even see the reason given to us for it, a reason that the wise of this world cannot perceive. They say that there was no “ethical” value in the virgin birth of Christ, God says the reason is that His majesty may be upheld, boasting excluded from the flesh, and mankind humbled, and invited to approach on the basis of confession of sin, and the recognition of His righteousness revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we ponder the terms of this second chapter, what reality there is underlying it all! “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king,” etc. . . . Now, Bethlehem is with us, I have been there, and seen that Church of the Nativity, that has been a hallowed spot in Christendom, certainly since the third century A.D. Indeed, it is said to be the oldest church in Christendom. The beams of its present ceiling were supplied by one of the early English kings, —I forget which, at the moment, —and down in the vault there is a silver star let into the pavement, to indicate the spot where the Lord was born. It may not be the spot, and there is much ecclesiastical mummerly associated with it now, but that does not matter at all: it is the city, which has never been lost sight of, —one of the few undoubted spots.

We turn back to the prophet; what is involved in this prophecy in Micah concerning the birth of Christ at Bethlehem? We ponder these things, and when we consider the literal fulfilment of the words of the prophets in the birth of the Lord, there we rest assured that the rest of the prophecy will likewise be literally fulfilled. Micah had foretold that because of the iniquities of Zion’s prophets, priests and judges, the heads of the house of Israel, Zion should be “plowed as a field,” yet in the last days she should arise, shine, and be the metropolis of the world, so that many nations should come, as Isaiah likewise says, and say, “Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” And in that day there will be a great regathering, as the prophet goes on to say, and Zion, long down-trodden, will arise and thresh the nations that will gather together

against her. “But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they his counsel: for he shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass: and thou shalt beat in pieces many peoples: and I will consecrate their gain unto the Lord, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth,” that is, unto Jesus Christ.

So here is the picture; most of these things have never yet been; Zion has indeed been plowed as a field, and remains down-trodden, though the tide is turning, but she has never been such a metropolis, such a threshing-floor for the nations as God has ordained. But yet the very next words, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Juda, yet out of thee shall come a governor,”—that has been fulfilled. Throughout these chapters we read this singularly arresting expression concerning time, “Now,”—“Now why dost thou cry aloud?” “Now gather thyself together in troops.” Well may Peter say that the prophets “searched out what and what manner of time the Spirit of Christ in them did signify”; who but God could have spoken in this way? “Now many nations are gathered together against thee.” We are familiar, are we not (perhaps too familiar), with these cinematograph films, — moving records of the past: now imagine a moving record of the future: man could not do it, but God could, and in literary form He has done it in these pictures. They are not intelligible until the time comes, but when the time comes they become intelligible and so men look at the pictures, and say, Yes, that is what God has said.

And so, as we look at the birth at Bethlehem, it is a historical picture, and the importance of rightly pondering these things is this, that we follow in the same spirit in our day and generation, because just as there was a time for the birth of Christ, a time for the humiliation of Christ, so there is a time for the glory. We look back upon the humiliation,—“Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek,” and they did it, and the siege followed, as he told them it would, and that Jerusalem should be “trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled.” He was “made perfect through sufferings,” and judgment came upon Jerusalem: the times of the Gentiles supervened, in which the invitation of God in the gospel went forth to them, and they were called out of their “highways and hedges.” Now our turn has come. How are we walking in our time, dear brethren and sisters? Are we content to partake in whatever measure God may see fit, of the sufferings of the Christ, in hope of the glory that is to follow?

As we ponder these words, how wonderful they are! “Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.” And he goes on to tell how he shall be the peace, when the Assyrian invades the land in the last days, and how the remnant of Jacob shall do valiantly, as a lion among sheep, and as a dew from the

Lord. What figures! Who would dream of it, from the present state of things? And yet Christ came out of Bethlehem, and the other is just as sure to be fulfilled.

And so if we were to ponder these other testimonies: Matthew says, referring to the prophecy of Hosea, that the young child was taken down into Egypt, and was afterwards brought forth, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.” Well, we go to Egypt, and we see there monuments that bear testimony to Christ, and long before Christ, even to Joseph. A few miles north of Cairo there is almost the only remaining obelisk standing in situ in Egypt, on the site of On, where Joseph was, and the Nile mud that has been washed down the river all these centuries has raised the face of the country perhaps eight or ten feet, but they have excavated the base of this pillar, and you can go and see the pillar of the temple that was there when Joseph was there. A very little way from that, there is a tree called “Mary’s tree,” a sycamore, a monument, as tradition says, of the presence of the young child and his mother in Egypt, in those early days. But we turn to this prophet again, and there are associations of ideas here. No doubt there is a double intention in that reference in Hosea: no doubt it is historically true that when Israel was a child, God loved him, and brought him out of Egypt,—his national “son,” his “firstborn”; but there is this other beautiful idea covered, and that prophet likewise speaks of the judgments to come upon Israel, of the abiding of the children of Israel many days without a prince, without a priest or teraphim; and “afterwards,” he says, “shall the children of Israel return and fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days,” so that here, as in Micah, we have the same idea; a long period of forsaking, the coming of Christ, a long “time of the Gentiles,” the latter days, and restoration and glory in the kingdom of God, and we have modern testimonies to the truth of these things.

Then again, that apparently obscure reference to Jeremiah’s prophecy, when Herod was cruelly slaying the children at Bethlehem, “Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.” We look back upon that chapter, and we see the same things in wonderful ways. In the 31st chapter of Jeremiah, God is speaking by the prophet of the restoration of Israel in the latter days. In the 21st verse of chapter 30. he is speaking of the governor of Israel, that Judge of Israel, who should be smitten upon the cheek,—Jesus is here prophetically alluded to,—“Their nobles shall be of themselves, and their Governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me, saith the Lord?”

Now Christ did approach unto God, by resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the majesty on high, and in connection with this it goes on immediately to speak of the whirlwind of the Lord going forth with fury, and coming upon the head of the wicked, “The fierce anger of the Lord shall not return, until he have done it, and until he have

performed the intents of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it. Now we are in “the latter days,” and Christ is at the right hand of God, having engaged his heart to approach, and a whirlwind has arisen, and a mighty earthquake is shaking all nations. All the earth knows and fears; but it knows not the divine purpose in the storm. What is it? The 31st chapter tells us: “At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.” Verse 8: “Behold I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child, and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither. They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn. Hear the word of the Lord. O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off— (that is what we are doing)—and say, he that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock.”

And it is in this connection, a verse or two further on, that we read of this lamentation in Ramah, “Thus saith the Lord: A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord: Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border.” Are we to understand from that, that that prophecy is exhausted in the Herodian episode of the massacre of the innocents at Bethlehem? By no means, it is a wider matter, as you perceive. Rachel’s children stand for much more than those babes at Bethlehem at that time; just as the true children of Zion stand for much more than the descendants of Abraham after the flesh. What is involved in this is a national restoration, and more than that, a manifestation of Christ and the true children of Zion in immortal redemption. We know there are some who apply it to the literal resurrection of children, without reference to the hope of Israel. That will not stand; we must control our thoughts by God’s conditions revealed.

Just one word in conclusion,—to realise that these things are not apart from what we are reading of in Matt. 1: and 2.,—in verses 22 and 23 of this 31st chapter of Jeremiah, we read, “How long wilt thou go about, O thou backsliding daughter? for the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man,”—another prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ. “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; As yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity; The Lord bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness,” and the prophet says, in the 26th verse, in a curious kind of parenthesis, “Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me;” and he will literally awake from the dead, and behold, and sweet will be the vision. Shall we be there? Yes, if we hold fast these precious things which God has given to us!

CC Walker, (1919). The Christadelphian, 56 page 345–349.

1 Thessalonians 4: The Return of Christ

One of the major themes in this Epistle, is that of the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ. Each chapter refers to this momentous future event, as follows:

“... to *wait for his Son from heaven*, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thes. 1:10).

“... for 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 Thes. 2:19).

“... to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, *at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* with all his saints” (1 Thes. 3:13)

“... 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” (1 Thes. 4:16)

“... For yourselves know perfectly that *the day of the Lord so cometh* as a thief in the night” (1 Thes. 5:2).

For the purposes of this exhortation, we shall focus on today’s chapter: 1 Thessalonians 4, and some of the Old Testament principles being alluded to here.

As cited, above, the Lord Jesus Christ is to “himself descend from heaven”, and at that time the “first” thing that takes place is the rising of the dead. The verse that follows then proceeds to describe how that “we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air ...” (1 Thes. 4:17). The language here, takes us back to the beginning of Israel’s formation as a nation, as recorded in Exodus chapter 19.

In this passage, we read the following:

“... And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to *meet with God*; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because *Yahweh descended* upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of *a trumpet* sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by *a voice*. And *Yahweh came down* upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount and Yahweh called Moses up to the top of the mount, and Moses went up ...” (Exo. 19:17-20).

Notice how that the emboldened words match the description given in 1 Thessalonians 4: Just as the Lord descended upon mount Sinai, so the Lord Jesus Christ is to descend from heaven. There is a point of comparison here: just as Moses went up the mount

to lead the people in meeting their God, so the Lord has ascended to his Father's presence – to return. And we must be like the people ought to have been: patiently waiting for the Master to return: “unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28). Like Moses was to come again, so with the Master. And just like the people had turned aside to idolatry in Moses' absence, even so Christendom has gone astray from the true Gospel message to the worshipping of a fictitious Trinitarian deity.

Our position, however, does differ in certain respects:

“ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness and tempest ... and so terrible was the sight that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake. But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of Angels” (Heb. 12: see verses 18-22).

We don't have the terrifying sight of a burning mountain and all the experiences which made even Moses to “fear and quake”. Rather, we come to be part of a new system of things, even heavenly Jerusalem, “and to Jesus the mediator of the New Testament” (vs. 24).

There is another way in which the experiences of Israel at the beginning of their existence as a nation, foreshadow our situation in the Lord Jesus Christ:

In Exodus 33, Moses prayed to God: “I beseech thee, show me thy Glory”. And the response was:

“he said, I will make all **my goodness** pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of Yahweh before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy” (Exo. 33:19)

But interestingly what actually happened, was that God's goodness passed before Moses in the proclamation of words:

“And Yahweh descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of Yahweh. And Yahweh passed by before him, and proclaimed, ***Yahweh, Yahweh God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,*** and that by will no means clear the guilty visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation” (Exo. 34:5-7).

Notice that here, the goodness and glory of God was demonstrated, not in what was literally seen by the eyes, but in the words that declared His Attributes. And that word demonstrated the “gracious” and “mercy” of God.

Even so, we read of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas Moses said “shew me thy glory,” in Christ “we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jno. 1:14). And this verse in John 1 also described how that glory is revealed: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ...”. Jesus was the embodiment of all those attributes described in the words proclaimed to Moses – he was all of those words “made flesh”. And “the word was God” in that it contained the various virtues of Yahweh – it describes who He is.

Returning to 1 Thessalonians 4, we read that when the Lord descends from heaven, “the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thes. 4:16-17). This gathering together of believers is referred to elsewhere. Hence we read in the Psalm:

“He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. ***Gather my saints together unto me:*** those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness ...” (Psa. 50:4-6).

Although the judgments of God are referred to in the Psalm, in 1 Thessalonians 4, this aspect is not specifically mentioned: it is a condensed view on what will take place regarding the faithful who watch for the coming of Messiah. But notice that here, those saints (i.e. the approved) who are gathered together, are defined as those who have “made a covenant with me by sacrifice”. The question arises, what sacrifice? Romans 12 has the answer:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2).

Ordinarily, a sacrifice is dead. With few exceptions, the sacrifice involved the slaying of an animal, so that “almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22). But in our case, the sacrifice is alive. The true believers die with Christ in the waters of Baptism (Rom. 6), and rise again to a new existence, devoted to the doing of the will of God. Like Paul, they can say “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” (Gal. 2:20).

Notice also here, there is only one sacrifice, but many members who constitute that offering. As Paul continues: “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another” (Rom. 12:4-5). The unity of true believers is spoken of many times in the New Testament, their hearts “being knit together in love” (Col. 2:2), as members of the united body of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4 continues: “then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (vs. 17). This verse is misunderstood and misapplied by those who believe in the “rapture,” and the gathering of Christians to be with Jesus in heaven. The Bible knows no such doctrine, and defines the hope of believers as inheriting the earth (Mat. 5:5) when Christ comes again to fulfil the promises made to the Father’s of old, Abraham Isaac and Israel. But leaving aside what the verse is not saying, we need to consider what it is actually teaching!

ENTRY INTO THE POLITICAL HEAVENS

In Revelation chapter 4, we read of the invitation extended to John:

“... After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew you things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat upon the throne” (Rev. 4:1-2).

Here, John is taken through the door into the heavens. The actual throne itself is upon earth, as it was promised by the Angel of the Lord: “he shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Lu. 1:32-33). But it is in the political heavens – the place of rulership. The prophets often use the heavens to symbolise a position of power and authority (cp. Gen. 1:16, Isa. 1:2, Isa. 34:4, 2 Pet. 3:13 etc), and if we were writing to Christendom at large, we would demonstrate that principle in more detail. But for those who are disabused from such a notion, we are content to notice the point in passing, that John was given a door of entrance into the ruling plane of the Age to Come, and being a representative man, his situation thus describes how the believers will also “come up hither” to be with their Lord, seated in his throne. This is the promise: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the ecclesias” (Rev. 3:21-22).

When we referred to Psalm 50 above, we saw that it is the “saints” who will be so gathered together to be with their Lord. This precedes the situation described by Zechariah: “And Yahweh my God shall come, and all the saints with thee” (Zech. 14:5). Clearly, the saints have been brought together, to be manifest in the earth with Yahweh – the Son who has from his Father, inherited a better Name than that of the angels (Heb. 1:4).

And this is alluded to again by Paul in the chapter before, speaking of the love of saints in the purpose of God: “to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness, before God, even our Father, at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (1 Thes. 3:13).

The promises of God will only be given to "... them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). We may know that Christ is going to come again in an intellectual capacity – but how will we respond when he does come again? Will it be an unwelcome interruption of our lives, or will it be the fulfilment of all our hopes and desires? Do we yearn with all our hearts for Messiah to come again? If not, we need to reconsider our standing – but if so, we can "comfort one another with these words" (1 Thes. 4:18), and prepare for that great day to come.

Christopher Maddocks

The Tree of Life

When we consider the condition of Creation before the Fall, we find that Adam was formed in a "very good" state, and was therefore free from any form of defilement or decay. We see that he was not created a dying creature, but as the Apostle declared, death entered into the world subsequent to, and as a consequence of transgression (Rom 6:12).

But there are those who teach that Adam was created mortal and that it was necessary for Adam to eat of the Tree of Life in order to arrest the decaying process which was inherently within him. As the Divine command was "of every tree thou mayest freely eat" (Gen 2:16), and as "every", here must include the Tree of Life, so it is said, they must have eaten of this also. Yet, as we shall show, this is no more than supposition, as nowhere in Scripture is the Tree of Life spoken of in this way.

Although it does not in itself prove our case, it should be pointed out that this is not a new idea by any means, it has been around for many years, and is a theory which Christadelphians have long resisted. In 1896, Bro Roberts spoke of it, calling it:

"a plausible theory to the effect that we do not inherit death from Adam by any physical law, but merely by denial of access to the tree of life; that the sentence of death took no effect on Adam's body, and therefore not in ours: that, in fact, we are the "very good" and uncursed Adamic nature ... that our nature is not an unclean and sinful nature: that there is no such thing as sin in the flesh ... it is the old doctrine of Renunciationism in a new form. It is worse than Renunciationism ... while apparently an innocuous and harmless theory, it fatally corrupts and upsets and perverts the truth at its very threshold ..."

(The Christadelphian, July 1896).

These are strong words, even for Bro Roberts' Day! But when we carefully consider the logic of his reasoning, these words are fully justified. For, if Adam was created subject to decay already, then the wages of sin would not be death (Rom 6:23), but merely the exclusion from a particular life-sustaining fruit. This would then mean that the nature of man is not in itself under condemnation, as the Scriptures teach, but is still in the "very good" state in which it was first formed. And this would seriously

undermine our understanding of how we are affected by Adam's sin, for rather than inheriting a defiled, condemned nature, as Christadelphians have always believed (and as the Bible teaches), the only way in which we can be under condemnation is in some "legal" sense; because of Adam's sin, we can't eat from the tree! And this would nullify our understanding of the Sacrifice of Christ, for he would not need to overcome the diabolos in our sinful nature (Heb 2:14), and so overcome death itself, to stand before God as our representative (Heb 9:24). Rather, as our nature itself would not be the problem, he must have died as some kind of substitute, to suffer our punishment so that we might walk free. And these beliefs are held in great sincerity - by some of the churches around us. So then, although it may seem to be an "innocuous" suggestion, as Bro. Roberts wrote, it has serious ramifications which negates the whole of Scripture teaching concerning the Atonement.

What then, do the Scriptures teach? It is true that the Lord gave permission for Adam to eat "of every tree of the garden", but nowhere in Scripture are we told Adam actually ate from the Tree of Life. At best, this can be no more than an inference. Permission was given, but nowhere are we told that Adam actually did eat from every single tree which existed in the garden. And in any case, the expression "of every tree", does not mean any tree without exception - it did not include the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Lord said "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it ..." (Gen 2:16,17). When Adam was given permission to eat "of every tree," as we shall see, this meant every tree which was placed in the garden for food, not every tree which existed - the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was not formed for food, and was not to be so used.

But the Tree of Life was not formed for Adam to feed upon either! This is clear from Gen 2:9, where a distinction is made between trees for food, and those other two unique trees: "And out of the ground made Yahweh Elohim to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil". The Lord made trees for food, and "the Tree of Life also", that is, in addition to, and distinct from the other trees. Thus, God allowed Adam to eat of any food-bearing tree, but this did not include the Tree of Life, or the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which were in different categories of their own.

Again, we read of the Tree of Life in Gen 3:22-23, following the transgression of our first parents, and the subsequent covering of their nakedness: "And Yahweh Elohim said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore Yahweh Elohim sent him forth from the Garden of Eden ...". Here, the Tree is spoken of as giving everlasting life, and clearly if the Tree of Life gave immortality, then Adam couldn't have eaten from it, or else he would still be alive! And in addition to this, the phrase "lest he ... take also of the tree of life" is used, which would also imply that he hadn't previously eaten of the tree.

But against this, those who press the point tell us that although the Hebrew word for "also" is usually translated in this way, it can also mean "again", which would suggest that Adam had eaten of the tree, and that he was being prevented from doing so again.

And as to the Tree of life giving everlasting life, they tell us that the Hebrew word translated “ever”, (as in “live for ever”), does not in itself contain the idea of eternity, (although it can be used in this sense), but it literally means a time of unspecified duration, and can also be used for short time periods. So, the Tree had previously been eaten, we are told, the eating of which gave them life for a limited period, which meant they had to keep eating of it at intervals to prevent death. Thus, the sentence against Adam needed only to be exclusion from this type of food, and he would naturally die.

But again, there are clear errors in this reasoning. Firstly, it is recognised that the AV rendering of these words is in accordance with the meaning that they can carry. And secondly, it is also recognised that the AV rendering is the usual way these words are translated - thus the case is far from being proved. But in addition to this, there is a third point - surely there is something wrong with building a doctrinal structure, the logical outcome of which undermines fundamental points of our faith, upon a foundation which is no stronger than the possible meaning of two Hebrew words?

We have long recognised that the correct way of understanding Bible teaching, and learning doctrines, is by “comparing Scripture with Scripture”. So then, to learn about the Tree of Life, we need to consider what other parts of Scripture tell us.

A REWARD FOR FAITHFULNESS

In the Apocalypse, the Tree of Life is used to represent the reward given to the faithful: “to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). Here, being permitted to eat of the Tree of Life is used as a representation of the reward given to those who have “overcome” a period of trial. This clearly contrasts with the expulsion from the Edenic paradise of those who failed to overcome, in order to prevent them from partaking of the life-giving Tree, and also suggests to us that had Adam overcome, he also would be permitted to eat from the Tree, as a reward for his faithfulness.

We read of this antitypical tree again in Rev 22:14: “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life ... “. Similarly, we have another contrast with those who did not obey God’s commandment; they did not have a right to the tree of life, and were driven from it’s presence.

So then, from these two passages, we learn that as a symbol in the Apocalypse, the eating of the Tree of Life speaks of a reward given to those who endure and overcome a period of trial, who obey the commandments of God. Thus, it speaks of the bestowal of Immortality by the Lord Jesus Christ upon his brethren. We would suggest that if in Eden, the Tree was not present for this purpose, it would not be an appropriate symbol in the Apocalypse.

When we consider the literal Tree in Eden, every indication suggests that it’s existence was ready for the rewarding of man’s faithfulness (had he obeyed the Divine Command), with the bestowal of Immortality. Indeed, it’s very name, (the “Tree of Lives”, as it could be better rendered) is suggestive of this, it would give life to all those who would partake of it. In this, it stands as a great contrast to the Tree of the

Knowledge of Good and Evil, which would bring death to those who transgressed the command in partaking of it.

This appears to be the reasoning of Bro. Thomas, for speaking of the Tree of Life in Elpis Israel, he wrote: "Its fruit, however, was of a quality entirely opposite to that of which they had eaten. Both trees bore good fruit; but that of the Tree of Life had the quality of perpetuating the living existence of the eater for ever ... It is probable that, had he (i.e. Adam) been obedient to the law of the Tree of Knowledge, he would have been permitted to eat of the Tree of life, after he had fulfilled his destiny as an animal man; and, instead of dying away into dust, have been "changed in the twinkling of an eye" (Elpis Israel, p. 70).

What this means, is that Adam and Eve had immortality to look forward to, had they remained obedient. But following the Fall, access to the Tree was barred, and the sinful pair were thrust out from it's presence. We can only begin to imagine how Adam and Eve must have felt outside of the Paradise in Eden, knowing they were to lead a life of travail and suffering, as dying they would surely die. At one time, they were faced with the prospect of being like the Elohim in nature - if they had obeyed, but now all was vanity as they were denied access to the Tree of Life, and condemned to return to the ground from whence they came.

But this hope was only deferred, not removed altogether! The Lord, in His Kindness and Mercy had ordained a "Way" back to the Tree, which was preserved by the Cherubim, and Flaming Sword, placed at the entrance to the garden (Gen 3:24). And, even before their expulsion from Eden, both Adam and Eve were taught the need for Sacrifice in order to provide a covering (atonement) for sin, a practice they were to continue at the entrance to the Way, as we learn from the opening verses of Gen 4.

This situation is aptly described in Proverbs thus: "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life" (Prov 13:12). Despite the sickness of heart Adam would experience because of the condemnation of death, he nevertheless had a hope of life. As He stood at the entrance to the Garden (which was also the place where "the Way of the Tree of Life" began), to offer his Sacrifice, it is quite possible that he would be able to look beyond the sword of fire, wielded by the Cherubim of Glory, along "the Way", to the Tree in the distance, yielding it's life-giving fruits. Indeed, the role of the Cherubim to "keep", or "preserve" the way (Gen 3:24) would suggest this, for the record states that it wasn't simply the entrance to the way, but the way itself, which was preserved. The features of the Cherubim would teach him what he must become, being a depiction of the glorified Body of Christ (Ezek 1). And the fiery sword, being the means by which the Way was preserved would teach that he, as all who seek "glory and honour and immortality" (Rom 2:7) have the duty to preserve the Way of God (Ps 119:33-35, cont Gen 6:12) by the effective use of the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph 6:17), cutting down the high things which exalt themselves against the knowledge of the Truth (2Cor 10:5). And being a Fiery sword, as well as speaking of the bright flame of the Word, it would also teach him that keeping the true Way is often accompanied with a fiery trial (1Pet 4:12) of affliction.

And so as Adam gazed past these things, along the “Way” to the Tree which was “afar off” (Cp Heb 11:13), in the midst of the Garden, he would be able to look beyond his sentence of death, and all that it entailed, past the depiction of what he must do to be saved, to the glory which lay ahead. And this place itself, being a place of Sacrifice, would teach that the means to access the things that this tree offered would ultimately be provided by the One who had the power to overcome, through death, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE TREE OF LIFE ELSEWHERE IN SCRIPTURE

The fruits of the work of Christ, is that a means is provided for those who would seek to “overcome” to access the antitypical Tree of life. Thus, we read in Prov 11:30 “The fruit of the righteous (or, Righteous One) is a tree of life and he that winneth souls is wise”. The Lord Jesus is the One who is righteous and wise, and who is able to win (or “take”, as the word means), souls from the bondage of death, that they may be redeemed by his Sacrifice. Having truly “overcome”, he is himself the Antitypical Tree of which believers must partake in order to be ultimately glorified in immortality. As he said, “he that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life”, and again, in a clear allusion to Gen 3:22, “he that eateth this bread shall live for ever” (Jno 6:54,58).

Here, we need to appreciate that the Lord is speaking as the Word made flesh (Jno 1:14). To partake of the True bread of life, which is the Lord Jesus as the antitypical Manna, is to consume the spiritual nourishment which comes from him, and this is the Word which he spoke. As it is written “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Mat 4:4). The Words which proceed from God, then as spoken through His Son, and others constitute this Spiritual bread, which we must be partakers of. And the Lord Jesus, being the Word made flesh is an embodiment of that Word, the fulfilment of the things testified in the Oracles of God concerning him. Thus, to feed upon the word which testifies of the Saviour, is to feed upon the Saviour Himself. To feed upon this word, is to eat the flesh, and drink the blood of Christ (Jno 6:56), which will enable us to partake of the everlasting life he is able to impart, for to partake of him, is to partake of the Antitypical Tree of Life.

The Word of God, then, being the Word of life, those whose tongues are guided by, and influenced by it, themselves are able to impart words of life. As it is written: “a wholesome tongue is a Tree of Life” (Prov 15:4), words which have their fullest application to the Lord Jesus, whose words truly can give life to the hearers. But, this being so, it is not surprising for us to find the Tree of Life being spoken of in connection with the wisdom which comes from hearkening to these words. Thus, we read in Prov 3 of the wisdom of God, “her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold on her, and happy is every one that retaineth her” (Prov 3:17,18). Wisdom, then, is a Tree of Life to those who are able, and willing to grasp hold of her. Being a Tree of Life, her “ways”, and her “paths” are paths of the Tree of Life (cp Gen 3:24) along which a person must walk in order to find life, and peace, a peace which “passeth all understanding” (Phil 4:7).

The ways of wisdom collectively form the “narrow” way which the Lord informs us leads us to life, as opposed to the “broad” way which leads to destruction. “Enter ye in

at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mat 7:13-14).

Just as Adam and Eve were faced with two trees, a tree of life, and a tree of death to those who partook of them, so their progeny are faced with two ways. And just as Adam was led by his wife to walk the path to the tree of death; this is the way the multitudes have chosen ever since; a way of wilful disobedience to the will of their Maker. The other way is a way, which must be sought for. Although it is partly obscured by the traditions of men, it is being kept open, by those who wield the sword of the spirit, in cutting away the thorns of apostasy. This way, although it must be diligently sought for in these days of corruptness and evil, is a narrow way. And being narrow, it is not designed to accommodate the ignorant multitudes who follow every whim and fancy of man, but those few who would walk it in faith, looking to the end, beyond the trial of this life, to the vision of the Tree of Life in the Kingdom, even the Lord Jesus himself (Heb 12:1,2).

A FURTHER POINT

But there is a further point to consider. The question naturally arises, "If the Tree of Life gave Immortality, why didn't Adam and Eve simply go to that tree, and eat from it after the Fall?" Indeed, it would seem that they did have opportunity to go to the tree, as after they transgressed, and before their appearance before God, there was a time when they were hiding in the trees of the Garden. A possible explanation, is that there was no fruit on that tree for them to eat, for the Scriptures say nothing about it yielding fruit, prior to transgression. In Gen 1:14, we read that there were "seasons", and we know that trees bear fruit according to their particular season. In "very good" conditions, trees would give fruit at their appointed time. And as the Tree of Life was designed for the reward of faithfulness, a season for it to bear fruit, surely would be when faith had been shown? And being a Type of Eternal Life in Christ, to those who are in need of healing from mortality, in the event of transgression taking place, another season for it to bear fruit would surely be after transgression, and after a way of reconciliation had been appointed? If there were fruit on this tree, we would suppose that there would be great urgency to drive man out from before it. Yet, in Genesis 3, we find that this was the last thing to be done, immediately following the appointment of Sacrifice.

So then, the presence of the Tree of Life in the Garden taught Adam and his wife that if they were faithful, their faithfulness would be rewarded. But even in the event of their transgression, there would be a Way of Life provided - on God's terms, as it duly was. The expulsion of Adam and his wife from the Garden taught that the way of life can only be accessed by the means of God's appointing. Thus, the tree stands as a powerful exhortation to us, not to devise fables which contradict the main thrust of Scripture, not to walk along the broad way that leads to destruction, but rather to understand and accept the way of Salvation, as appointed by the Lord Himself. We must seek wisdom, and then walk in its ways, which are the ways to the Tree of Life. And then, if we show ourselves to be faithful, if we "keep" God's ways, if we seek to "overcome" sin, then by God's grace, when the Lord returns, we might partake of the Antitypical Tree, and so be "partakers of the divine nature" even as the Lord has promised (2 Pet 1:4).

Christopher Maddocks

“An Highway shall be There”

G. H.—“And a highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called, The way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men though fools shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon: it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there” (Is. 35:8–9). What are we to understand by these words of the prophet?

ANSWER. —The words in question are part of a prophecy beginning at the 1st verse of chapter xxxiv. and running on to the last verse of chapter xxxv. We must consider the prophecy as a whole before we can get an understanding of this part. The words in question are also highly figurative though not symbolic: that is, they are the figurative dressing up of the literal. They belong to the class of words employed by the same prophet in speaking of the mission of John the Baptist five chapters further on: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low,” &c. (40:3–4). The preparation thus described was not a work of civil engineering as the words literally taken would import. It was a work accomplished in the minds of men. Nevertheless, the terms employed to describe the work are not symbolic terms, but the figures of a literal work. There was a literal “one” who would literally “cry” or cause his voice to be heard in the literal “wilderness” in preparation of the way of the literal Lord, who would make his literal appearance: but there was to be no literal filling up of valleys or smoothing of rough roads, or casting up of a literal highway. These are the figures of the preparation of the Lord’s way among men.

So in the prophecy quoted above, the “highway” is a high way certainly, but not an elevated surveyor’s road. It is of the character described in the promise of Isaiah 58:14, to those who conform to the Lord’s will: “I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth.” This does not mean the Swiss Alps or the Indian Himalayas, but the places of high rank among men—the places at present occupied by the kings and princes of the earth, whether they ride along the literal valleys or climb the mountain-side. The nature and locality or the high way we must learn by considering the prophecy as a whole.

Verse 1 of chapter xxxiv. invites the nations to listen. A purpose has been formed by Yahweh concerning their armies, which He is about to announce. He announces it: their armies are wholly to be given to slaughter (verse 2). The whole social and political system based upon the power of their armies is to be dissolved in judgment (verse 4), inflicted at Bozrah (verse 6) in the day of the Lord’s vengeance and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion (verse 8). Idumœa, the scene of this fearful stroke of judgment, is to be given over to perpetual desolation (verses 9–17). As the result, Zion’s desert solitudes will rejoice (35:1), for the glory of the Lord shall be revealed (2). In prospect of this, the now fearful and weak who trust in Yahweh’s purpose are summoned to be strong of heart. God will come with vengeance to save

them (verse 4). The New Testament shews in what way (2 Thess. 1:7–10). Then ensues an era of emancipation for the friends of God. Even the (figuratively) blind, deaf, and lame share the blessedness (verses 5, 6). Streams of knowledge and light and joy and blessing break forth in the desert of human life everywhere (verse 7). But as the result of what?

Where will be the kernel of the new age of glory? where the cause that operates such a revolutionary and beneficent change in the condition of “all the families of the earth?” It is here where the “highway” comes into view. “A highway shall be there.” The highways have everywhere else been abolished. “In that day,” as the prophet writes earlier (chap. 24:21), “the Lord of Hosts shall punish the host of the HIGH ONES that are on high (namely) the kings of the earth upon the earth.” They have been deposed and gathered as prisoners, after the type of the Kings of Canaan to Joshua’s presence. Their governments have been ended: their high places are no more. But an highway shall be THERE—that is, in the Lord’s land (verse 8). “It shall be called, The way of holiness: the unclean shall not pass over it.” This distinguishes it from all other highways that have ever been. The high places of the earth are not places of holiness, and never have been so: “the spirituals of wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12) still continues to be the description of those who inhabit them. The unclean—(those who are such in God’s regard)—not only pass over their highways, but swarm in and cover them. The divinely clean cannot walk among them. But here is a highway where the state of things will be reversed: it will be a way of holiness, where the unclean will be unknown. As we read in the Apocalypse: “There shall in nowise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Continuing, Isaiah says: “It shall be for those”—defined in verse 10 as “the ransomed of the Lord.”

These at present are “the wayfaring men”—strangers and pilgrims—considered fools by their contemporaries in every generation of their development, and no doubt considerably such when judged by current standards of wisdom; for, as Jesus says: “The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.” Though fools now—fools for Christ’s sake, as Paul was (1 Cor. 4:10)—they will make no error when they come to walk the way of holiness. Invested with the incorruptible and immortal nature of the Spirit and exalted to power, in the Kingdom of God, they will govern mankind infallibly, and be the most efficient rulers the world has ever seen. The rulers of the present order are lions and ravenous beasts: none such will have place in the Kingdom of God. The men who will then ride in the high places of the earth will be lambs and shepherds by comparison—men who will govern in the spirit of gentleness and kindness, and in mercy and truth and the fear of God. Upon their own heads will be joy and honour: fled for ever will be sorrow and sighing.

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(electronic ed.), 182–183.