

“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)

Demons and the Bible

*(The following article is from an address given at the
Liverpool Library on 20.07.2026)*

In our last session, we considered how that the word “devil” is used in the Bible as a way of speaking of Sin, particularly what Paul calls “sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). We saw then, that the source of all temptation and evil is the sinful nature of man himself. Consider the following:

“Every man is tempted, when he is **drawn away of his own lust**, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (Jas. 1:14-15).

This is why the prophet Jeremiah said:

“the heart is **deceitful above all things**, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9).

This latter reference is particularly relevant to our present considerations – the deceitfulness of the human heart is “above all things”. There is no need for a rebel angel to induce men to sin and commit trespass, man is quite capable of doing that for himself. A common misapprehension is that men are seduced and tempted by associate rebel angels called “demons,” and that the presence of evil in the world is evidence of demonic activity. It is our intention to examine the Bible evidence for such an idea, leading to the conclusion that just as there is no personal rebel angel, the Devil, there are no minions of his either – the source of all sin and evil is man himself.

A DEFINITION

The word “demon” is used a number of times in the Bible (not in the KJV, where the original word is translated “devils”), but on none of those occasions are we specifically given a definition of what that word is describing. Hence, we must work it out from other information that the Bible does provide.

Those who believe in Demons regard them as being fundamentally evil spirit-creatures, which sided with the rebel angel Lucifer. He rebelled against God, and became their ruler instead. These demons are said to go to and fro throughout the earth, inducing men and women to sin, and generally bringing destruction, chaos and evil into the world. A definition by the self-proclaimed Jehovah’s Witnesses, who do believe in Demons is as follows:

“Demons are “angels that sinned,” spirit creatures who rebelled against God. (2 Peter 2:4). The first angel to make himself into a demon was Satan the Devil, whom the Bible calls “the ruler of the demons.” (Matthew 12:24, 26) (cited from jw.org).

Wikipedia informs us of the following:

“As lesser spirits doing the Devil’s work, they have additional duties – causing humans to have sinful thoughts and tempting humans to commit sinful actions”

We have already seen that the source of human temptation is the deceitful heart of man – but how do we explain the Bible use of the word “demons”?

As we shall presently demonstrate, the Bible is using the language of the day, to describe certain phenomenon. Hence, to know what is being referred to by the use of these terms, it would be helpful for us to investigate how folk of the day understood demons.

GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND DEMONS

Plutarch, who lived around 46-120 AD wrote “Oracles in Decline,” where he states the following about Plato, the Greek philosopher:

“Plato relieved philosophers of many serious problems by his discovery of the element underlying created qualities ... but in my judgment even more problems and more serious ones have been solved by the discovery of **the race of demons that comes between gods and men** and somehow links and brings together the community to which we both belong ... it was Hesiod who first set out clearly and distinctly the four classes of rational beings - gods, demons, heroes and lastly men”

(Plutarch (c. 46-120 AD), Oracles in Decline)

He further states thus:

“There are indeed beings on the frontier, as it were, **between gods and men**, susceptible to mortal passions and necessary changes, whom we are right to follow our father’s tradition in believing to be demons and worshipping under that name ... the **nature of demons is to have the passions of mortality and the power of divinity**”

It is clear that the demonology held by the Greek Philosophers is different to that of current demon believing groups, like the JW's. According to Plutarch, demons were beings who existed "between gods and men". Moreover, these beings were not always evil. Philo, writing "On the Giants" in around 20-50 AD said this:

"But as men in general speak of **good and evil demons**, and in like manner of good and evil souls, so also do they speak of angels"

Here, we have a general agreement that demons could be either good or evil. So the Jewish historian Josephus wrote in "Wars of the Jews" where he thought they came from:

"What man of virtue is there who does not know that those **souls which are severed from their fleshly bodies** in battles by the sword, are received by the ether ... and joined to that company which are placed among the stars; that **they become good demons and propitious heroes**, and show themselves as such to their posterity afterwards?"

Again, we find that demons were not rebel angels who sided with Lucifer: rather they included the souls of valiant warriors, who "became good demons and propitious heroes". This demonstrates another error in understanding – the Bible nowhere teaches the immortality of the soul!

This is important, for it shows that modern Demonology is different both from the prevailing opinion of the day, and also the way in which the Bible uses the word.

The online Etymology Dictionary provides the following about the word "demon":

"c. 1200, 'an evil spirit, malignant supernatural being, an incubus, a devil,' from Latin daemon 'spirit,' from Greek daimōn 'deity, divine power; lesser god; guiding spirit, tutelary deity' (sometimes including souls of the dead); 'one's genius, lot, or fortune;' from PIE *dai-mon- '**divider, provider**' (of fortunes or destinies), from root *da- 'to divide.'

The highlighted section illustrates that one of the meanings of the word is to be a divider, or provider of fortunes or destinies.

LINKED TO FALSE WORSHIP

The Apostle Paul links demon worship with idolatry:

“What shall I say then? That the idol is anything, or that which is offered in sacrifice **to Idols** is anything?”

“But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice **to demons**, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with demons ...” (1 Cor. 10:19,20).

Notice that in this passage, he uses the word “demons” interchangeably with the word “idols”. He further associates them with the objects of false worship:

“ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of demons ...” (1 Cor. 10:21)

But idols do not exist! Hence we read:

“As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are sacrificed unto idols, we know that **an idol is nothing** in the world, and that there is none other God but one.” (1 Cor. 8:4).

If idols are “nothing”, and the demons are idols – then they are “nothing” also!

The Old Testament also refers to demons in the context of false worship. Consider the following:

“They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. **They sacrificed unto demons, not to God;** to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.” (Deut 32:16,17).

BEELZEBUB

We quoted earlier from the jw.org website, that:

“The first angel to make himself into a demon was Satan the Devil, whom the Bible calls “the ruler of the demons.”—Matthew 12:24, 26.”

However, if we look up Matthew 12, given as evidence here, that is not what we find. The Bible does not describe “Satan the Devil” as originally being an Angel, and becoming “the ruler of the demons” at all! What it does speak of is a belief of the Pharisees regarding a false god:

“... But when **the Pharisees** heard it, **they said**, This fellow doth not cast out demons, but **by Beelzebub** the Prince of the demons” (Mat. 12:24).

Notice, the reference is **not** to “Satan the Devil”, but “Beelzebub”. Who or what is Beelzebub? This is a reference to the idolatry of the Jews in the Old Testament, where they appropriated gods of the heathen nations for their own worship. The Old Testament refers to this deity as a Philistine god of Ekron:

“... Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, enquire of **Baal-zebub the god of Ekron** whether I shall recover of this disease” (2 Kings 1:2).

Here, King Ahaziah had an accident where he had a fall and hurt himself badly. He then sent his messengers to consult the god of Ekron, to see whether he would recover – and the chapter continues to describe how he was rebuked by the prophet of Yahweh, the Hebrew God, for seeking to idols (see the whole chapter). The Baal gods were a continual snare to Israel, who worshipped them rather than the God who delivered them out of the hand of the Egyptians.

We find then that Beelzebub, AKA Baal-zebub was a god of the heathen: an idol which was “nothing”, as we saw earlier. It was not the modern Devil, or Satan, but an ancient idol, and part of Israel’s false worship. But the interesting point to note, is that this idol was thought by the Pharisees to be the “prince of demons”. The important point is that the narrative is not recording the words of the Lord, but the traditions of men, held by the Pharisees. This is what they thought – and they were in error!

A CONCLUSION

From the above, we can deduce that:

- Demons beliefs originated in pagan worship systems, and could be good or bad – which is different to today’s demonology
- Demons were part of Israel’s idolatrous worship

- To affirm the existence of Demons, we must also accept the existence of the Baal gods, particularly Baal-Zebub, which Israel worshipped alongside other idols.

DEMONS AND HEALING

Turning to the Bible itself, the closest we get to a definition of Demons, is a description of how people were healed from them. The record in Matthew describes this:

““And they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed of demons and those which were lunatics, and those that had the palsy; **and he healed them**” (Mat. 4:24)

Again, Luke 8 records the healing of Mary Magdalene:

“Certain woman, which had been **healed of evil spirits** and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went **seven devils** (Luke 8:2)

And Matthew chapter 8:

“... they brought unto him many that were **possessed by demons**: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and **healed all that were sick**: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses”. (Mat 8:16-17)

This citation from the prophet Isaiah is most interesting, as it doesn't mention demons, but it does refer to healing:

“... Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted ...

... he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes, **we are healed**” (Isa 53:4-5)

This leads us to another aspect which we will consider shortly – the healing miracles of Christ, demonstrates how he will “heal” his brethren from the malady of mortality. Through his sufferings, “we are healed”.

What we find then, is that the Bible uses the language of demon possession to describe illnesses, which could be healed. This is further illustrated in the healing of Legion:

“They went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and **in his right mind** ... they also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the demons **was healed**” (Luke 8:35-36)

This passage is most instructive, for the consequence of the demons departing, is that this man was “in his right mind” – which indicates that prior to this healing, he was **not** in his right mind! In other words, he was suffering from a mental aberration, or illness as we would put it today.

Matthew chapter 4 shows the same position:

“they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were **possessed by demons**, and **those which were lunatic**, and those that had the Palsy and he healed them.” (Mat. 4:24).

It is clear from the above, that mental disorders were attributed to demon possession. This can also be seen in the way in which Jesus himself was regarded:

“... many of them said, He **hath a demon, and is mad**, why hear ye him?” (Jno 10:20).

“... others said, These are not the words of him **that hath a demon**. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?” (Jno. 10:21).

Notice that they accused Jesus of having a mental health problem – i.e. he was mad – and they attributed it to demon-possession. In our day, the maladies are called Mental Illnesses and include such sicknesses as Schizophrenia and Multiple Personality Disorder – and they can be successfully treated with medicine, not exorcisms!

A CONCLUSION

- Demons in the Bible = sickness, including mental illnesses, such as Schizophrenia and Multiple Personality Disorder.

- Today such illnesses are successfully treated with medication – are the demons afraid of tablets?

A CASE STUDY – THE GADARENE DEMONiac

The Bible gives us significant detail in the healing of Legion, “a man with an unclean spirit”. Of him, it is written:

“who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains ... and always night and day, he was in **the mountains**, and **in the tombs**, crying, and cutting himself with stones ... and he asked him, what is thy name? and he answered, saying, My name is Legion **for we are many**” (Mrk. 5: see verses 1-9).

This case is sometimes used to describe a person who is possessed by multiple demons. But notice that we already saw above, then when healed, Legion was “in his right mind” – which proves it was a mental illness that was cured. He would appear to be suffering from either a Multiple Personality Disorder, or Schizophrenia, which caused him to self-harm – cutting himself with stones. Most likely it was Schizophrenia, a condition whereby the sufferer experiences delusions and hallucinations, such as hearing voices, and becoming paranoid. This illness can cause the sufferer to self-harm and lose contact with the real world. Hearing many voices in his head, Legion said “we are many”, and was in need of healing.

A LIVING PARABLE TO ISRAEL

When we consider the healing miracles of the Lord Jesus Christ, we find that they were not merely acts of humanitarian kindness – they were also designed to teach spiritual lessons. The description given regarding Legion alludes very strongly to the Old Testament accounts regarding Israel, who were possessed by idolatrous beliefs. We have already demonstrated the link between demons and idols, but consider the following, and compare it with the record in Mark chapter 5:

“A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick; **which remain among the graves**, and lodge in the monuments, which eat swine’s flesh ...”. (Isa. 65:3,4)

“Which have burned incense **upon the mountains**, and blasphemed me upon the hills ...” (Isaiah 65:7)

“They shall also **strip thee out of thy clothes**, and take away thy fair jewels” (Eze. 23:26, cf 16:39)

“The king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and **bound him with fetters, and** carried him to Babylon” (2 Chron. 33:11)

Zedekiah: “... bound him **with fetters** of brass ...”. (2 Kings 25:7)

“... he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt **cast** all their sins into **the depths of the sea**” (Mic. 7:19).

We find then, that the account of Legion’s healing from his demons uses Old Testament descriptions concerning Israel. This illustrates how Israel themselves could be healed of their possession of false gods – including “Baal-zebub”. Therefore, when the Bible uses the word “demon”, it is not merely accommodating the language of the day. Rather, it is using that language to teach underlying spiritual principles: that the demons/idols (i.e. spirit of madness) which Israel were possessed by, could be healed by the work of Jesus.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the above, we have seen the following points:

- The real source of all sin and suffering is man himself
- The heart of man is deceitful above everything else – even demons
- Pagan “demons” were intermediary beings, who were the souls of dead heroes - either good or evil, and providers of fortunes
- Demons were also part of false worship, as in the case of Baal-zebub, yet such idols are “nothing”
- Bible “demons” include mental illnesses which can be treated today with medication
- Jesus used the terms of this false belief as a tool to describe how Israel, possessed by a belief in idols, and false ideas might eventually be healed and redeemed by his work

Christopher Maddocks

Spiritual Garments

Our New Testament reading from Revelation chapter 16 contains words which are particularly applicable to those who are alive at the coming again of Jesus Christ. We read of how the nations are gathered through the frog-like spirits of democracy, to “gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:14). Then the next verse continues:

“Behold, I come as a thief. ***Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*** And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue, Armagaddon” (Rev. 16:15-16)

The highlighted words are given to those who are contemporary with the thief-like advent of Messiah – in other words, us! We need to ensure that we are found both alert and watching, and also keeping our garments. It is the latter aspect that we shall consider in our exhortation today.

This verse demonstrates how those who are found in a state of nakedness, will have their shame openly displayed for all to see. Nakedness is the natural state of man. As Job declared: “naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither ...” (Job. 1:21). Adam and Eve were created, and placed into the Edenic Paradise, in a naked state. But they were not ashamed:

“... and they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25).

The shame came from their conscience being troubled by their committed sin. The consequence of their actions in eating from the proscribed fruit is expressed thus:

“the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and the sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons” (Gen. 3:7).

Notice the contrast with Revelation 16, cited above – they *saw*, and as a consequence they knew their condition, and sought to cover themselves with a contrivance of their own making. Revelation 16:15 also describes seeing and nakedness – but the difference here, is that the seeing or watching, is necessary to avoid being naked and ashamed.

It is written that “he that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). This was the condition of the first human pair: they sought to cover their sins. And this is the

natural state of man – seeking to cover up what evil has been done. Job spoke of this, speaking of his own circumstance: “If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom ...” (Job. 31:33). But man cannot atone for his own sin. “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13), but a covering can be obtained: “even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin ...” (Rom. 4:6-8).

In Eden, the Great Creator mercifully provided a covering for nakedness:

“Unto Adam also and to his wife did Yahweh God make coats of skins and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21).

Even so, the Lord has mercifully provided a covering for our sin – our spiritual nakedness. The word for “skins” in the Hebrew we are told, is singular not plural. This would perhaps suggest a single animal used to cover both Adam and Eve. And this is most appropriate when we consider the covering granted to us – a single offering, the Lord Jesus Christ, as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). He is our covering with which we must be clothed: “... put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom. 13:14).

But the representative nature of the literal events in Eden go further. Adam was created in the Image of God (Gen. 1:27), and therefore had specific responsibilities as a consequence. His Sin did not befit the Divine Image that he was made in. And he would have had to recognise this, in putting off the fig-leaf contrivance he had girded himself with, and put on the Sacrificial covering provided by God. Paul expounds these things for us:

“Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have **put off** the old man with his deeds; And have **put on** the new man, which is renewed in knowledge **after the image** of him that created him” (Col. 3:9-10).

There is a need then, for us to cast aside any attempt to cover up our own sins, and allow the Spirit-Word to renovate our minds. Then, being renewed in knowledge, we will walk in a manner befitting the Divine Image.

But in order to put on new garments, we must recognise our dire circumstance of need. The Laodiceans to whom the Lord wrote, did not do this:

“Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, **and naked**: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; **and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear**; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (Rev. 3:17-18).

Notice, that the metaphor of Garments is changed here. The garments the Laodicean’s are exhorted to possess, are defined as “white raiment”, and not animal skins. This is because a different aspect is being emphasised here – righteousness, rather than sacrifice.

WHITE RAIMENT

Isaiah chapter 64 is often misquoted in this context. Oftentimes it is used to express our current position before God, this side of immortality. But actually, it is Israel speaking of their condition before God in their trespasses and sins:

“... But we are all as an unclean thing, and **all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags**; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy Name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us because of our iniquities ...” (Isa. 64:6).

Notice, that Israel are not here representative of the forgiven, who are justified through faith: they are rather those who are consumed because of their iniquities. They are not clothed with the type of garments offered to the ecclesia at Laodicea, rather they are arrayed in “filthy rags”, and are in need of cleansing and forgiveness.

The white raiment worn by the Redeemed is referred to a number of times in the Apocalypse:

“he that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in **white raiment**: and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life ...” (Rev. 3:5).

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the lamb, **clothed with white robes**, and palms in their hands” (Rev. 7:9).

“... these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, **and made them white** in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14).

“... and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in **fine linen, clean and white**: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Rev. 19:8)

“and the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in **fine linen, white and clean**” (Rev. 19:14).

We saw earlier how that David spoke of those who sins are “covered”, and now we learn what that covering is. The fine linen “is the righteousness of saints” – but not their own intrinsic righteousness, for that would contradict the principle that salvation is of grace, not of works (Rom. 11:6). Rather, it is the imputed righteousness of the faithful. Their garments were naturally defiled, but they have “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the lamb”. Ordinarily blood stains, and is difficult to wash out – indeed, the figure is used in such a way, in Isaiah 63:1. But against the natural order of things, the shed blood of Christ represents the cleansing influence of his sacrifice. The saints are made righteous through faith in the sacrifice of their Messiah, hence they are cleansed from all sin by a baptism into his death and resurrection (see Rom. 6). Their filthy rags, and fig-leaves are replaced with clean and white garments, and the wearers of such are no longer “miserable sinners”, but are part of the joyous company of the redeemed.

But a careful examination of Revelation 3:5, cited above, reveals that there is more than one set of clean garments! The verse in context reads:

“Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have **not defiled their garments**; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed **in white raiment**; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Rev. 3:4-5).

Notice that here, there are the garments that remained undefiled during the mortal lives of the saints, and there are other garments that will be given to those who overcome.

To consider them in order, the first garments signify the imputed righteousness of the saints, whereas the other garments speak of the purity of the immortal state. The Psalmist speaks of this class of people: “he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn

deceitfully, he shall receive the blessing from Yahweh, and righteousness from the God of his salvation” (Psa. 24:4-5). These are they who endured tribulation for His Name’s sake, and who “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23). Being cleansed by the Lamb’s blood, they are considered undefiled; and they are credited for keeping their garments white (cp. Eccl. 9:8). “There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1), and so they shall receive the blessing of which the Psalmist speaks.

This blessing is the second set of white robes. They are the Garments of Salvation spoken of by the Psalmist, who brings both sets together:

“Let thy priests be ***clothed with righteousness***; and let thy saints shout for joy. ... I will also ***clothe her priests with salvation***; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy” (Psa. 132:9, 16).

Again, the prophet Isaiah speaks likewise:

“I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with ***the garments of salvation***, he hath covered me with the ***robe of righteousness***, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels” (Isa. 61:10).

Notice that here, the prophet is clothed with the garments of Salvation as well as the garments of Righteousness. These are honourable garments, liked to those who adorn themselves with beauty at their wedding! Indeed, we saw this in Revelation 19:8, cited above.

To conclude our present considerations then, we find that we need to recognise our natural state of being spiritually naked before God (cp. Heb. 4:13). Our own contrivances to cover up our sins, are wholly inadequate for the purpose – they are flimsy fig-leaves, or filthy rags. Only through faith in the slain Lamb can sins be covered – and righteousness can be imputed to those who believe. We can stand before God, not as miserable sinners wearing filthy rags, but as those who are justified, having “put on” Christ - and who rejoice in the hope of Salvation. And we can then look forward to the day when we shall wear the Garments of Salvation, and rejoice in them with the Lord Jesus Christ throughout all the ages to come!

Christopher Maddocks

“The Care of This World”

“he also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Mat 13:22).

The Apostle John defines the underlying principles upon which the entire world is based:

“... all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 Jno. 2:16-17).

The world is transient, and not eternal. All of the foundation principles that govern it's operation shall ultimately pass away - but those who stand aside and instead do the Will of God will abide for ever. Peter also describes this principle in speaking of the believers:

“... being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word by which the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

Notice that again, even the greatest of man's glory will fail, like wild flowers withering away. But for the faithful, there is hope: the Word of God will not pass away, but will rather endure for ever. And those who receive it into themselves become “born again”, with a new life and existence. Being born of the incorruptible Seed, they will themselves endure for ever in the sight of God.

Our opening citation is from Messiah's parable of the Sower. Here, there are varying conditions of men's hearts into which the Word-Seed is implanted. Matthew 13:22 speaks of the care of this world, using the symbol of Thorns. That which will gain a stranglehold upon the growing Seed, are not the trials and tribulations of this life, as one might suppose. Rather, the parabolic thorns are the cares, and riches, and pleasures (Luk. 8:14) of this life. These are real threats to the new man of the spirit – that which is born again by the Word of

God. Indeed, it is quite possible for them to slowly develop a stranglehold upon that new life, without our even realising it!

The Apostle also describes the ground that bears thorns:

“... for the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but **that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected**, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (Heb. 6:7-8).

Thorns are reminiscent of the Curse of God upon the earth (Gen. 3:18), and those who permit their hearts to be overrun with them, shall themselves be cursed. They will bear no fruit, and so prove themselves to be useless, fit only for destruction.

The Lord also warns his disciples:

“... take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, **and cares of this life**, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Lu. 21:34).

The command is to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you” (Mat. 6:33). If our priorities are for the furtherance of the Truth, then we will escape the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet. 1:4), by holding fast to the principles of the Word. But if we are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:4), then the day of the Lord’s coming will come upon us “unawares”, and we will not have prepared ourselves for it!

The Apostle makes the same point elsewhere, but using a different metaphor:

“Thou, therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth **entangleth himself with the affairs of this life**; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier ...” (2 Tim. 2:3-4).

Here is the exhortation: do not become entangled with the affairs of this life! King David famously did this in his indiscretion with Bath-Sheba. He was chosen by God to deliver his people from their enemies (2 Sam. 3:18), yet

rather than to be battling on the front line, he stayed at home. Then, he was tempted by the lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh, and committed adultery with Bath-Sheba. He lost his focus in fighting the Lord's battles, and became entangled with worldly affairs and pleasures. Then, he committed murder, having Bath-Sheba's husband destroyed by the enemies of Israel. But by contrast, Uriah's thoughts were on the front line, and he declined to enjoy the pleasures of home life:

"Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing" (2 Sam. 11:11)

Uriah, then, a Gentile, became an example of dedication to king David, and refused to be distracted from his place on the front line. His heart was with those who were in the battle to secure Israel – and so he was not entangled with the pleasures and cares of this life.

The Apostle Peter's exhortation is relevant here, speaking of those who promise liberty from the constraints of the Truth:

"... while they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet. 2:19-20)

We saw above, that the thorns include cares, pleasures and riches. But there are those who trust in those things, rather than the provisions of God. Hence Paul exhorted:

"charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim 6:17).

The Psalmist also speaks of the demise of those who trusted in their wealth:

"... God shall likewise destroy thee for ever ... the righteous also shall

see and fear, and shall laugh at him: Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but ***trusted in the abundance of his riches***, and strengthened himself in his wickedness” (cp. Psalm 52 – whole Psalm).

It is written that “wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it” (Ecc. 7:12). To trust in riches cannot profit in the long term – but wisdom can save us from death.

NABAL THE FOOL

In our Old Testament readings for today, we have the example of Nabal, the fool. He was a very wealthy man, who indulged himself in his riches, rather than to help others - by contrast to Abigail, his virtuous wife (1 Sam. 25:2-3). He was approached by David, who was fleeing for his life from Saul, to provide provisions for himself and those that were with him. But Nabal, being a “churlish” man, refused. Rather he held a feast in his house, and became “very drunken” (vs. 36) in the over indulgence of his opulent wealth.

Abigail on the other hand, was of a totally different spirit. She provided for David and his men (vs 18), and humbled herself before him. Hence Nabal died in his drunken orgy, being smitten by the Lord, and Abigail subsequently became David’s wife.

The Lord appears to be alluding back to these events, in his parable of the man who built bigger barns, recorded in Luke 12. Here, the man laid up treasures for himself:

“and I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, ***Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee:*** then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided. So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Lu. 12:19-21)

The name “Nabal” literally means “fool”, and this man in his folly took pleasure in the abundance of his riches, rather than to provide for David’s needs. He was not rich toward God and so perished without hope. Such will be the end of those who trust in the benefits and pleasures of this life: as Messiah himself said in this context: “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Lu. 12:15).

Another aspect to the cares of this life, is anxiety about what the future will bring. Paul exhorted the Philippian brethren and sisters:

“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Phil. 4:6, ESV).

There is a danger when we live in a world of constant change and uncertainty, that we become preoccupied with anxious thoughts. But as we cited earlier, if we seek first the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness, all other things that we have need of will be provided (Mat. 6:33). We must not fret therefore, in our difficult circumstances, but rather trust in the Lord: “casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

We must not be desirous of riches, and neither should we be anxious about how we will be provided for. The correct balance is shown in Proverbs 30:

“... remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is Yahweh? Or else I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8-9).

The days are near when Messiah shall come again in his kingdom, with power and great glory. In that day, our wealth and prosperity in this life will be irrelevant. The Lord is no respecter of persons, and shall judge righteously. In that day, where we have spent our strength and endeavours will determine our judgment:

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:7-8).

We will indeed reap as we have sown: we shall be judged according to our deeds (Rom. 2:6). We cannot serve God and Mammon. We must therefore refocus on where our priorities lie. We must give ourselves over to the affairs of the coming kingdom of God, seeking it first in all our ways. Then, we will not be strangled by the matters of daily living, and the deceitfulness of riches. Rather, we shall be partakers of the coming Glory in the Kingdom of God – which is worth far more than anything this world has to offer!

Christopher Maddocks

Being Valiant for the Truth

Our reading from Jeremiah chapter 9 describes the failing of Israel:

“They bend their tongues like the bow for lies: but ***they are not valiant for the Truth*** upon the earth, for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith Yahweh” (Jer. 9:3).

There is a need then, to be Valiant for the Truth – and Israel were not doing this. The principle is also echoed by Jude, who exhorts the brethren:

“it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should ***earnestly contend for the faith*** which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

It is clear then that the faithful must both know what “the truth” is and be valiant in contending for it.

THE TRUTH

Sometimes our detractors describe us as being “arrogant” because we say that we have the Truth, and “other Christians” do not. As one of our adversaries has it: “we don’t have a monopoly of the Truth” – and who are we to judge others who worship Jesus just as sincerely as we do?

The root of the mischief – for that is what it is – is that our position is mis-stated. We do not say that of our own selves “we have the Truth”. Rather, we say that the Bible has the Truth, and we believe the Bible with all deference and humility – just as our adversaries are at liberty to do, if they so choose. It is perfectly true to say that “we don’t have a monopoly on the Truth” – but our God does. As it is written: “Yea, let God be True, but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

As we have often cited, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God is Truth. As he said in his prayer for his disciples: “Sanctify them through thy Truth: thy word is Truth” (Jno. 17:17). Whereas Truth is sometimes portrayed as a subjective thing, with “one man’s truth being another man’s heresy,” these words of the Master demonstrate that there is a fixed and absolute standard of Truth – which is the Word of God. And by definition, that which differs from that Word is not Truth. Hence it is said of those who forsake it, that they: “concerning the Truth have erred” (2 Tim. 2:18). And again, that they “erred from the Truth” (Jas. 5:19). Concerning teachers who preach something

different to Apostles, it was prophesied: "... they shall turn away their ears from the Truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:4). Here is the vital principle: "no lie is of the Truth," (1 Jno. 2:21) and that which contradicts the True Words of God is by definition a lie.

But what of those "sincere Christians" who have a different point of view to ourselves? Surely it is unChristlike to speak against others who just don't see things as we do? Actually, no! This is the teaching of Messiah: "... they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch". (Mat. 15:14).

A blind man cannot have a "point of view" – he can see nothing. Those who would brand us as being "unChristlike" should examine what Christ actually said. Men close their eyes to the things of the Truth (Acts 28:27), for the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14). A person who closes their eyes cannot have a vision of what is before them. They need to anoint their eyes with the eyesalve of the Word, so that they can see (Rev. 3:18). Only then can they have a legitimate "point of view".

THE GOSPEL TRUTH

The Word of Truth comes to us through the Gospel being preached. Hence that Word is styled in Scripture as: "the Truth of the Gospel" (Gal. 2:14, Col. 1:5). The Gospel is defined as "the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ", which it was necessary for the hearers of Philip to understand and believe in order to be baptised (see Acts 8:12). The BASF describes those two aspects very succinctly and scripturally. It thus epitomises the principles of the Gospel.

Sometimes the issue is raised as to how much a person needs to understand in order to be validly baptized. The Scriptures contain both "first principles" and "solid food" (Heb. 5:12,14): it is the first principles that need to be understood to lay a foundation for repentance from dead works (Heb. 6:1). Those who do this, are said to "believe and know the Truth" (1 Tim. 4:3), for they have "come unto the knowledge of the Truth" (1 Tim 2:4).

Again, is sometimes asserted that a person doesn't need to have a particularly detailed knowledge in order to express belief and repentance in submitting to Baptism. But such forget that Israel were "destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). It is possible to not have enough knowledge to be saved – but it is

not possible to have too much knowledge! And this assertion overlooks that it is necessary to “believe” the first principles: “he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mrk 16:16, see also 2 Thes. 2:12). But what is it that must be believed? As we defined above, the “things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” – and it is a summary of those things that provide the Statement of our Faith.

UNDERSTANDING AND WORKS

There is a need then, to have an understanding of, and belief in, the principles that collectively form the Gospel. This is described as “the full assurance of understanding” (Col. 2:2), without which there can be no faith, or belief – for how can a man have faith in something he knows nothing about?

Sometimes the idea is expressed that we need to live out the principles of the Truth in our lives, rather than to just study the Bible. But this is a false dichotomy: the situation is not either/or, but both! We must “love in deed and in Truth” (1 Jno. 3:18) and be found “walking in Truth” (2 Jno. 4). And it logically follows that we cannot walk in the Truth, if we do not know what that Truth is! We must believe and understand the righteous principles of the Gospel message, in order to “walk according to the Truth of the Gospel” (Gal. 2:14), and thereby “obey the Truth” (Gal. 3:1, 1 Pet 1:22). Yes, it is vital to live out the practical outworking of the Gospel believed, but it is also necessary for us to “study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of Truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Both aspects are necessary in order to please our Father and Maker.

A DELIGHT!

Another objection heard from time to time, is that we need to enjoy ourselves as well as doing Bible study. But such sentiments do not come out of the mouths of those who are lovers of the Truth (2 Thes. 2:10). The Apostle Paul wrote: “I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22). And again, the Psalmist:

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ***But his delight is in the law of Yahweh;*** and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:1-2, Psa. 119:97).

To study the Scriptures is not a chore to lovers of the Truth. It is a “delight”! Often we hear folk say concerning a novel or some other book that “it was so absorbing I couldn’t put it down!” That is what the Bible is to the brethren of Christ. It absorbs us into itself, and engages the mind in spiritual things. Those of a spiritual mind will delight in it, and will be reluctant to put it down!

The Lord Jesus Christ taught that “the Truth shall make you free.” And as we have demonstrated, the Truth needs to be understood and believed (1 Tim. 4:3). As the Apostle wrote, we need to receive it “not as the word of men, but as it is in Truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thes. 2:13).

It is written by Paul to the believers at Colosse: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ...” (Col. 3:16). But logically, the word of Christ cannot dwell in us, unless we put it there! To study the Bible brings great enjoyment and pleasure to men of the Spirit, and it also provides wisdom, and a power by which we can be saved. To study the Word is not an optional extra for the more studious amongst us: everyone that is of the Truth will hear the Master’s word (Jno. 18:37). We disregard it therefore, at our peril!

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

It is a feature of true Brethren of Christ, that they are valiant in contending for the faith together. Hence Paul encouraged the believers at Philippi:

“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind ***striving together for the faith of the gospel***” (Phil. 1:27).

Whilst the modern “progressive” churches advocate an open fellowship, with mutual tolerance and respect for different beliefs and practices, the faithful members of Christs’ ecclesias will contend against such a thing. The true believers are not “of one mind” because they overlook their doctrinal differences, but rather because they have “obtained like precious faith with us [i.e. the Apostles], through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:1). There is only “one faith” (Eph. 4:5), and that is what constitutes “the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42). That which differs from it, by definition, is not that which the Apostles taught, and there subsequently can be no fellowship with those who promote it.

The Apostle warned the elders of Ephesus that false brethren would arise: both from within their own company, and externally:

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves ***enter in among you***, not sparing the flock. Also ***of your own selves*** shall

men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears ..." (Acts 20:29-31).

It would appear that the Ephesian ecclesia heeded the warning of Paul: but they had another problem. Rather than to contend for the faith out of love of the Truth, it was evidently out of hatred for the error. Indeed, both are necessary, but the Ephesians had lost their first love:

"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars ... Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because ***thou hast left thy first love.*** Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy lampstand out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2:2-5).

These members were valiant for the Truth, and they could not bear those who proved themselves to be false brethren – but they had lost the love that they had at the first, when the Apostle preached to them.

From the above, we can see how it is essential to have a knowledge of what Scripture reveals to be Truth. And knowing it, we must also "contend" for it – that is a command of Scripture, not an optional extra. But in contending, it is important to make sure that we don't lose our first love, and remain on that narrow path which leads to the Kingdom of God.

Christopher Maddocks

FREE BIBLE TALKS

(PowerPoint)

Liverpool Central Library, 4th Floor

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1pm Monday 3rd August 2026

Heaven and Hell – What does the Bible Teach?

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1pm Monday 17th August 2026

The Geographical Context of the Gospel Hope

.....

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Apparent Prosperity

IN the portion read from the prophets this morning, we find expression given to the thoughts that must, at one time or other, exercise every lover of righteousness. More than this, we get the divine rejoinder to the thoughts expressed, and thus through Jeremiah (12.) we enjoy the great comfort of communion with God on the subject, and are helped to rest in the day of evil. Jeremiah says: "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments." As much as to say, "I wish to have some explanation of a matter which is apparently inconsistent with what I know of Thy righteousness." "Wherefore, doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore, are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them; yea, they have taken root. They grow; yea, they bring forth fruit."

This is the very picture we see around us—a picture liable to depress and even stagger, apart from the explanation of the case—a picture of men established in wealth, health, influence and authority, who neither fear God nor regard man; a picture in which the meek among men go to the wall, their righteousness a cause of poverty and contempt, and in which God appears to take no notice, and to make no interference on behalf of His dishonored name. This state of things distressed David. He says, "I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as with a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish." Habakkuk expresses the same anxiety on the prosperity of the lawless: "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he, and makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle; they catch them in their net and gather them in their drag; therefore, they rejoice and are glad."

We often may be distressed with the same situation of things. It is a comfort to know that we have such company in our distress as David, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, of whose experience the Psalms are an inspired reflex. But it is a great comfort to know that there is an explanation to this distressing state of things. Let us look at the explanation this morning, and let us indulge in the delicious prospect in connection with it, that that state of things will as assuredly pass away as night

vanishes before the morning, and that, in due time, righteousness and praise will spring forth before all nations.

Let us first look at the answer that Jeremiah receives. It is not, at the first sight, comforting: "If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?" This was as much as to say that worse was coming. Jeremiah was distressed to see the wicked and the treacherous in prosperity among Jehovah's own people in Jehovah's own land; but this was but as the running of footmen to the race of horses. A more terrible triumphing of the wicked was coming, foreshadowed in the intimation, "I have forsaken mine house; I have given the dearly-beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies." That more terrible triumph came in due course. The enemies of Israel poured into the land like a flood and banished the very form of all divine institutions from the earth.

The times of the Gentiles set in with all the terrible vigour implied in the question addressed to Jeremiah. They have prevailed during a long succession of dark ages; and the night still broods over all the earth. The horse-running and Jordan-swelling age is not yet over, and the panting Jeremiahs are sore pressed with the triumph of the wicked. But there is good hope in the situation. The morning is at hand. The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. The time for prosperous wickedness has nearly run its course. The war of the great day of God Almighty will break in pieces the power of all nations. In these, the days of the voice of the seventh angel, the mystery of God shall be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets. This we know by the later information vouchsafed to John in Patmos. Then shall we see the joyful mustering from all directions of the many of different ages past, whose part it will be to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God. Jeremiah will then no longer have to reason with God as to the meaning of His ways with man. "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. so that a man shall say, Verily, there is a reward for the righteous; verily, he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

In view of this consummation, the direct answer to Jeremiah's lamentation about the wicked being apparently planted and rooted in the earth, is to be found in the words written in Isaiah 40.: "Yea, they shall not be planted, yea, they shall not be sown; yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth, Jehovah

shall blow upon them and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.” Their being planted and sown is only an appearance. They are planted and sown and established for the time being, but only as the vegetation of a season. When the season is over they will be sought for in vain. This has been the comfort of the saints in all ages. It was the promise made to Abraham, that his seed should possess the gate of his enemies; it was the prophecy by Balaam that a star should come out of Jacob and a sceptre out of Israel, which should have dominion, and should destroy the children of the enemy.

It was the song of Hannah in the days of the Judges, that the adversaries of the Lord should be broken to pieces, and that Jehovah should exalt the horn of His anointed, and judge the ends of the earth. It was the consolation of David, that his throne should be established for ever, and that evil doers should be cut off, when those who wait upon God shall inherit the earth; yea, saith he, “When the wicked spring as the grass and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever.” All the visions of Daniel are to the same purport, as witness the splendid image of Daniel’s dream crumbled to powder under the stone, although made apparently of materials that could not be ground to powder. The terrible monster of Daniel’s own vision meets destruction at the hands of the Ancient of Days, and is given to the burning flame. The prophecy of the seventy weeks is accompanied with an intimation of Roman triumph, only, until “that which is determined shall be poured upon the desolator.” The vision of the ram and the goat finishes with the intimation that the Gentile adversary of Israel shall finally be “broken without hand,” while the concluding vision of the time of the end glows with the brightness of the great Prince that standeth for the children of Daniel’s people, at whose hand the Gogian confederacy comes to its end, with none to help.

And what shall we say of the fulness of the light that came with the age which witnessed the production of the New Testament? Jesus rejoiced in spirit when, looking forward, he beheld the Satan as lightning fall from the heavens of exaltation and power. “Woe unto you,” said he, addressing the Satan class of his day, “ye have received your consolation: woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger; woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep.” And comforting his own disciples, he said that they should weep and lament, and the world should rejoice. “But your sorrow shall be turned into joy; I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.” Let us hear also the consolation by the mouth of Christ’s special messenger to the Gentiles, whom he gave to us for a pattern to all who should after him

believe on Christ to life eternal: “God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”—(Rom. 16:20.) “God shall recompense tribulation to them which trouble you, but to you who are troubled, rest with us when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven.”—(2 Thess. 1:7.) “God will render unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile.”—(Rom 2:7, &c.)

When we come to the last communication of Christ to his friends, we find all these things brought to a brilliant focus. In his revelation to John in Patmos, he tells us that he has received from the Father the commission expressed in Psalm 2:8: “Thou shalt break the nations with a rod of iron, thou shalt dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.” The execution of this work he expressly promises to share with those who are faithful to him, saying: “To him that overcometh and keepeth my works to the end to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I have received of my Father.” He exhibits to us in advance the spectacle of the collision which results in this catastrophe to the power of the enemy. He shews us “the kings of the earth and their armies” on the one side, gathered together against himself and “those that are with him,” on the other; and he tells us of the victory which remains with the latter in “the war of the great day of God Almighty.” He shows us in dragon-symbol the power of the enemy chained and imprisoned; the winepress of God’s indignation against the world trodden by himself in terrible works of judgment, and all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of Jehovah and His Christ, and their glorious possession by the saints who live and reign with him a thousand years and beyond.

The answer to Jeremiah’s question is therefore obvious and complete. He did not receive that answer in the fulness in which we possess it, nevertheless he had it with sufficient definiteness for the day of his need. We have the answer more abundantly, because our need is greater in a day when God holds His peace as appointed, and when there are no visible tokens of His presence. The answer is plain and strengthening, so that he who readeth may run with patience the toilsome race set before him in the gospel. That answer is, that in a time appointed the prosperity of the wicked will come to an end, when there will be no more need to ask the question which distressed Jeremiah. There is great need to emphasise on this fact, both for the encouragement of those who have set their hope in God, and the warning of such as are liable to weary in well doing, God Himself says. “Say ye to the righteous that it shall be

well with him, for the reward of his hands shall be given to him.”—(Isa. 3:10.) The deferring of this dispensation of judgment may weary, but it cannot alter the reality of the fact when it shall come. On this point the word speaks to us comfortably, thus: “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is set in them to do evil: though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God.”

It is this apparent slowness in the execution of the divine decrees that we have to fortify ourselves against. We must remember what Peter says: that the Lord is not slack concerning his promise as some men count slackness: a thousand years with him are as a watch in the night, to use the expression of Moses; and as one day, according to Peter. What we have to do is to wait in patient obedience all the days of our appointed time. We must not forget how much reason there is in it. Judgment, which was to include ourselves and all who have gone before us, could not take place in the days of Adam, nor of David, nor of Christ. It was needful that God should appoint a day when all His servants should be vindicated and glorified together; and the fixing of this day involves the deferring of all judgment till then. Let us not be little children and murmur at the delays of wisdom.

Not only the delay of judgment, but the triumph of ungodliness in the earth is a necessary preparation for the results involved in that judgment. For how could we be exercised in faith and patience, and how could the unspeakable joy of release from the present evil world be prepared for us without that very planting and prosperity and establishment of the wicked which distressed Jeremiah, and which will wring groans from the pilgrim’s breast till the very hour of the avengement ? The plan is great and wise, and only becomes the more apparently so to every effort of enlightened reason. This is the case even when we confine our view to man’s side of the question only, but how greatly is our perception of the matter quickened when God’s side of the case is taken into account. The earth and its inhabitants are His, and He has made them for His pleasure. His holiness and His majesty are ineffably exalted beyond our conceptions, yet His will has been violated and set aside in the history of mankind. It is of His own pure beneficence that there is any arrangement at all for a rectification of the mischief that has come from this rebellion. That there should be slowness in the development of this arrangement is not for created man to complain of; rather is it for us to rejoice and give praise that in the good pleasure of His own will He hath purposed in the ages to come to show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

The one danger to which we are exposed is the liability to forget the consolation applicable to the sorrows of the new man in Christ Jesus. It is a consolation that may be called farfetched more ways than one, but it is the consolation in which God has been pleased to exercise his children in the cloudy and dark day of their probation. It is a consolation only to be found in the word of His testimony, and it requires to be constantly renewed. Our knowledge of the consolation to day will not serve for next week's conflict. Our minds are forgetful even of human things, and much more of those thoughts and ways of God which are so much higher than our own ways and thoughts, therefore our poor memories have to be continually refreshed. Our special danger is that we may not feel the need of this refreshment. The lust of other things enters in and chokes the Word. There are many objects of interest and affection in the economy of our present life, and between these and the natural mind, which is nearly omnipotent with us all at the start, there is almost the affinity of chemical force.

When we give place to those things the mind is pleased and entertained, and as the entertainment has its source in human ways and present things, there is not only no need felt for the consolations of the Word, but a feeling of aversion is liable to spring up towards them. The Scriptures have to do with divine ways and future things, and are therefore liable to lose their interest for those whose affections are not set upon these. This is at one time or another the case with us all, and here we must fight and conquer, or be conquered. In the course of daily life there are things we can choose to have to do with, or let alone. Paul recognises this in advising us to lay aside every weight; that is, everything that will act as a drag in the race we are running for eternal life. Some do not choose to lay them aside, but cumber themselves with occupations and associations at variance with the objects of the calling which every man has accepted who has put on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such a choice can only be due to a want of recognition of the practical nature of the demands which the gospel makes.

Those demands have to do entirely with the present life; and if men exclude them, there can only arise one result, the decay of the spiritual man now, and denial by Christ at his coming. Spiritual vigour now, and recognition by Christ at his coming, can only be secured in the way the Spirit itself has provided, and that is, first, by a diligent submission to its tuition in the word, which practically means the daily and methodical reading of the Scriptures, and secondly, by an avoidance of the pleasures of the world and the society of fools. Compliance with the Spirit's requirements in these particulars may entail

a sense of deprivation sometimes, but in the long run it brings great satisfaction and peace, and lays up in store a harvest that the appointed time of joy and well being, which it is alike beyond the power of speech to exaggerate, or human imagination to conceive.

Robert Roberts, The Christadelphian 1877 page 441–446.

Sheep and Goats

*“... then shall the king say unto them on his right hand,
Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from
the foundation of the world” (Mat. 25:34).*

Paul also speaks of those who will “inherit the kingdom” or otherwise, saying thus: “know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1Cor.6:9). And again, he writes: “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God...” (1Cor.15:50).

It is clear then, that those who will inherit and enter into the Kingdom of God are the righteous, who are no longer flesh and blood, but energised by the Spirit in glorious incorruptibility – just like their Lord himself (see context of 1Cor.15). There is some discussion as to whether the Sheep and Goats are nations, or individuals: the present writer holds to the latter on the following basis:

- The “righteous” are said to “inherit the kingdom” (vs 34), and as per above, according to 1 Corinthians 15:50, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”. Hence inheriting the kingdom can only be for those who are immortalised.
- The class of men who are accepted constitute “the righteous”. Yet, righteousness can only be given upon the basis of faith: righteousness is imputed to the faithful (Rom. 4:5).
- The “righteous” are said to enter “into life eternal”, and whilst this expression can have the sense of the age-long life, i.e. life during the millennium, when used in connection with righteousness and an inheritance, it seems more likely to refer to the immortal nature of the saints who enter into the joy of their Lord.

Matthew 25 describes the qualifications for entry into the kingdom:

“I was an hungered and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and ye took me in: Naked and ye clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me” (Mat.25:35-36).

None of these things require great skill or training: they are simple things that the lowliest disciple can do. And these are things that the faithful do without even realising it, saying: “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee etc.” (Mat.25:37-39). Notice, this doing of good to the brethren - and so to the Lord - is so ingrained in them, that they don’t even know they have done it!

But for the unfaithful, they didn’t even see the opportunity to attend to their brethren’s needs, also asking: “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered etc.” The simple things by way of tending to each other’s needs, are the things that can so easily be overlooked, as in this case of the rejected. Yet they are necessary for the righteous to enter into the joy of their Lord. To meet with the Lord’s approval, the faithful must seek the opportunity to care for their brethren and sisters: then they shall be blessed by inheriting the kingdom with him.

This attitude of mind is very instructive when it comes to working in the ecclesia. Tending to the needs of the brethren and sisters is a very important job. Rather than focusing on our own affairs, we should be looking for ways that we can serve our brethren and sisters. Even as it is written: “look not every man on his own things, but every man **also on the things of others**” (Phil. 2:4). As we say, what is sobering about this parable, is that the Goat class didn’t even see those opportunities! The faithful are proactive in looking to the needs of their fellow-servants, for all will experience afflictions of one form or another, and all need the help and support to bear the burdens of life. If we cannot see this, then that places us in the Goat category, a grave situation which we must seek to rectify.

Those who are accepted by the Great Shepherd, are those who hear his voice (Jno. 10:3), and who lay down their lives in service: “Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 Jno. 3:17). Our duty is clear, but whether or not we discharge it is entirely up to us to decide!

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