

“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)

Adam and Eve before the Fall

The following questions were asked on a Social Media platform:

Some questions from Genesis 3:22 and 23.

1. If Adam and his wife did not eat the fruit, would they die?
2. After the fruit meal, why did they not eat the fruit of the tree of life?
3. Before God punished them, why didn't the Serpent encourage them to eat the fruit of the tree of life

We endeavour to supply answers as follows:

1. If Adam and his wife did not eat the fruit, would they die?

This is one of those “What if?” questions, which it is not wise to dogmatise upon, but is interesting to consider. We are told very plainly in the New Testament, that death came into the world as a consequence of sin:

“... as by one man sin entered into the world, **and death by sin**; and so death passed upon all men in whom all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

As far as the Scriptures themselves are concerned, Adam did sin, the sentence of death was passed, and we know what followed – but we are not told what might have been under different circumstances, or whether death could have entered the world in a different way in those circumstances. The question is, would death at any point have come into the world if the first human pair had not eaten of the proscribed fruit? Brother John Thomas gives his thoughts on this question both in *Elpis Israel*, and also in a further article appearing in “*The Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come*”, July 1885, entitled “*Our Terrestrial System before the Fall*”. In both of these, he makes the suggestion, that although there was no active process of decay in operation within Adam or Eve before the fall as there is at present, because the animal body with which they were created was not designed for an endless existence without a change, it would eventually wear out. Thus, in *Elpis Israel*, speaking of the hypothesis “if they had not sinned they would nevertheless have died”, we read:

“*It is probable they would* after a long time, **if** no further change had been operated upon their nature. But the Tree of Life seems to have been provided for the purpose of this change being effected, through the eating of it's fruit, if they had proved themselves worthy of the favour” (*Page 72*).

And in *Our Terrestrial System Before the Fall*, he wrote:

“Adam and Eve, and all the other animals born of the earth with themselves, *would have died and gone to corruption, if there had been no transgression, provided* that there had been no further interference with the physical system than Moses records in his history of the Six Days”.

The suggestion is then, that the “animal body” with which Man was created, would only be capable of existing in its pristine condition for a certain period. It was not designed for eternity and would eventually wear out - a very different thing to saying that Adam was created as a decaying creature, with an active principle of corruption as part of his physical make-up. But it ought to be pointed out that in any case this is more of an academic consideration than anything else - *in actual fact, it could never happen!* In Eden, Adam and Eve had only two options placed before them - neither of which would permit the supposed natural dissolution of their animal nature into corruption. Either they would remain faithful, and after a period of probation be granted immortality, *or* they would disobey, and be placed under the sentence of death. Under this consideration therefore, the issue of what may, or may not have happened had there been either no sin, or no transformation into immortality, is really a non-question, for this option *could never have taken place*. Indeed, Bro Thomas recognises this in the quotations above; suggesting Adam’s body could wear out in the absence of sin, *if* it had not been changed to Immortality by God. Again, in 1852, he wrote concerning the nature of animals, “These did not sin, yet they returned to dust whence they came. *So probably would Adam, if* he had been left to the ordinary course of things as they were. ***But he would not have returned to dust if he had continued obedient***” (*Tempter and Tempted, The Herald of the Kingdom, 1852*).

The present writer’s thoughts are that whilst Bro. Thomas’ suggestion sounds plausible, and does not contradict the BASF, there is another possibility. As Adam and Eve were created in a “very good” state, they would remain in such condition, unless the appearance of sin would change things, as it duly did. It is quite possible therefore, that the bodies of Adam and Eve, being sustained by the “breath of life” (Gen 2:7) and having no active principle of corruption (i.e. mortality) within them, could have maintained an undying existence indefinitely. This is not to say that they were immortal, but that they would live for however long the Lord wished them to before the rewarding of faithfulness, with the possibility of death occurring at any point, consequent to the introduction of sin. We have seen that the possibility of Adam’s death because of his body eventually wearing out was not an option anyway, and this suggestion would at least allow for a probationary period of any length of time prior to the reward of immortality.

But on this particular matter, the Scriptures do not speak specifically, and therefore it is unwise to dogmatise. What the Scriptures do state is that Adam became a dying creature *subsequent to, and because of* his action of sin; and with that we must be content.

2. After the fruit meal, why did they not eat the fruit of the tree of life?

According to the Genesis record, the command was given:

“... 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: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:16-17).

It is observed that there was no such prohibition against eating of the Tree of Life, which leads some to assume that Adam and Eve did have free access to that tree, and

partook of it regularly in order to sustain them. Then, it is reasoned, that having access to that tree removed, they would begin to die and experience the travail that comes from a mortal existence (see for instance the book *“The Divine Plan - A Reappraisal of some Christadelphian Traditions”* by CE Cave and J Adey).

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 Renunciacionism in a new form. It is worse than Renunciacionism ... 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 Brother 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 punishment for sin would not be the imposition of death, but merely the exclusion from a particular life-sustaining fruit. This would then mean that the nature of man is not in itself affected, as the Scriptures teach, but is still in the same “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 originally 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 have no entitlement to 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 many 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”, it is evident that 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.

We read again 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.

When we consider the literal Tree in Eden, every indication suggests that its 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. How appropriate for there to be a Tree which would give life consequent to obedience, and a Tree which would be the cause of death to those who transgressed!

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*, p70).

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 its 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 the question is, Following the eating of the forbidden fruit, why couldn't Adam and Eve simply eat from the Tree of Life which was also in the midst of the garden? The assumption is that it was already yielding fruit – which the record does not say. Our suggestion is that as trees produce fruit according to the seasons, it was not the season for this fruit grow (in fact, Revelation 22 speaks of a wood of life in this way). It would only be needed in the event of a successful period of trial – before that event, this fruit would not be needed, and so would not be provided. If the tree were already bearing fruit that could confer immortality, one would assume that the first thing to do would be to exclude the sinful pair from it immediately – whereas in the Genesis record, this was done last.

3. Before God punished them, why didn't the Serpent encourage them to eat the fruit of the tree of life

Again, it is an assumption that the tree was bearing fruit at the time. The record gives no reason to suppose that it was. There was evidently a period of time between eating of the forbidden tree, and the sentencing of death. Adam and Eve had time to make themselves aprons of fig trees: they surely would have had time to immediately go to, and partake of the Tree of Life, had it been in fruit.

But there is an antitypical Tree of Life which those who overcome will be allowed to eat from! The Lord, in His Kindness and Mercy 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. Indeed, the stated purpose of the Cherubim to “keep”, or “preserve” the way (Gen 3:24) would suggest this. 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 (2 Cor 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.

Such is the situation as it appears to us: we invite reader’s comments!

Christopher Maddocks

Special Study Section:

Principles of Interpreting Revelation

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROPHECY

The Apostle Peter, in comparing the prophetic Word with his inspired eyewitness account of Christ’s transfiguration spake thus:

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scriptures is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:19-21).

Prophecy then, is not something provided as a kind of ‘optional extra’ for the academics to debate and argue about. It is a ‘light’, designed to illuminate an otherwise dark and benighted age until the dawning of the new day of righteousness. And it is a light which we disregard at our peril, for without the light of Yahweh’s providing, we will most surely remain in the shadows, in a state of unenlightened dimness and obscurity.

And this light is not merely a glimmer, barely discernible to those who approach it with anything but the most detailed scrutiny. It does not emit an uncertain glow, so

that the travellers along the path of life might not be certain as to the objects it illuminates – rather it is “a more *sure* word”. Prophecy then, is not something to be *unsure* about, despite the claims of some. As Divinely provided illumination, it shines brilliantly upon the face of world events, enabling the affairs of men to be seen as how they really stand in the Father’s estimation, and enabling those who “watch” to discern their position relative to their Master’s coming.

But there is another point about prophecy, which is so often overlooked. According to the Apostle, it contains things which we would “do well” to “*take heed*”. Conversely, if we do not “take heed”, we do not “do well”! Therefore, as we endeavour to show in this article, the subject of prophecy is one which should be studied most earnestly by those who look for the great climax of human history when our Lord comes. We wish to be approved by him at that time, and we must therefore give our attention to doing the things which the Spirit informs us we would “do well” to do. But how can we ‘take heed’ to something we do not understand? We cannot. This then, is the real value of a correct understanding of the Prophetic Word – being a Divine light for the path which leads to the Kingdom, it gives encouragement to those who discern the hand of providence in human affairs and teaches principles for us to heed, that we might prepare for that great day.

And this “sure” word of prophecy is no mere tangled morass of confusing symbols of contradictory meaning. The prophetic word, as with all Scripture, has consistency, harmony and order. Whether we take the record of Creation, the Law given to Moses, or the Promises given to Abraham and David – all show the qualities of Divine intent and purpose. And Prophecy is no different, especially so when we consider the carefully ordered symbols of Revelation. In our understanding therefore, there should be no tangled inconsistencies, or dogmas which reflect the chaos and disorder of human theorising. Rather, there should be logic, consistency and illuminance. And only by allowing the Word of Truth to shine unhindered by the obscure clouds of Church philosophy can we truly have the ‘dark place’ of our wilderness journey so enlightened.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Lord Jesus himself has promised a blessing to those who “do well” in taking heed to the words of his prophecy, contained in the book of Revelation: “*Blessed* is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (Rev 1:3). These words then, raise this last message of Christ to his servants to an even higher level of importance – those who “*keep*” the principles contained therein will be “*blessed*,” the implication being that those who do not “*keep*” those things will not be blessed. But in order to “*keep*” these sayings, we firstly need to “*read*” and “*hear*,” for how can a man “*keep*” something concerning which he has no knowledge? We cannot obtain the blessing from Christ by neglecting his Book; only by searching it diligently, by reading it, by seeking to hear and heed its words of instruction and exhortation will we be viewed with such favour.

But it is also clear that in order to obtain the promised blessing, we need to have correct understanding of Revelation. A person may “*read*,” yet if they cannot understand

what is written, they cannot truly “hear” in the Scriptural sense, being in a no better position than those who could not receive Christ’s parables, of whom he spake: “hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Mat 13:13). To “hear” then, is not a matter of giving ear to the many theories of men which abound, and which only serve to confuse the mind to Divine things – it is to *listen intelligently with comprehension*. It is to hear, and understand the things of The Word. That is the kind of hearing needed for the faithful to “keep” the sayings of Christ in the Book of Revelation, a clear understanding of at least the basics of what is written for our learning.

But in addition to promised *blessings* for those who hear the words of Christ, there are also promised *cursings* to those who would change his word: “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev 22:18-19). To add to, or detract from the message of the book of Revelation then, is a grave matter. Those who would remove vital elements of its warnings and instruction, by obscuring its teachings with the delusions of Catholicism, and those who would add their own notions by distorting its truths in erroneous exposition, are in very real danger of bringing the curses of the book upon themselves. As Brother Roberts wrote:

“the Spirit pronounces a blessing on those who understand it (1:3), from which it follows that a wrong apprehension of its import deprives the wrong apprehender of its blessing. Jesus pronounces a curse on those who take away from its words (22:19), and no one takes away from its words more effectually than the man who misrepresents its meaning” (*The Christadelphian, August 1872*).

So likewise, we must not detract from the Word by removing this book out of our arena of study. The great importance of the Book of Revelation is reflected in the gravity of what it promises to those who approach it, and whether we be partakers of blessings or cursings depends on ourselves, and the manner of our approach. We must then, read, understand, and keep this last message of Christ that we might be given it’s blessings.

THE BACKGROUND OF DANIEL

The standard Christadelphian (and Scriptural) understanding of the Book of Revelation is known as the *Continuous Historic* interpretation, because it is based on the principle that prophecy provides a *continuous* record of *history* in advance. The precedent for taking this approach is found in the prophecies of Daniel, from which much of the symbology of the book of Revelation is derived. Nebuchadnezzar’s Image is perhaps the simplest of all symbolic prophecies in Scripture, and it also provides a framework for understanding other, more complex prophecies. Here, the Spirit gives an outline of history in advance, speaking of the Babylonian king as the Head of Gold, followed by the Medo-Persian empire as represented by the breast and arms of silver, the “brassen-coated Greeks” being depicted as the “belly and thighs of brass”, and the Western and Eastern parts of the Roman Empire being symbolised in

the legs of Iron. Finally, the image depicts the fragmentation of the Roman Empire into the fragmented state that we have today in Europe, a fragile alliance of Iron and Clay feet, a situation which will prevail until the time of our Lord's coming.

So much is readily understood amongst us. But notice these features:

1. It is totally *continuous*. That is to say, there are no gaps in the Image; it gives a continual outline of world events from the time of Babylon to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.
2. It is mostly History!

We might say therefore, that Nebuchadnezzar's Image is a *Continuous-Historic* prophecy; detailing history in advance – with no gaps. There are those who criticise the usual Christadelphian understanding of Revelation on the grounds that it allegedly relies too much upon History to expound the fulfilment. But the Image sets a precedent for looking to the past - as most of the prophecy has been fulfilled we need to look to History to find empires which match the Belly and Thighs of Brass, and the Legs of Iron etc. Only by looking at History with the light of Bible Prophecy, do we become enlightened as to which predictions have been fulfilled, and how.

FOUR BEASTS

In the vision described in Daniel chapter 7, the metal-kingdoms of the Image are depicted in animal form; the Lion, Bear and Leopard corresponding to the Babylonian, Medo-Persian and Greek empires respectively. But of particular interest to us in our reflections of the Book of Revelation, is the Fourth, *unnamed* beast. This corresponds to the fourth Iron section of the Image (notice it's teeth of *iron* – verse 7), and therefore speaks of the Roman system which, as the iron in the feet of Iron and clay indicates, continues until the time of Christ's return, and the establishment of his Kingdom. This is an important key point to notice; from the time of the rise of the Roman Empire, this Fourth beast exists – albeit going through many forms and phases – until the time of it's destruction at the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ: "I beheld, till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame" (*Dan 7:11*).

Moreover, as well as being a great political empire, this bestial system was the source of a great *persecuting power*. It's development is depicted in terms of the Romanic Beast growing a new horn, amongst its 10 existing ones: "I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another little horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots: and behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things" (*Dan 7:8*). Also, we further read that Daniel "beheld, and the same horn *made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; until the Ancient of days came, and judgement was given to the saints of the Most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom*" (*Dan 7:21-22*).

We find then, that out of the Roman political animal was to emerge a horn of power, which would successfully war with the Saints, or Holy Ones of Yahweh until the time of it's destruction and their deliverance at the hands of the Ancient of Days. And the

features of this power – an extension, or horn derived from the Roman Empire – leave us in no doubt that it symbolises the Roman Catholic system.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Firstly, what made it remarkable by comparison with the other 10 horns, was that it had a *mouth*, and *eyes*. It had “a mouth that spake very great things, whose look was more stout than his fellows” (7:20). It’s *look* being more ‘stout’ (or *chief* as the word can be rendered), than it’s fellows, it was a *Chief Overseer*, or *bishop* (the word for ‘bishop’ meaning ‘overseer’). The “great things” which it spake, we are further told, it spake “against the Most High”, being expressive of it’s swelling doctrines and teachings which are exalted against the revealed Truths of the Most High God. And as memorialised in the “triple tiara” worn even today by the “Holy See” as the mouthpiece of the Roman Beast, this horn had plucked up 3 of the other horns, speaking of the subjugation of 3 of the barbarian tribes which invaded the Roman Empire.

This persecutory protrusion of the Roman political Beast then, can only be identified in History with the Papal system, whose terrible persecution of the saints is renowned, even within the world of darkness. The blood of the saints – Messiah’s brethren and sisters – cries out from the pages of history, of the atrocities yet to be avenged when the Lord comes. Truly there will be rejoicing in that day (*Rev 18:20*), when the untameable, savage Roman beast shall be destroyed, and it’s body given to the burning flame (*Dan 7:11*).

THE SAME BEAST IN REVELATION

It is well recognised that the symbology of Daniel’s 10 horned Fourth Beast really forms the background to the Book of Revelation. Daniel was shown how that this power would undergo certain changes, throughout the duration of it’s existence, indicated by it’s horns, and most particularly the self-exalting “little horn” which we have just been considering. But the Book of Revelation elaborates on this, and using a similar beast-symbology, describes the developing phases of that political creature in more detail. We saw earlier that Daniel’s Fourth Beast is given no name; that is, no animal from Creation was used to depict the Roman Power. And one reason for this, is that the changes the Roman power was to undergo were so great, that they just could not all be adequately depicted by a single animal. Accordingly, the Book of Revelation, in speaking of that same beast in greater detail, uses the attributes of several different beasts. It describes a great red *dragon*, or *crocodile* (12:3), a *beast of the sea* (13:1), a *beast of the earth* (13:11), and a *scarlet coloured beast*, being ridden by a prostitute (17:3). And despite the varying forms each beast takes, all have a single common feature which identifies them all as being but different aspects of Daniel’s Fourth Beast. That is, they are all *persecuting powers* (cp 12:13, 13:7, 13:15, 17:6). And all except one bare the characteristic features of 10 horns (12:1, 13:1, 17:3, that one exception, the *Beast of the Earth*, instead possessing 2 horns to reflect the dual Secular and Ecclesiastical aspect of the Holy Roman Empire). They all therefore, are but elaborations of the Roman Beast as beheld by Daniel, one power being depicted by various creatures to reflect the great changes and developments that power was to undergo.

This identification of the Beasts of the Book of Revelation with the Roman system is Scripturally indisputable against the background of Daniel's prophecy, and also in the characteristics revealed of those beasts themselves. But returning to Daniel's vision, note the duration of time that the Papal system would prevail against the Saints – right up to the time of its destruction: “the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them *until* the Ancient of days came ...”. In our day, before the coming of Christ, we would do well to ask how that Papal system – the Roman beast – is prevailing against the body of Christ. Not by open persecution, for those days are past. Rather, by more peaceable means; having failed to destroy the Holy Ones of Yahweh through persecution, the great system of False worship and blasphemy against the Most High has employed other, more effective means – through peaceful subversive teachings.

THE CATHOLIC ANSWER TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The English priest, E B Elliott, wrote, “The Futurist scheme was first, or nearly first, propounded about 1590 by the Jesuit Ribera, as *the fittest one whereby to turn aside the Protestant application of the Apocalyptic prophecy from the Church of Rome.*” Again, Professor TR Birks wrote of the consequence of Futurism: “The strongest bulwark against the revived zeal against the Romish Church will have been taken away when it is most needed; and the danger of a renewed apostasy will have been fearfully increased ... the light which the Word of God has thrown on half the whole period of the Church's history, will have been quenched in darkness.” (*First Elements of Sacred Prophecy,* 1843).

Historically, back in the ages when people were beginning to read the Bible for themselves, the Protestant movement that rejected much Papal dogma in favour of a smattering of Bible Truth, quickly identified the Papal system with the great system of blasphemy being depicted in the beasts of the Book of Revelation. This being the case, and being no longer able to suppress the availability of Scripture, there was a pressing need for the Church to produce an *alternative* explanation of those symbols of Scripture, to divert attention away from themselves. Accordingly, two interpretations emerged – both from the Catholic Church - the *Futurist*, and the *Preterist* positions. Futurism attempts to portray the prophecy as being all, or mostly in the future, whereas Preterism seeks to present it as being in the past, relating to the events of AD 70 and soon after. So it is, that by seeking to move the prophecy either backward, or forward in time, the Papists sought to remove any identification of themselves being spoken of there. However, there is something they evidently did not recognise. By attempting to shift the timeperiod to which the prophecy relates, rather than to give an alternative contemporary interpretation, the Catholic System itself gave testimony to the fact that it could find *no* contemporary system which could be identified with the beasts of Revelation – except itself.

THE ORIGINATORS OF FUTURISM AND PRETERISM

Francisco Ribera, a Jesuit and Doctor of Theology penned his Futurist interpretation in 1585, in which he postulated that the majority of the Book of Revelation was to do with a period of 3 ½ literal years immediately before the Return of Christ. He was closely followed by Cardinal Robert Bellamine, who also published a work between

1581 and 1593 following similar lines entitled *Polemic Lectures Concerning the Disputed Points of the Christian Belief Against the Heretics of This Time*. A little later, writing under the pen-name of Juan Josafa (Rabbi) Ben-Ezra to hide his Catholic identity (!), another Jesuit, Manuel De Lacunza published a book in London, Spain, Mexico, and Paris between 1811 and 1826, again advancing the cause of Futurism. When we consider the various interpretations around us therefore, we must bear in mind this fact - that the whole concept of the Book of Revelation speaking of a 3 ½ year period in the future originates not from the Scripture studies of Christ's brethren, but from within the very system of harlotry which the prophecy itself warns us about – and with the specific aim of removing that warning from it's pages.

The alternative interpretation, the *Preterist* teaching also originated within the Catholic System. This was first advanced by a Spanish Jesuit by the name of Luis De Alcazar (1554-1613) in his 900 page long *Investigation of the Hidden Sense of the Apocalypse*, which claimed that the whole prophecy spoke of Pagan Rome, and the first 600 years of 'Christianity', falsely so-called. This lay the precedent for future *Preterist* expositors to present other alternatives based on events long before the development of the Papal system.

The outcome of this, was that in their endeavour to remove any possibility of the Catholic System being identified with the great and terrible prophecies of Scripture, that system was advocating 2 contradictory, and mutually exclusive interpretations! The immense differences in each mattered little – what was important was to answer the Reformist identification of the Papacy in Revelation, by providing seemingly plausible alternatives.

Over 100 years ago, the Protestant writer Joseph Tanner spoke of this situation:

“towards the close of the century of the Reformation, two of her most learned doctors set themselves to the task, each endeavouring by different means to accomplish the same end, namely, that of diverting men's minds from perceiving the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Antichrist in the Papal system. The Jesuit Alcazar devoted himself to bring into prominence the *Preterist* method of interpretation, which we have already briefly noticed, and thus endeavouring to show that the prophecies of Antichrist were fulfilled before the Popes ever ruled in Rome, and therefore could not apply to the Papacy. On the other hand, the Jesuit Ribera tried to set aside the application of these prophecies to the Papal Power by bringing out the *Futurist* system, which asserts that these prophecies refer properly not to the career of the Papacy, but to that of some future supernatural individual, who is yet to appear, and to continue in power for three and a half years. Thus, as Alford says, the Jesuit Ribera, about AD 1580, may be regarded as the Founder of the *Futurist* system in modern times”
(*J Tanner, Daniel and the Revelation, 1898*).

And the Church of Rome has had considerable success in that regard. Far from identifying the Papacy with the Scripture prophecies which speak of it, modern Protestants of our day, such as Hal Lindsey and John Hagee, fully embrace these *Futurist* ideas, and are themselves promoting them. This dramatic U-Turn on the part

of that system which was once so antagonistic towards the Papal system is truly stunning, and is witness to the effectiveness of the Jesuits' attempt to silence it's critics. As Joseph Tanner wrote in the same work "It is a matter for deep regret that those who hold and advocate the Futurist system at the present day, Protestants as they are for the most part, are thus really playing into the hands of Rome, and helping to screen the Papacy from detection as the Antichrist. *It has been well said that 'Futurism tends to obliterate the brand put by the Holy Spirit upon Popery.'*"

But over the last forty years or so, we find that even some Christadelphians have been deceived by the Jesuit lie, by accepting and promulgating these same beliefs – which were originally designed to divert attention from the truth that the Church of Rome is condemned in the book of Revelation! And in teaching this Catholic doctrine – for that is what it is, both historically and literally – they are leading others astray. It is important for us to realise that the new ideas of prophecy currently being introduced in Christadelphian circles, are not new at all; they have been around for many years, and originate from the Catholic Church. Remember, it does matter that we have a correct understanding of the prophecy – it is Christ's last message to us. In it, the Lord himself tells us that in order to obtain eternal life, the believer must "overcome" (Rev 2:17, 21:7). But overcome what?

"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory **over the beast**, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God" (Rev 15:2).

We cannot gain "the victory over the beast," if we do not know who or what "the beast" actually is!

Scripture warns us that the beast-horn power will prevail against the saints until the coming of the Ancient of days – it will prevail against us, unless we prevail against it. And this is what we find, as Catholic dogmas become more and more readily accepted by Central Christadelphians, blinding many to the real identity of the Catholic Harlot, and how the Papal system really stands in relation to the Most High. John described the vision of the Age to come which was revealed to him: "I saw thrones, and they sat on them ... *which had not worshipped the beast* ... and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev 20:4). The Redeemed comprise those who are *Separate* from that system accursed by God, who do not worship, or give homage to it. How deeply disturbing it is then, to find brethren taking hold of the words and doctrines which emanate from the little horn's mouth, and using them to lead members of Christ's body away from a true understanding of what He has revealed!

Within Christadelphian circles, the Futurist doctrine varies slightly from author to author, but certain common points are usually found, and these are compared on the chart below with the traditional Christadelphian/Biblical approach. The main common points are that the Book of Revelation will not be fulfilled until "The Last Days" (a phrase not actually found in the book itself), and that is a literal period of 3 ½ years. That there will arise a man whom they call "the anti-Christ" who will become

THE FICTITIOUS ANTICHRIST OF FUTURISM	THE TRUE ANTICHRIST (CHRISTADELPHIAN/BIBLE TEACHING)	EVIDENCE
Will be in the “last days” – 3 ½ years only	Will be/is throughout history since Apostolic times	2 Thes. 2, Rev. 1:3
Will probably be a Jew, or even a Christadelphian	Is Roman Catholicism	Rev. 13:18; Rev. 17:18
Reigns in Jerusalem	Son of God reigns in Jerusalem	Isa. 2, Lu. 1:32-35
Uses Satanic power and deceives all by ‘wonders’	Divine Power manifested through Jesus Anointed	Isa. 11:4, Psa. 2:2
Claims to be Messiah	The Lord Jesus Christ <i>is</i> the Messiah	Rom. 11:26
Makes a covenant with Israel	Jesus makes a New Covenant with Israel	Jer. 31:31, Hos. 2:18, 3:5, Rom. 11:27
Majority worship The Beast	Jesus destroys false worship	Zech. 13:1-2
Builds a literal temple in Jerusalem	Greater Son of David builds Temple	Eze. 40-48, Zech. 6:12-13
Wars to conquer the nations	Jerusalem – word capital of Christ’s Empire	Isa 2:3; Mic 4:2
Is destroyed by Christ	Jesus destroys Rome’s False Prophet and political power	Rev. 19:11-15

the leader of the Jewish people, build a temple at Jerusalem, and set about obtaining world dominion. The exact identity of this person varies, some claiming him to be a Jew, another postulating he might even be a Christadelphian! Other frequent ideas found in these interpretations, is the identification of “the great city” of Revelation 17:18 with Jerusalem, and that there will be a final battle, during which this man “anti-Christ” will be destroyed, and replaced as Ruler in Jerusalem by the Lord Jesus Christ.

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK

Each of these notions however, contradict what the Bible itself teaches, although some, such as the last, also contain an element of truth. We have already shown how the prophecy of Daniel lays a strong foundation for a correct understanding of the Book of Revelation. And this is a consistent weakness which runs throughout all of the Futurist books which Catholic-influenced Christadelphian writers have produced – they all fail to adequately explain, or even accommodate the obvious connection between Daniel and Revelation. To allow the Bible to truly speak for itself, is to recognise this Old Testament background, recognise that it is the same Beast being spoken of in Revelation, as in Daniel 7, and heed the warnings that Scripture gives us about it.

For many, the debates about which interpretation – if any – they should follow, appear confusing and perplexing. They may feel the book itself to be too hard for them to understand. That the symbols and signs used take too much hard study to unravel them – and if those for whom we have much respect argue amongst themselves about it – how can we hope to understand?

A “REVELATION”, NOT AN OBSCURATION

But let us not forget that to his servants, the book is intended as a *Revelation* from our Lord, not an obscuration. The word “revelation” itself is translated from the Greek *apokalupsis*, which signifies *an uncovering*. This in itself is truly revealing about the character of the book; rather than to obscure, or hide things from us, the purpose of it’s Symbols is quite the opposite – it is to *reveal* to the seeker certain things the Master would have them know. But why use symbols? Surely it would be easier to use plain speech? This, however, would remove an important function of the symbols. The book was not given to reveal all things to all men. Rather, it is “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto *his servants* things which must shortly come to pass” (Rev 1:1). The book is written for the benefit of Christ’s servants alone, not for the benighted clerics who speak against the Truth. That being so, the symbols have a dual function – to hide the meaning from those to whom the things are not given, yet to reveal certain happenings in world events to those with ears to hear. Similarly, the Master explained why he spake in parables: “because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given ... therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Mat 13:11-13).

This in itself is further evidence that the clerics of Rome just can’t understand the book. They are not the servants of Jesus Christ, for they reject his word, and despise his true servants, having persecuted them down the ages. Therefore, they cannot perceive the things pertaining to the Revelation of Jesus Christ; they are instead blinded to them. Why then, should brethren heed their unenlightened postulations? Why give ear to the interpretations of that system which slaughtered the Saints of the Most High, and would yet still, if they had the power so to do? Yet this is what we find happening around us, as the infiltration of Jesuitical ideas into the brotherhood blinds the senses of those who should know better, luring them to adopt and teach a position on Prophecy that removes from the Spirit’s words the very warnings they were designed to give.

THE PROPHETIC TIME-PERIOD

The Apostle John was informed that the prophecy contained “things which must *shortly* come to pass” (Rev 1:1). This suggests that we need to begin with the time “shortly” after the prophecy was given in looking for the fulfilment. Again, this is reinforced by some of the details which were revealed, relating to the beasts which we have already briefly considered. Speaking of the “scarlet coloured beast” with 7 heads, ridden by “the mother of harlots”, the Spirit identifies the system represented by that beast, and what is represented by it’s heads: “here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are *seven mountains*, on which the woman sitteth. And there are *seven kings*: five are fallen, and one is; the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he

must continue a short space” (Rev 17:9,10). The heads then, speak of 2 things; they are representative upon 7 mountains upon which the Harlot’s seat is to be found; and also seven “kings”, or types of Kingship, (taking a “king” to be representative of a system rather than one man – like, for example, the “man of sin” (2 Thes 2:3) and “The False Prophet” (Rev 16:13), and even the woman in this chapter. None of these are single people, but *systems*).

From the background of Daniel, we have already established that the Beast is a Roman political animal. So how does the prophecy fit the circumstances of the Roman system? Rome itself is well-known to be founded upon 7 hills, or mountains. And of the 7 kingly heads? 5 of those heads had “fallen”, one was presently extant, and one was to come. John therefore, must have lived under the 6th head – the one which “is”. And history records how that there were 7 forms of Roman Government - and John lived under the 6th, the Imperial Head. So it is that the “fit” proves the validity of the interpretation, and also provides further confirmation that the Book of Revelation pertains to the period from John’s own day onward.

By contrast, one popular Futurist teaching is that the 7 mountains, or hills referred to, speak of 7 mountains upon which Jerusalem is allegedly built; and that therefore she is the city being referred to (even though in scriptural terms Jerusalem is *surrounded* by mountains (Ps 125:2) not built upon them). But as we said earlier, this position does not explain the clear allusions between the Book of Revelation and Daniel’s 4th beast – Jerusalem just does not fit those links. Further, Bro Roberts easily dismissed that notion, by pointing out that Revelation 18:20 speaks of the Apostles having been killed in that City. Not within Jerusalem – but certainly within the precincts of Rome, whose boundaries equalled those of the Empire.

FURTHER LINKS WITH ROME

The links with Rome are clear and unmistakable. The woman of chapter 17 has her description written in her forehead: “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev 17:5-6). So, she is a harlot, or prostitute. Such an abominable woman in Scripture speaks of a virgin who has defiled herself; a corrupt religious system, not having kept herself pure and chaste to her husband to be, but having prostituted herself in his absence (cp 2 Cor 11:2, Rev 2:20).

This false religious system is the *mother* of other such systems, and is found seated upon 7 mountains, according to the terms of the prophecy. What system other than Rome meets this description? The Council of Trent, meeting in 1563 proclaimed “The Roman Church is the *mother and mistress* of all churches” - which claim was only recently confirmed by the Vatican in it’s *Declaration Dominus Iesus* issued on 5th September 2000, stating the Catholic Church to be “the mother” of all Christian denominations, and not a “sister“. Truly by her own admission, the Romish Church is not a “chaste virgin”, but a “mother and *mistress*”, the mother of harlots, whose seat of authority is located upon the 7 hills of Rome – the ancient home of the persecutory power of Daniel, drunk with the blood of our brethren and sisters. It’s identification

with the *Babylon* of old is certain (note the mouth of a *lion* (13:2, Dan 7:4). See also *The Two Babylons* by Alexander Hislop), and the warnings of Scripture regarding it, are equally plain.

Scripture indicates that this latter-day Roman power, whilst being “drunk” with the blood of past persecutions, will also prevail against the saints until it’s destruction at the hands of the Ancient of Days. And that is just what we find, as the mouth of the little horn power is today prevailing against those who should know better, with it’s Futurist and Preterist teachings becoming more and more accepted - even being openly taught without hindrance by prominent members!

And we saw in the words of history, that the very purpose of those teachings, was specifically to remove the warning of Scripture against the Catholic system. And having no warning, many are caught unawares! In this regard also, the voice of the Papal horn prevails amongst some, as the enmity which once existed between the faithful virgin, and the harlot mother is rapidly disappearing. There are those who openly claim that Christadelphians should be part of the Papal led Ecumenical movement. Others promote the attendance of multi-denominational gatherings - a contemporary pseudo Christadelphian magazine recently reported and approved such a visit. And the Churches generally, rather than to be viewed as the harlot-daughters which the Book of Revelation shows them to be, are seen as other Christians who have chosen a “different spiritual pathway”. The inroads of Romish philosophy therefore appears to be shaking the faith of not a few, by inducing them to believe that the Papacy is not really as bad as the Lord Jesus makes out!

AN EXAMPLE OF SEPARATION

Having seen the Old Testament background of Daniel, we turn finally to the example of *separation* given there. Chapter 3 recounts how Nebuchadnezzar, king of the original “Babylon the Great” sought to bring all the peoples and nations of his realm together in a united form of worship – of his own devising. He gave the command for all to bow down and worship the image which he had set up, with the punishment of being burned alive (a method adopted later by the Papacy), for any who refused to obey. Here then, we see the prototype of the modern Ecumenical movement; all nations and peoples united in the worship of a single god. Notice however, Nebuchadnezzar did not call upon the people to forsake their own beliefs and idols - he did not directly challenge their religion in this way; rather he sought to make them worship at his Image *as well*. And how much like today that is! Mutual toleration for one another’s beliefs is one of the fundamental principles of Ecumenicalism; yet with the underlying aim of bringing all in subjection to the Pope as head.

3 men only refused to worship on that day; Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. “These men have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan 3:12), so the king was told. We know the story; those three men were miraculously delivered from the fiery furnace by Yahweh, the God of Israel. They rejected the call for unity in worship, because it involved compromising their worship of the Most High. But what of ourselves? Do we worship at the Papal Image? (Rev 13:15). The issues are not as clear cut in our day, because

the sight of many has been obscured by the thick clouds of Futurism to the Bible's warnings – yet they are just as real, even if the threat of being burned alive has passed. Those who join with all the other “kindreds, tongues, and nations”, in accepting Papal superstitions into their worship, are those “whose names are not written in the book of life” (Rev 13:8). But for the faithful minority, who “read”, “hear”, and “keep” the sayings of this book, a glorious blessing is promised. Blessings and cursings are placed before us, but which shall we finally be given? The choice is ours, for the result is based on how we approach this last message of our Master.

Christopher Maddocks

Jacob and the Angels

Our readings over the last few days have brought us to consider aspects of Angelic ministration both in Genesis and the Psalms, and in the New Testament. It is one of those happy coincidences that in our recent readings, there has been this common theme. Indeed, yesterday's reading states that:

“The angel of Yahweh encampeth round about them that fear him and delivereth them” (Psa. 34:7).

Although this Psalm is attributed to David, and describes certain particulars regarding his experiences, there is also a background in the life of Jacob. So we read:

“the angel which redeemed me from all evil bless the lads, and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and let them grow to be a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Gen. 48:16),

Here this verse matches Psalm 34: the Angel delivering the faithful from evil. Indeed the life of Jacob in relation to the Angelic Hand in his life is most instructive for us to consider – and this is what we shall endeavour to do by way of exhortation for today.

Genesis chapter 28 describes the circumstances regarding Jacob's journey to Padan-Aram to obtain a wife, and Isaac's blessing upon him:

“God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people: and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee ...” (Gen. 28:3-4).

Interestingly, the word for “multitude” of people is used again in Psalm 22, a prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ: “I will declare thy Name unto my brethren: in the midst of the **congregation** I will praise thee” (Psa 22:22). And this verse is in turn cited in Hebrews 2:12: “... I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the **church** will I sing praise unto thee”. The word for “church” here is “ecclesia”, which signifies those who have been called out as an assembly, to become a special people in the sight of God.

What this establishes, is that when Jacob was saying that his son Isaac would be “a multitude of people”, he used the equivalent Hebrew word for the Greek, “ecclesia”! Isaac was the child of promise, and it is through him that the Ecclesia of Christ would come! The ecclesia consists of those who embrace the Hope of Israel, and who are also children of promise – as a consideration of Romans chapter 9 confirms.

The Genesis account continues to record how on his journey, Jacob was shown a vision of the Angelic ministers:

“and he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached unto heaven: and behold, the Angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Gen. 28:12).

This vision confirmed that the Angels were to be with Jacob, but the way in which this would be so, is most interesting. The description echoes and contrasts with the language of the tower built at Babel: “let us build us a city and a tower, *whose top may reach unto heaven*: and let us make us a name ...” (Gen. 11:4). Their intent was thwarted by God confounding their languages and scattering them away from that place. But here, Jacob sees a means of access to heaven which was denied the builders of Babel. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ quotes from this vision, and applies it’s principles to himself:

“... verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, *and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man*” (Jno. 1:51).

The Lord Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and man: the means of access to heaven, and the means by which the Angels minister to his brethren: “... I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jno. 14:6).

The Angels in Jacob’s dream travelled to heaven and back, illustrating the constant communication they have with Yahweh in heaven. Indeed, the Lord draws an exhortational point from this principle: “take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, That in heaven, their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 18:10). Here is the point: would we want the Angels to communicate a bad report before the Father in heaven, because we despised one of his little ones?

After Jacob had obtained his wives - and a considerable degree of wealth - the Angel of God revealed himself again to him, and commanded him to return home: “... now arise, and get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred” (Gen. 31: see verses 11-13). Genesis chapter 32 then recounts how “Jacob went his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God’s host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim” (Gen. 32:1-2). Mahanaim means “two camps”, and evidently refers to both his, and the Angelic encampment. Indeed, this is the principle of Psalm 34:7, “the angel of Yahweh *encampeth* round about them that fear him, and delivereth them”. The appearance of the Angels to Jacob should have given him great encouragement, for he had been afraid of how his brother Esau would receive him. Yet something else was necessary for him to no longer trust

in his own strength or ingenuity but rather take courage in the Hand of the Almighty, and that is recorded in the next chapter.

Genesis 32 describes the preparations that Jacob made to meet his brother. He divided his own camp into two groups, being “greatly afraid and distressed” (Gen. 32:7), saying: “if Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape” (vs 8). He made all the provisions that were humanly possible, and prayed to the God of his fathers for deliverance (vs. 9-12). Having done all, he was left alone. But an angel came to him (vs. 24), and wrestled with Jacob – something which was the subject of a later prophecy of Hosea, speaking of Jacob:

“He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he had power with God. Yea, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Beth-el, and there he spake with us” (Hos. 12:3-4).

This reference in Hosea is most interesting: it states that “he had power over the Angel and prevailed”, yet the Genesis account describes the Angel as winning the wrestling match. The Angel obviously had much more strength than Jacob had: he had Divine strength, and was able to dislocate his thigh with a single touch. But still, Jacob would not let go of the Angel: “he said I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26), and a blessing was duly given.

In these events, we do not see a fight between two opponents seeking to beat each other up! Rather, it was a test for Jacob – how strong would he be in seeking Divine blessing? Despite the pain of his dislocated thigh, Jacob refused to let go, until the blessing was given. He wanted to retain a hold of Divine things, as it were, and it was so. The wrestling ended with a blessing being conferred – yet Jacob’s thigh was still out of joint. He would not have physically been able to confront Esau in his disabled condition – all he could now do, was to trust in the Angel’s blessing, and that the Divine Camp would operate on his behalf, ensuring that peace would ensue between him and his brother Esau. Hence, in Genesis 48, he describes “the Angel that redeemed me from all evil” (vs 16). Now he recognised the Divine Hand in his life: Now he recognised that the blessings that came his way were not of his own endeavours, but rather it was the extension of Divine Favour towards him.

Having considered the Angelic ministers in the life of Jacob, we find principles for our learning, that we can trust in the power of our God to deliver us out of all adversity. But notice that the Angel did not prevent adversity to come upon Jacob. The promise of Psalm 34 is not that the Angel will prevent difficult circumstances – it is rather that when those times come, the Angel will “deliver” us out of them. It is written that: “there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13). And we suggest, it is the Angel that makes that way to escape! That promised “way” is not always easy, and it might even lead us down a path that we ordinarily would avoid – but so long as we remain on that narrow way that brings us to life, we will be led through the obstacles in the way, to inherit the glory given to those who comprise the true “Israel

of God". Jacob, also named Israel, experienced this throughout his life, yet concluded his days by recognising the Divine hand which shaped and guided his life.

Returning to Psalm 34, we bring our minds to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. Whilst (as cited above) it describes Angelic ministrations and deliverance; it also describes suffering to be experienced by those who fear Yahweh: "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but Yahweh delivereth him out of them all. He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken" (Psa. 34:19-20). And this, we are informed, was a prophecy of Jesus: "... these things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken" (Jno. 19:36). Whilst the Psalm expresses a general truth regarding the experiences of the faithful, it has a specific bearing on the Son of Man who laid down his life for his friends.

The Lord himself required and benefitted from Angelic hands. At the garden of Gethsemane, when he resigned himself to the doing of his Father's Will, "there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him" (Lu. 22:43). Indeed, prior to this at the beginning of his ministry when tempted in the wilderness, we find that "then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him" (Mat. 4:11). So, his ministry began and ended with Angels being in attendance.

At the climax of his suffering upon the cross, the Lord could have called upon 12 legions of Angels to take him down (Mat. 26:53), yet he remained obedient to the doing of the Will of God.

Then we find the Angels again at the time of his resurrection: "... behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came, and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" (Mat. 28:2-3).

Again, at the time of his ascension to heaven, there were two angels; so it is said of the disciples: "while they looked steadfastly toward heaven, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10-11). At each stage of Messiah's ministry, there was Angelic involvement, ensuring that the Divine Will was carried out.

To summarise the things that we have considered: we have seen the importance of trusting in the Angels of God: but we also find that difficulties will come. We think of the life of Jacob: He was brought face to face with his Angel, and we consider how difficulties came upon him. The Angel didn't stop them from coming but ultimately made a way of escape. And we think of the Lord Jesus Christ: "great are the afflictions of the righteous". The Lord Jesus was brought through death to be redeemed out of it. Those who would follow Christ, therefore, must look to these things as examples for themselves, that they might hold on to the things of the truth: the things of the Spirit. And then they will receive the promised blessing, and be confessed by their Lord in the presence of the Angels of God (Lu. 12:8, Rev. 3:5).

Christopher Maddocks

Observations on the Parable of the Sower

Peter, you remember, has said, “Desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby.” This we have learnt to do. Nothing short of the undiluted Bible will make us grow. Our system of daily reading enables us to get the full benefit and to realise the apostolic precept in the most effectual manner. Under this system, many, many features of the divine thought are brought under our notice that we should never notice, or noticing once, forget. Every time we read, we get something fresh— something we had not seen just in the same vivid light before; and when the “every time” is every day, we slowly get enriched in a way not possible with those who only look into the Bible occasionally.

This morning, we have a message through Ezekiel which, though not addressed directly to us, has a bearing on our position, from which we may take comfort. I refer to what we find in chap. 12. verse 22-23: “Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying. The days are prolonged and every vision faileth? Tell them, therefore, thus saith the Lord God, I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel, but say unto them, the days are at hand and the effect of every vision.” It is worthwhile considering how the proverb thus rebuked, originated, and what was its precise meaning. That it had reference to the visions of Ezekiel, as well as to the prophets that had gone before him, is evident from verse 27: “Son of man, behold they of the house of Israel say, the vision that he seeth is for many days to come, and he prophesieth of the times that are far off.”

Now the visions that Ezekiel saw (as regards the bulk of them) were visions of “lamentations, mourning, and woe.” This very chapter illustrates their leading character: e.g., verse 15, 20, “I will scatter them among the nations, and disperse them in the countries . . . and the cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be desolate.” All the prophets had prophesied like this. All of them foretold calamity for the people of the land, and they had done so for many years, without the calamity coming; and the result was that the people in general became sceptical about it. Because it had not come, they thought it would not come. Their scepticism took the form of a proverb, which got into circulation, and which here receives notice and rebuke at God’s hands. “The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth.” But the time, in Ezekiel’s days, were close at hand, and here Jehovah says to them: “In your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it.” “There shall none of my words be prolonged any more” (verses 25, 28). And so it came to pass. Nebuchadnezzar invaded the land, and emptied the cities of their inhabitants, and laid Jerusalem in ashes. As we contemplate the condition of Israel and their land for the last 1800 years, we are able to realise that the word of God, however it may appear at any time to be deferred, will at last come to pass, and the flippant unbelief of a heedless generation be put to silence in the grave.

There is a parallel to these things in our days. For a long time, the proclamation of the same sure word has rung in the ears of men, “The coming of the Lord draweth nigh,” and because the time has gone on without yet bringing the Lord, the subject has become a scorn with the majority of civilised mankind. The disappointment of prophetic expectations has, in fact, become proverbial. The fact has passed into a

proverb, with the implication accompanying, that because the Lord has not yet come, he will never come, or, at least, “not in your day nor in mine,” as they say, by which they mean not for thousands of years yet, if he ever comes at all. “The days are prolonged and every vision faileth.” It is exactly the proverb they had in the land of Israel—exactly the proverb which events confuted and confounded in a terrible manner in Ezekiel’s days, and which will be confuted and confounded in a similar manner concerning the subject of Christ’s coming.

The proverb is more unreasonable in our day than in Ezekiel’s. There are signs and tokens in our day which were lacking then. During the past forty years nearly, a great variety of prophetic anticipations have been realised, bringing a guarantee of the sureness of the prophetic word which did not exist in connection with the predicted overthrow of Israel. From the outbreak of a European revolution, in 1848, to the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, and the commencement of the Jewish colonisation of Palestine (on however small a scale), there has been an unbroken series of signs of the Lord’s approach, and about which there can be no doubt, because all of them have been anticipated on the strength of the prophetic words. The only point of failure has been as to the place in the programme at which the Lord’s appearing would occur, and this is a failure not of the prophetic world but of human estimate of probability. It seemed likely that the ending of Papal coercive power would be the time for the Lord to appear. The ending of the Papal coercive power came at the expected time, but not the Lord, and because of this, the thoughtless cry “failure.” Perhaps this failure was divinely permitted (i.e., the mistaken expectation allowed to be entertained) to try the faithful, and give the other class the pretext for going away. True failure there has not been; on the contrary, prophetic expectations that were truly warranted have in all particulars been realised in a very wonderful manner.

Dear brethren and sisters, the word of the Lord standeth sure. Onward the divine programme will go till the very consummation itself is reached, in the glorious event to which this ordinance of the breaking of bread has been pointing for the last eighteen centuries—the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ in power and great glory. This event may take place any day, and the days may yet be prolonged, though the vision cannot fail. The all-important question for each of us is, in what attitude ought that event to find us so that we may find favour of the Lord in that day? On this question we have light thrown by the portion read from Luke this morning. I refer to the parable of the sower. We are all acquainted with the features of this parable uttered by the Lord. A sower scatters seed-grain in the field, which, being a Syrian field, is not ploughed all over as in western agriculture, but is merely scratched, and consequently has a very diversified character of surface—strong wayside places, thistly places, rocky spots, and bits of good ground in right condition. The seed falls into these various sorts of ground, and produces various results accordingly. From the hard places it is picked off by the birds; in the shallow places, it grows to wither in the sun; in the thorny places, it is choked by the growth of weeds; in the good places, it grows to maturity, and gives a liberal return.

In the application, we need make no mistakes, because the Lord has plainly indicated it. In the first place, the seed is the word of God—the word or gospel of the kingdom, as He explains. It is not human tradition, or theological sensationalism. It is not

dreams, vagaries, or imaginations. It is God's own word, as we have it in the writings of the apostles and prophets—alias the Bible. In the goodness of God, we have become the subjects of this word; we have been delivered from the nightmare world of imagination that exists around us in Christendom. The word itself has been sown in our hearts. The question is, as to the results. There were four results in the parable, and only one of them effectual. To which do we wish to belong? Let us look at them one by one.

“Those by the wayside are they that hear: then cometh the devil and taketh away the words out of their hearts.” The people in question get the word into their hearts at the start, or it could not be taken away. Let us measure ourselves by the case. We have got the word into our hearts. Good: but that is no guarantee it will remain. The devil may take it away. Who the devil is, I will not stay to argue. We all know it is not the supernatural devil of clerical theology. We all know it is a devil that takes various shapes, but in every shape, is human nature in some attitude of antagonism to divine ways. The old man within is one shape of the devil—the natural man “who is corrupt according to deceitful lusts.” He may take away the word: he may whisper “It won't do: it will injure your standing: it will bar your way: it will cut you off from lively friends and pleasures; it will spoil your life.” Resist these suggestions if you wish the seed to remain and bring forth fruit. Or the devil may take an outside shape. It may be a friend; it may even be a man called a brother. There are devils in the camp as there have ever been, even in the small camp of twelve. We have to try the spirits whether they are of God. The devil in this shape will tell you that you need not take it in such terrible earnest: that there may be such a thing as salvation and there may not: that if there is, it is easy to get: that you need not put yourself very much about: that you should, at all events, look after the main chance, and not be too strait-laced; “don't make a nuisance “of yourselves; enjoy yourselves while you “may, and let others enjoy you; there “are lots of fine people in the world, and “plenty of good entertainment if you don't “unfit yourself for it by righteousness over- “much.”

Brethren, this devil is dangerous, because he presents himself as an angel of light. It will be easy for you to say to him that his talk does not at all resemble the talk of Christ and his apostles; that the effect of his philosophy would be to take you away from Christ, and put you in the company of sinners which you desire by Christ's command to avoid; that in a word, he is pecking at the seed sown in your heart, and that you will have nothing to do with him. Of course, the devil may come to you in his own native hues—the out and out antagonist of the word of wisdom, though your friend, perhaps. He will ply you with various arguments against what will seem to him the unwisdom of staking your all upon a possible misadventure. He may even go further, and maintain that the whole affair of the gospel is an effete and mistaken thing, with which it is a mistake for any liberal-minded, educated man to have anything, to do. You will not be in much danger from this gentleman. He sets himself too directly in opposition to palpable truth. You will quickly dispose of him with a decisive “Get thee behind me, Satan.”

The second class are they “who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, and these have no root, which for a while believe and in time of temptation fall away.” Here is something for our attentive consideration. We may succeed in warding off the

seedpicking raids of the devil, and fail for want of root to the seed retained. We have received the word with joy: how do we stand the times of temptation? This is a question of root. If we are rooted and grounded in the faith, we shall hold fast in the toughest trial. To be rooted and grounded in the faith, is to have the faith rooted and grounded in you. You say, perhaps feeling the roots are rather slim in your case, "Happy are they who have the faith strongly rooted in them." True; but what do you mean? "We mean what we say," answer you. Yes; but let us look under your meaning. You think this rooting to be an affair of natural constitution, and that, if you haven't got strong roots, you cannot help it. Now you are not altogether correct there. Christ's parables are uttered for instruction, and it would be no benefit to teach fatalism which Jesus never did. No; if the seed is not rooted, it is because you have not rooted it. Two men might each have a garden plot of equal quality, and sow it with the same seed. But suppose the one dug it up and manured his ground, and was careful to keep it in right condition while the seed was growing; and the other did not take these measures, but merely cast the seed on the unbroken ground, and left it to take care of itself. The seed would take and have root in the one case, and very slight root in the other. So it is with the seed of the word. The seed will take root if you adopt the means, which mainly consist of two things: (1) the daily study of the word with prayer, and the use of all helps in that direction, as regards meetings, companions, books &c., and (2), the avoidance of everything that will check the growth of the seed, such as worldly pleasures, sinful companions, flesh-pleasing and foolish literature, such as novels, comic publications. By such means the seed will take root, and in time of temptation, it will be there to withstand all assault.

The third class is an easily recognisable class, and one in which it is very easy to be included. "They who fell among thorns are they who when they have heard, go forth and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life and bring NO FRUIT TO PERFECTION." Surely dear brethren and sisters, none of us wish to be included in this class, and yet how liable we are to fall into it. How much all of us know of "cares"—few of "riches"—perhaps some of "pleasures." These are the thorns. We must keep our eye on them. Pluck them up in every possible case. Whatever happens, we must not let the word be choked in our hearts. It is here where Christ's exhortation applies with especial force. "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off; if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out." There are many things that people do and enjoy, to their own hurt, in this matter. The wisdom of the cutting off will be very manifest to them in the day of the Lord, if not before. It will be too late to pluck up the thorns when the day comes to inspect the garden. If the king's plants lie all sickly and stunted and dying, and the devil's thistles are flourishing in a vigorous and umbrageous development, we may be quite sure there will be no prize awarded for such horticulture. Practically, it means this: while giving ourselves to the word of God and prayer let us, having food and raiment, be content, and decline all temporal aims and enterprises that would only mean an increase of "cares and riches and pleasures" which choke the word.

We may then hope to belong to the fourth class—the seed that fell on the good ground—being "they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, kept it, and bring forth fruit with patience." The fruit consists of those things that men do from the conviction of the truth. This fruit will come where conviction is at work, and conviction will remain and acquire increasing strength from the keeping of the word

in the heart by the daily reading and meditation thereon, and a patient continuance in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. In such a state of things, there will be a fruitfulness, "some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, and some an hundred-fold," according to the nature of the good soil, in which there are differences of natural fertility. This fruitfulness is not a question of the absolute size of what a man does, but the proportion it bears to what he can do and ought to do. The Lord settles this in the case of the widow's mite, which was small in itself, but very large in relation to the widow's ability. With fruitfulness of this sort, the Lord has declared he will be well pleased, and will accept, and seal, and reward the same in the bestowal of the inconceivably larger stewardship of the kingdom of God.

It is clear, then, what the attitude is in which the Lord should find us, in the fast approaching day of His appearing. He should find us in the attitude of faithful servants: much interested in Him; much given to the promotion of His affairs: much addicted to the word and to prayer: much controlled by His commandments: and much abstinent from the friendships and riches and pleasures of this life, which choke the word, and make it unfruitful. If, in this attitude, there is much crucifixion of the flesh, much carrying of the cross, much denial of self, there is also much of the answer of a good conscience, much peace and joy in the Lord, and much unspeakable promise for the day that must come, when every man must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and receive, in body, according to what he hath done—good or bad.

*Robert Roberts,
The Christadelphian, 1883 page 492–496.*

Colossians – An Exhortation for Unity in Love (11)

COMMUNICATIONS OF FELLOWSHIP

In our considerations over the last year or so, we have examined in some detail but a few of the many wonderful themes, Old Testament allusions, and practical teachings of this Epistle. But as our title implies, each of our studies has sought to focus upon the central message of the Epistle – that the hearers thereof might become united in love, as a single conglomerate Body with the Lord Jesus Himself as the Head. And we saw that this love is no mere shallow sentiment such as that which exists in the world, rather the inevitable effect upon believers of a mutual understanding and appreciation of the Divine Wisdom revealed in the Word.

Here then, is the central exhortation, as expressed in the words of Paul's prayer for the believers: "that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ" (Col 2:2). Being united together in a "full assurance of understanding", true brethren in Christ experience a joyous fellowship which greatly surpasses any friendship the world can offer. For the unity of the believers ought to mirror in measure, that perfect unity subsisting between the Father and Son. Thus the Lord prayed: "keep through thine own name those whom

thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are ... neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us ... and the glory which thou hast given me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (Jno 17:11,21,22).

Being risen with Christ in the baptismal waters of a typical grave (Col 3:1), this is a powerful influence which irresistibly draws brethren together, irrespective of their personal differences. By contrast to the morass of humanity who seek only their own, whose only desire is to satisfy the grovelling instincts of the flesh, Christ's brethren have no regard for the temporal advantages of this life. Rather, being One with him, and in him, they seek to set their affections "on things above, not on things on the earth", (Col 3:2), for 'above' is where their Master is, and is therefore where their hope of life is hid (3:3). They are elements of a New Creation (cp 2 Cor 5:17), formed in the image and likeness of their maker (Col 3:10) - the constituent parts of a "new man" (Col 3:10), formed by the living influence of the Word upon the tables of their heart. And as a new man - complete in Christ, having no need of further addition by way of the traditions of men and the Judaising influence of those who would have them believe in "another gospel" - they stand whole, with mutual regard one for the other, "forbearing one another, and forgiving one another" (Col 3:13), even as Christ forgave them.

THE UNITY OF BELIEVERS – EXPRESSED IN WORDS

So it is that the central theme of this Epistle is that of the Unity of believers in Christ. And this theme continues through to our concluding section, from verse 2 of Chapter 4, to verse 18. Here, whereas the previous chapters spoke of matters of behaviour, and attitude; this section deals with words. For not only must the Spirit of Christ be seen in all our actions; our conversation also must be reflective of the One who always spoke his Father's Word. And this is seen in 3 ways – words of Prayer (4:2-3), Proclamation (4:3-6) and Care for fellow believers (4:7-18).

That which ought to come first and foremost in the utterances of the Saints, is the offering of Prayer to the Father: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds" (4:2,3). The saints at Colosse were to pray –but not simply a 'shopping list' of repeated requests, rather a watchful, thoughtful petition that the Father would be with the Apostle's preaching, opening a door of opportunity for him that the work might continue.

And in this, we are given a significant insight into the mind of the Apostle. Bound in prison, in threat of his life, in dire circumstances; his overriding concern was not for himself, and for the severe discomfort he was enduring. It was for the fact that whilst he was in chains, he was unable to preach the Gospel to the dying sinners around him. That "the mystery of Christ" was not being "made manifest" by him, as he had been Divinely Commissioned to do. Thus, the primary – and indeed only – thing he besought the brethren to pray for, was that he might have such opportunity presented to him, even in such dire circumstances when preaching the Word may well be farthest from the minds of many hirelings who place present advantage over future gain.

The Apostle besought the brethren to pray for "a door of utterance". Indeed, he had been granted such a "door" several times previous to this. At Ephesus (1Cor 16:8,9 and Troas (2 Cor 2:12), so he informed the Corinthians, "a door was opened unto me of the Lord". Here, a 'door' being an entrance or means of passing from one arena to another, the expression is used to denote the manner in which words might have opportunity to pass from Paul to the hearts of the hearers. Being alone, as when he was imprisoned at Rome, there was no-one to hear – the door was either closed, or was not even present at all. So, the 'doors of his lips' (cp Ps 141:3) were not permitted to allow the Gospel message to pass through them. But when it so fitted the Purpose of the Deity, opportunity was given; a 'door' was opened that Paul, and the message he bore, could enter beyond it, that the words of Life might not be bound.

And that the prayers of the brethren were indeed heard is evident from Paul's Epistle to the Philippians, for there he speaks of how his deliverance into Caesar's palace was beneficial for "the furtherance of the Gospel"(Phil 1:12,13). And again, he refers to those who had received the word, upon the opening of the door of opportunity for it's utterance: "all the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household" (Phil 4:22). So it was, even within the sufferings of imprisonment, the Gospel was preached – and received.

THE CARE OF THE SAINTS

One of the striking features of our fellowship is the mutual interest which brethren and sisters have in one another's affairs. It is one of our communal tendencies, to want to know; and to seek after the wellbeing of those of like precious faith. And whilst the men of the flesh abuse this Scriptural, just disposition of mutual concern, debasing it into merely a desire to hear snippets of gossip and scandal; the true man of the Spirit will always seek after his brethren's well-being. The case of Paul is testimony to this: "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts; With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here" (Col 4:7-9). Here is found the expression of true carefulness in fellowship. Not a cold state of detachment from others, but a warm and living relationship – a desire to know one another's affairs, to help, encourage and pray for one another.

And in keeping with this spirit, the final words expressed in this epistle, are Salutatory greetings from brethren to those to whom Paul was writing. Aristarchus, Marcus, Jesus which was called Justus, Epaphras, Luke, Demas, and Paul himself sent their fraternal greetings to their brethren in a far off country – a token of their fraternal love, and sense of unity as a Divine Family, organised under Christ as Head. In some cases, they may have been those of like precious faith whom they had never met or seen, yet the bonds of true fellowship is not bounded by familiarity or geographical location. And this is the central, and powerful exhortation which runs through all we have meditated on in this series – that brethren of the Lord Jesus must strive to be united in fraternal love.

(CONCLUDED)

Christopher Maddocks

Being Ready to Depart

Matthew chapter 19 records the promise made to those who forsake the affairs of this life, for Christ's sake:

“... and every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life ...” (Mat. 19:29).

It is sometimes necessary to end our former associations for the Lord's sake, especially if they are unbelieving, belligerent, and pose a hindrance to our walk in Christ. The middle portion of today's readings describes those who would separate themselves to become part of the Bride of Christ:

“Hearken, O Daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him” (Psa. 45:10-11).

The allusion would appear to be from Genesis chapter 2:

“... therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh ...” (Gen. 2:24).

Although the reference here is directly to the man, it is evident (as we shall demonstrate) that the same principles apply to the woman also: both leave their natural families, and become joined together as one. We have many instances of this in Scripture, and we shall consider some of them by way of exhortation today.

REBEKAH

The record of Genesis 24 recounts the sending of Abraham's servant, to find a wife for his son Isaac, from his natural relatives in Mesopotamia. Abraham commanded his servant regarding the Divine supervision that he trusted in:

“he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again” (Gen. 24:7-8).

There were two factors involved with Isaac's prospective wife: 1. The Angel would arrange circumstances that would lead to a spouse being obtained, and 2. The woman had to be willing to leave her family, and go to be Isaac's wife. In the event, Rebekah proved to be very willing. After the servant had declared his mission, we read:

“they said, we will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go” (Gen. 24:57-58).

Notice that there was no hesitation on her part: “she said, I will go”. This was a great act of faith, as she didn’t know Isaac, yet she was willing to leave behind her family her “own people”, and her “father’s house”, to embrace, and become joined to the family of Abraham.

RACHEL AND LEAH

Through particular means, Jacob came to serve Laban for his two wives Rachel and Leah, and a flock of goats and sheep. Whilst he was with Laban, God blessed the household, and even Laban recognised this: “... I have learned by experience that Yahweh hath blessed me for thy sake” (Gen. 30:27). But once Jacob purposed to leave, and return back to his homeland, his fortunes changed, and Jacob became quite wealthy, at Laban’s expense. So the Angel of God appeared to him again in a dream:

“... I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowest a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred” (Gen. 31:13).

But notice the response of both Rachel and Leah, once Jacob had related this dream to them - they were willing to leave their family, like Rebekah had done:

“... all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is our’s, and our children’s; now then, ***whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do***” (Gen. 31:16).

Notice their willingness to be part of the outworking of God’s Purpose: “whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do”! They recognised that their prosperity was of God, and were willing to leave their “own people” and their “fathers’ house” behind, and depart with their husband, to lead a nomadic life with him, dwelling in tents.

RUTH

The Divine record describes the providential circumstances of how Ruth, a Moabitess, came to be joined to Israel. Those circumstances are beyond the scope of our present considerations, but are described in this article: <https://bibleonline.uk/archives/21314>. Ruth is another example of one who was willing to leave all behind, and become part of the family of Naomi – by contrast to Orpah her sister, who returned back to her people and her gods:

“Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: Yahweh do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:16-17).

Notice that she was also willing to leave her people – and her gods - behind, to be joined to Naomi, her people, and Yahweh her God. Even so, she became a mother in the genealogy of Christ, being joined to Boaz, Naomi’s kinsman, and son of Rahab the repentant harlot. She provides a wonderful example of how when in Israel, there was

great apostasy and every man did that which was right in his own sight, a Gentile embraced their national hope, to worship their God in spirit and in truth.

ABRAHAM

When considering examples of those who left all behind, we would be very remiss not to mention Abraham:

“by faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” (Heb. 11:8).

But the Divine record also describes how Abraham lived out the spirit of a stranger and sojourner, and demonstrated that by living in tents:

“By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb. 11:9).

Abraham forsook all, “not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off”, being “persuaded of them, and embraced them”, and confessed that he was a stranger and pilgrim in the land (Heb. 11:13). Again, a wonderful example for us to follow!

LOT

Having departed from Abraham, Lot went to live in an area of natural prosperity – yet was spiritually bereft. He lived in Sodom, and was greatly distressed at the godlessness of that society. So we read that God:

“delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;), the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished ...” (2 Pet. 2:7-9).

Lot was called upon to leave that city, in order for the judgements of God to begin: “... Up, get you out of this place; for Yahweh will destroy this city” (Gen. 19:14). He lingered to begin with: “and while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters: Yahweh being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city” (Gen. 19:16).

However, his wife looked back: “his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt” (Gen. 19:26). Here, the Hebrew for “looked back” signifies, “to look intently, to regard with pleasure.”

Evidently, it wasn't a casual glance, it was a longing to return to that place. Hence the Master warned of the coming day of judgment: "in that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife ..." (Lu. 17:31-32). The juxtaposition of returning back with remembering Lot's wife reveals her true feelings. Whilst Lot left without so much as a backward glance, she gazed intently, being reluctant to leave her hometown.

There is parallel with our circumstance. Like Lot, we have been "delivered from the wrath to come" (1 Thes. 1:10): we must, therefore, be willing to leave the Sodomite society in which we sojourn behind, with no regrets, and without looking back. Our souls are sore vexed with the excesses of wickedness all around us: the faithful will be glad to leave it all behind, and become joined as an ecclesial Bride to the Lord Jesus Christ.

MOSES

The occasion of Israel leaving Egypt to go to the land promised to their fathers, is one of the most well known of Bible stories. The parting of the Red Sea, which facilitated their final cutting off of Egypt, is one of the most well known of Bible miracles. This immediately followed the institution of the Passover feast, where the people were to eat their food in haste, dressed for immediate departure:

"... and thus shall ye eat it; ***with your loins girded***, your shoes upon your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste, it is Yahweh's Passover" (Exo. 12:11).

In a similar way, those who embrace the hope of Israel must also be prepared for an immediate departure:

"wherefore, ***gird up the loins of your mind***, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13).

But we have another example in the case of Moses himself:

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith, he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:24-27).

Moses "forsook Egypt", and spent 80 years of his life wandering in the wilderness with the people of God. "Through faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood" (vs. 28), trusting in the promises of the Lord. In some ways, his situation was like Lot in Sodom: the judgments of God were to be poured out upon the society in which they lived, and these men of faith were delivered from the coming wrath. They

left their homes behind, forsaking the temporal pleasures of living in a materially prosperous society, to suffer for the Truth's sake.

God has: "appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31), and that is a "day" we must prepare for. The Apostolic command is to separate ourselves from the ways of the flesh, just like the examples before us.

"wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor. 6:17).

In the coming day of judgment, we need to be ready to leave everything behind. The Lord shall come to take us to himself: "... the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thes. 4:16-17).

We need, therefore, to be ready to be "caught away" – like Philip was (Acts 8:39), to the Lord, and so be hidden in the day of Yahweh's anger:

"come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For behold, Yahweh cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity ..." (Isa. 26:20-21).

We have considered the example of faithful men and women of old, who were willing and ready to depart in order to embrace the holy seed of Abraham, and their national Hope. We need to be ready for the Angel, like Rebekah: "I will go"! We must remember Lot's wife, and be prepared to leave everything behind, without so much as a backward glance, let alone an intense gaze!

We do not know the day nor the hour when we shall be called, and we have "no need" to know, for "yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night ..." (1 Thes. 5:1-2). We know as a matter of first principle doctrine, that the Lord will come again. But are we ready to leave the world in which we live at an instant? "for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes. 5:9). Are we really those who "love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8)? Or would our preference be for that day to be afar off so that we can enjoy the pleasures of sin for a prolonged season? We must consider these questions soberly, for our answer will determine our future destiny.

Christopher Maddocks

WHY IS ONE GENERATION MORE FAVoured THAN ANOTHER?

Question:-

Why are the people of one age more favoured than those of another, in hearing the Gospel and being saved?

Because one generation of flesh and blood happens to live contemporary with the times appointed in the original plan, while other generations do not, no injustice is done to the nations and generations that never heard the Gospel. Before they were born into the world they were nothing; after they died, they went to nothing so they became as though they had never been. They had no hopes, and now they have no regrets; why, then, need we burden ourselves with sorrows for them that know nothing and care for nothing? "The dead know not anything".

Men were not ushered into being for the purpose of being saved or lost. God-manifestation, not human salvation, was the grand purpose of the Eternal Spirit. The salvation of a multitude is incidental to the manifestation, but it was not the end proposed. The Eternal Spirit intended to enthrone himself on the earth, and in so doing, to develop a Divine Family from among men, every one of whom shall be spirit being born of the Spirit, and that this family shall be large enough to fill the earth, when perfected, to the entire exclusion of flesh and blood. In elaborating this purpose, upon the principles revealed in the Bible, a far greater production of human kind occurs than is necessary. Hence vast multitudes are swept off by disease, war, and so forth, and the multitude left are but little more use than to keep the world going until the Divine Family shall become complete. God will take out of the human race as many for his Name as his purpose requires. If he chose to make apostolic demonstrations every two hundred years, he could, doubtless, obtain a hundredfold more for the kingdom than upon the present system; but he does not so operate. It is fair, then, to conclude that his purpose does not demand so many, and that, therefore, he only employs means adequate to what he desires.

True, "one generation *needs* the blessings of salvation as much as another," but it is not God's pleasure to respond to all their needs, for the plain reason that he does not require it. The more light the more responsibility; hence, there will be, no doubt, more raised to Aion judgment who have previously lived in the apostolic age than of those who live in this generation of ours. It is, therefore, a merciful dispensation to leave "the Veil of the Covering" over the intoxicated nations until the appointed time to teach them righteousness by the only means that can effect it - by the argument of Divine force, as introductory to the force of Divine argument. "when thy judgements, O Yahweh, are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Isaiah 26:9. This is the only remedy for our rebellious race.

God has given light enough and ample means enough for the taking out all needed for his name. The light is strong enough for an honest and good heart to see by, but it is not strong enough to bring men to obedience of a contrary description. Men who do not think and dare not reason or act, lest they should jeopardise their social position or be wounded in the vested interests, can never see the kingdom of God. The light is not strong enough for them, and their constant exclamation is, "I do not see it in that light,"

"I cannot so understand it." It is never convenient for them to see anything by which "*the idols of the den*" are made to follow the lead of Dagon: The house hold gods must be preserved. Whatever else betide!

God does not "*will* all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth," in the sense of *compelling* such a result. That he does not is clear, from the fact that very few of mankind in each generation arrive at that knowledge, and the salvation is scrupulously predicated upon the knowledge and obedience of the truth. The original words of Paul to Timothy do not sanction such a supposition. Speaking of God, he says, "who is willing that all men be saved and come to the exact knowledge of truth; for there is one God and one Mediator of God and men, Jesus, a man anointed, who gave himself a ransom for all; the testimony in its proper times." -1Tim 2:4-6. The proof of God's willingness is seen in his sending an invitation to all men, offering them the kingdom, power, and glory, of which the Gospel treats, with eternal life at the resurrection; and the extent of the salvation or amplitude of the "*all*" is also seen in accompanying the invitation in the history of its proclamation; so that when his willingness shall have found its full development and the fruits shall be gathered in, they will sing, "Thou hast purchased us for God with thy blood OUT OF EVERY kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Rev.5:9. He is willing that any man, Jew, Turk, Protestant, Pagan, or Papist should be saved on the terms he has appointed, for "he is no respecter of persons," but he will not force men to be saved, nor will he permit them to be saved if they will not believe his promises and do his commands. In 2 Peter 3:9. the word rendered "*willing*" is not the same as used by Paul above. Peter said, "Not desiring or wishing that any perish." The "*any*" are related to the "*toward*" in the sentence immediately before. He is willing that the incorrigible perish, but he does not desire or wish that any of the saints should perish. There were certain before Peter's mind who had obeyed the truth, but "had forsaken the right way" 2 Peter2:15, and who were about to fall into that furnace of fire that was shortly to devour Judah. It was the Lord's longsuffering towards such errorists of the circumcision that caused the seeming delay with which the apostles were taunted. He did not wish any of them to perish, but that they might all come to a change of mind.

John Thomas, Herald of the Kingdom and Age to Come, April 1858, Page 84.

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The Voice of Wisdom

“O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is”

(Psalm 63:1)

The cry of wisdom is sent forth: “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me” (Prov. 8:17). Also, it is written of the Lord: “Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: (Jer. 7:25 etc). There is much to be said for rising early and commencing the day by reading the Word of God. It sets the mind up for the day, and provides an early focus on spiritual things. There is also another sense: it is better to seek the wisdom of God early on, rather than leaving it too late. Now is the day of opportunity – we need to take hold of the opportunity to imbibe the Holy Word in the short time that remains.

Wisdom’s cry is: “I love them that love me”. There are those who love and delight in Wisdom and Truth, and there are those who spurn Wisdom’s cry. But it is only those who receive the knowledge of the Truth that shall be saved (cp. 2 Thes. 2:10), and the only source of Truth currently extant is the Wisdom of the Word of God. This is the wisdom which is from above (Jas. 3:17), which is “first pure, then peaceable ...”. The Disciples of Christ are those who love the One who “is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). They, by applying themselves to the reading and study of Scripture, become “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). This is not accomplished by the wisdom of men, “for after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21).

“Wisdom is the principal thing”, hence the exhortation to “therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Prov. 4:7). And again, “how much better is it to get wisdom than gold! And to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver” (Prov. 16:16). Wisdom is superior than riches in every way: “for wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it” (Eccl. 7:12).

Our desire to drink deeply from the well of salvation should be like a man longing for water in a dry and thirsty land. There is currently a spiritual famine, like that of Israel of old: “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Yahweh” (Amos 8:11). We live in a spiritually dry and barren wilderness: men of the flesh are impoverished without even realising it, but men of the spirit thirst greatly for the sustenance of the spirit. It was against this background that Messiah spent his mortal days: “he shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground” (Isa.53:2). There was no spiritual sustenance in the environment in which he lived: he gave attendance to the Water of the Word. We must do likewise, so that we might ultimately be blessed – with the Master - to be like “a tree of life planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season.”

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