

# The Old Paths – April / June : 2020 – № 26

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**H**usbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

(Ephesians 5:25-27)



## From the Editor's Desk

### **“THE WORD OF GOD – A MIRROR TO LOOK INTO”**

**“For if any be a hearer of the Word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding (contemplating) his natural face in a glass (mirror): For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was” (James 1:23-24)**

No greater delusion can be conceived than to imagine that merely hearing or even learning the Word of God, is all that is necessary. It is a mistake just to study the Word in order to develop a sermon to preach to others. An understanding of its meaning, words and tenses is very helpful. True benefit is firstly hearing personally, reading individually, meditating upon the Word for our own upbuilding, applying it to ourselves and doing what it says. When we look into the mirror we may need to make changes.

The unresponsive hearer is likened unto a man beholding his face in a mirror and forgetting his appearance. We look into a mirror to see ourselves. A careless look may make little impression and is immediately evanescent. A closer look, an examination, may reveal something needing attention. A penetrating gaze perseveres. “Let a man examine himself” (1Cor. 11:28). An honest inspection may demand adjustment. The real contrast is between one who “forgetteth” and one who “continueth” (v25); “But whoso looketh

into the perfect law of liberty (the Divine precepts of God's Word, righteousness obtained by faith and lived in practice), and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the Work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (v25). The Bible is God's guide book for our conduct. We must continue abiding in its teaching and work out its precepts making when necessary, the practical adjustments in our lives. Thus the hearer of the "WORD" becomes a doer of the "WORK" (James 1:25).

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## Worship in Mark's Gospel

It may be because Mark is the Gospel of Christ as the Servant, that there is not the same emphasis on worship. We still read of those who "bowed down before Him", but the word "worship" is not used as often as it is in Matthew. However, this just seems to highlight three references to worship which contrast remarkably with the loving adoration He received according to Matthew's record. They are found in Mark's accounts of the healing of the Gadarene demoniac, of the rebuke of the man-centred worship of the Jews, and of the ill-treatment of the Lord by the Roman soldiers.

### Desperate and Demon-possessed Worship

(Mark 5:6) - "But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped Him". This man was obviously not habitually a worshipper of God. He was oppressed and dominated by evil spirits. Yet the presence of the Lord Jesus constrained him to come urgently, to run to Him and worship. The question may arise: was it the man running to the Lord in desperation? Or was it the demons recognising the supreme authority of the One against whom they had rebelled? If it is the first, then it proves that even a legion of devils cannot keep a sinner from Christ, if he wants to be delivered. This of course would also have made it necessary for the evil spirits to give in to the superior power of the Son of God. So, it could be understood as a combination of the two alternatives.

Thus, this passage assures us of two most important facts: 1) Any sinner can come to Christ and obtain deliverance - "Whosoever will may come"; and 2) even the most powerful of evil beings, even Satan himself, will eventually acknowledge that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father".

### Human and Hypocritical Worship

(Mark 7:7) - "Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men". The Jewish teachers were criticising the disciples for not obeying their traditional interpretation. The Lord shows that these Jews were themselves fulfilling the words of the Lord in Isaiah 29, "This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me". The human heart is naturally deceitful and hypocritical, and the subjects of holiness and worship always expose it as such. The secret of holiness and true worship is to love God. To be more holy we must love Him more.

However, the human heart is always ready to devise means by which it can appear to be more holy and pious, while still being sinful and corrupt. The sect of the Pharisees originated in times of revival in the days of Nehemiah. But, as always seems to happen, following generations lost the spiritual element and endeavoured to maintain the appearance of piety in their own strength. To do this they overlaid the law of Moses with numerous interpretations and traditions which applied to every detail of their lives. As the Lord says, they ended up contradicting the Scriptures. Making God's commandments of no effect through their traditions.

There is still the same danger today. We may discover an example or a principle in the word of God, and in our love for the Lord desire to apply it to our lives. That is excellent. But then another generation comes along, who do not have the same love for the Lord, nor are sensitive to the examples and principles found

in the Scriptures. Yet they want to walk in the ways of their forefathers, so they turn those examples and principles into precepts and commandments and condemn those who disobey them.

God is not satisfied with outward conformity. He is seeking true worshippers who worship Him in spirit and truth. He does not want a mere outward shell of apparent godliness, but He does want an outward godliness which springs from a living and loving relationship with Himself. It is not that the traditions we follow are necessarily wrong, but they must never be a question of mere imitation and conformity. We must draw near to God in our hearts, and then we will sincerely desire to obey the precepts of His word and live in the light of the examples and principles it contains. God does not want substitute holiness nor imitation worship, He desires “truth in the inner man”. Man’s corrupt heart cannot produce this, all that proceeds from ourselves is corrupt. We must “worship God in the Spirit” and “walk in the Spirit” so as not to fulfil the lusts of the flesh (Philippians 3:3; Galatians 5:16).

### **Malicious and Mocking Worship**

(Mark 15:19) - “And they smote Him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon Him, and bowing their knees worshipped Him”. The soldiers had put a crown of long, sharp thorns on His head and with the cane drove the thorns deeper into His scalp. They spat on Him as the most extreme expression of their hatred and disdain. Then they bow the knee in mocking worship. Yet nothing happened to them. They put His own clothes back on Him and led Him out to endure the ultimate shame and agony of crucifixion. Still nothing happened to them. No judgment fell, although the lesser impiety of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:2) and of Uzza (1Chronicles 13:10) had resulted in immediate death.

He prays for His tormenters. He does not want them to perish. He is suffering there to bring them to God. It is still true today that “the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). Yet, although none would ever think to use names like Buddha or Mohamed for their oaths and curses, the names of God and Christ are used by millions all over the world to express anger or frustration. Yet no judgment falls on them. He is still longsuffering towards us. Notice how the power of Christ’s longsuffering and grace is wonderfully seen at the cross. The centurion who had overseen the mockery and crucifixion of the Lord, hardened soldier that he was, “when he saw that He so cried out, and gave up the ghost ... said, Truly, this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

Such is the emphasis of Mark’s Gospel as to the subject of worship. Through the selfless service and atoning death of the perfect Servant we can see that: 1) The desperate and demon-possessed can become true worshippers; 2) The most precise and legalistic religionists are proved to be vain worshippers; 3) Those who mock the very thought of worshipping God and Christ, can end up giving Him the glory due unto His Name.

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## **The Acts of the Apostles**

### **Chapter 8:26-40**

#### **Philip is re-directed (v.26)**

The ministry of an evangelist should be subject to divine guidance, not human arrangement. He does not necessarily have a defined sphere of service. Natural wisdom would dictate that Philip stay with a demonstrably fruitful field of labour in Samaria. But not so. The blessing of one individual is also precious and similarly the object of divine activity. So we have “the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip” (v26) and “the Spirit said unto Philip” (v29). Perhaps angels may have more to do with the ordering of the circumstances, while the focus of the Holy Spirit may be to do with the communication of truth to the soul. That said, while there is an inscrutability about the movements of God in the outworking of His purpose,

and He is under no obligation to provide explanation or elaboration, it is vital that His servants comply with His directions.

The message was unmistakeable, “Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert”. It was also brief, containing no information or detail beyond the immediate. God’s word is first “a lamp unto my feet” before it is “a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). God cannot be expected to amplify on His forward intentions if we have failed to comply with His initial communications!

God will never give significant further light until the revelation of His will that He has already given is obeyed. That holds true in relation to unsaved people and Gospel truth; to believers in relation to truth about baptism and church order; and to servants of the Lord in relation to directions for service. Philip was responsive to divine direction even though he did not know all the reasons or details: “he arose and went” (v27). Philip obeyed even when he did not understand.

### **The African seeker (v.27,28)**

We are now introduced to an important personage: “Behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure” (v27). His nationality, ethnicity, his occupation and his personal integrity are conveyed in an economy of words. This trusted official “had come to Jerusalem for to worship”. He may have been a Jewish ‘proselyte of the gate’, that is one born a Gentile but who had converted to Judaism, and was making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Or he may have been simply a devout person or God-fearer with an attraction towards Judaism. Although he was personally excluded from full participation in the “congregation of the LORD” (Deut. 23:1), the removal of that prohibition is anticipated (Isa. 56:3-5). Nevertheless the anticipation that generated and sustained his journey of some 1,500 miles from Ethiopia to Jerusalem must have ended with a sense of anticlimax and disappointment. Whatever benefit and blessing he anticipated had not been realised at Jerusalem. It was not his fault. It was very unlikely that he would ever have been accepted at the temple but, more recently, the nation of Israel had rejected the very One who had come to be the Blessor, even our Lord Jesus Christ.

While the Ethiopian may have been disappointed at Jerusalem, he was still a seeker: his sincere search continued. If the temple and tradition had failed to satisfy him he had acquired, and likely at considerable cost, a copy – and perhaps only a partial copy – of the Old Testament Scriptures. Success is only secured by those who overcome initial disappointment and discouragement. In the spiritual realm God often tests reality before giving assistance to the seeker. So he was “returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias [Isaiah] the prophet”.

### **The African saved (v.29-35)**

As the Ethiopian was sitting in his covered wagon, tracing with his finger the words of Isaiah chapter 53 and speaking the words aloud, his intelligent mind was grappling with the meaning of the text. In parallel the Holy Spirit communicated an unmistakable message to Philip “Go near, and join thyself to this chariot”. Philip responded immediately and was sufficiently close to hear the Ethiopian reading and to converse with him. Then follows one of Scripture’s most wonderful questions and answer: Philip’s “Understandest thou what thou readest?” and the Ethiopian’s “How can I, except some man should guide me.” Without a willing mind and without divine illumination the Scriptures are a closed book to the natural man, no matter how cultured and intelligent they may be.

Yet God does not leave this earnest and enquiring Ethiopian to remain in ignorance as to the way of salvation. There are no accidental occurrences or coincidences with God. Rather everything is in accordance with His arrangement and is in step with the actions of the man. The Ethiopian eunuch had opportunity to obtain a copy of Isaiah; and he purchased it. He was also reading the Scriptures he had purchased. He was not only reading but was pondering the words, even though he did not know the significance of the message. It was then, when away from all other distractions that he invited the provided preacher to join in the consideration of Isaiah chapter 53 verses 7 and 8. It is the Greek Septuagint version of that text that is here recorded in Acts 8:32,33. This speaks of the voluntary submission of a sheep taken

to the slaughter, of the silent acceptance of the barbarity of a lamb (not a sheep) being prematurely sheared, the humiliation of mob rule, the vicious hatred disregarding innocence and denying justice, and a life cruelly cut off in its prime. The Ethiopian has been trying to clarify in his mind as to whom the “he” or “his” in these verses is referring. Hence his questions, “I pray thee, of whom speakest the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?”

What an invitation? Philip was only too pleased to open "his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus". Evidently he expounded much more than is recorded for us in Acts chapter 8. The subject preached is inexhaustible, the Gospel, the ‘good news’ about Jesus. This exposition of Isaiah chapter 53 in a wagon jolting its way between Jerusalem and Gaza is outstanding. For the very first time in Scripture it is explicitly asserted that the Suffering Servant of Isaiah chapter 53 is none other than that wondrous Person, Jesus, whom Philip is now preaching. No doubt the Lord applied this text to Himself during His post resurrection/pre ascension teaching to His own, when He opened “their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures” (Lk. 24:45). This ministry has since been continued by the “Spirit of truth” (Jn. 16:13,14). But here, in Scripture, the explicit link of the Person to the text is unfolded to this African government official; something that Jews then, and Jews now, failed to grasp and are totally blind to.

### **The African baptised (v.36-38)**

Having heard Philip's declarations about the Lord Jesus Christ, as developed from Isaiah 53:7,8, it seems as if the Ethiopian eunuch believed the message immediately. Again faith in Christ is followed by baptism, which demonstrates that baptism is not only for Jewish believers.

It would seem that Philip had covered the subject of baptism in his extended, but unrecorded, personal teaching. What is evident, however, is that there was a sufficiency of water, whether in a water storage cistern or the sea. Also that both Philip and the eunuch went into the water. Complete immersion is indicated by the words “and they went down both into the water” and “when they were come up out of the water”. Both entering the water refutes the idea of baptism being by sprinkling or anointing. We should also note that their emergence was not merely coming up from the edge of the water body, but “up out of”.

### **The African's onward journey (v.39)**

After the baptism occurred “the Spirit of the Lord caught [snatched] away Philip”. Thus this chapter, which started with death [that of Stephen], ends with the snatching away of Philip giving a foretaste of the rapture (1Thess. 4:17). The object of the Ethiopian's faith was not Philip, “the eunuch saw him no more”, but the Lord Himself. Earlier in this chapter we had Simon the sorcerer who was fixated by preachers but who totally missed having the Lord in faith; the Ethiopian having the Lord by faith could bear the loss of preachers, no matter how beneficial they were.

Although the true preconversion status of this man cannot be definitively ascertained, the conversion of the Ethiopian represents another stage in the movement of grace towards the Gentiles. His onward journey will be with the Saviour, with the Holy Spirit indwelling, with the Scriptures, with salvation, with the gospel: which, after all, is our ongoing resource as well.

Amazing that the man entrusted with stewardship of the treasures of the Queen of Ethiopia, returns bringing with him even greater treasures; eternal life and a portion of the Scriptures!

### **Philip's onward journey (v.40)**

Philip “was found at Azotus”, formerly Ashdod of the Philistines and then he journeys north along the Mediterranean coast “and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea”, which was a Gentile city and a Roman colony. Cæsarea later became Philip's home (Acts 21:8) if it wasn't then already. Such was the joy of the preacher used mightily of God in Samaria, and specifically in relation to the Ethiopian eunuch, he just preached all the way home; or certainly to Cæsarea! We are not told of any converts in those cities, but whether the results are many, or one or more, it is the preacher's sole responsibility to preach: the saving is dependent alone upon God.

(To be continued D.V.)

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## ASSEMBLY RECEPTION

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There is not any subject involving assembly order that is capable of revealing greater differences of mind than reception. Carefulness in reception has been attacked as extremism, and no one can deny that extremes have been evident, but this has not been confined only to those who have been over careful. We attempt here to take a fresh look at the Scriptures regarding this great safeguard of assembly testimony.

The assembly is made up of a company of baptized believers in a particular locality, who gather together regularly in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ for collective testimony. It is "the fellowship" of Acts 2:42 in which they share as full partners, enjoying the privileges and shouldering the responsibilities of the "continuing steadfastly" in this fellowship. Each believer is "within" in contrast to the "without" of 1Corinthians 5:13. This initial reception is one aspect of this truth, but all who are to be subsequently received as commended visitors or gifted teachers of the Word of God to other assemblies must have been initially received into one assembly (Acts 9:26).

### THE PRESERVATION OF ONENESS

Mr Henry Dyer stated in his day, "The assembly receives; it receives to its fellowship; it receives on competent testimony." Are we to be charged with "Needed Truthism" because we still believe that this is the pattern for reception? Mr Thomas Newberry wrote regarding reception; "The act to be valid, must be the act of the whole assembly, and opportunity should be given for the assembly to express its judgment or by its silence to signify its assent". However we go back to a far greater authority than the best of men and learn that it was the act of the assembly in Rome to receive Phebe "in the Lord" and it was the privilege of the assembly to assist her. Reception is never personal nor individual. No one can read Romans 16 and think that one name only was attached to Phebe's commendation even though it is the name of an Apostle.

It is a mistake to think of reception as a one-way avenue. It must be a mutual thing. The assembly receives the individual, and that individual receives the assembly in its teaching and practices (1Cor. 14:23-25). It can only be called dishonest to receive a person who is not aware of the beliefs of the assembly. We have seen people who have later confessed that had they known what they were being received into, they would never have applied. They found the assembly too "restricted" to suit them, and therefore they had never truly received the assembly in the first place. If reception then is to be mutual, surely some time is required for the assembly to know who is being received and for the individual to know, into what he is being received.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF CAREFULNESS

Acts 20:29 is the warning of Paul to the Ephesian elders that "grievous wolves" would "enter in" among them, not sparing the flock. Galatians 2:4 states that false brethren had been "brought in secretly" to the assembly at Jerusalem attempting by Judaizing methods to bring Paul and his fellow-workers into bondage. Under conditions that parallel our time, Jude speaks of "certain men crept in unawares". The dangers involved in these warnings are real and it would be to the hurt of any testimony to ignore them. False shepherds and false teachers are the objects of these warnings. The teaching of 1Thessalonians 5:12-13, if obeyed, would save us from such calamities, which in spite of all the warnings, still occur among assemblies. The exhortation is "to know them", and when a man who is to teach the believers is involved, it will take time to know a man's life and labours. "Lay hands suddenly on no man" (1Tim. 5:22), applies to just such a case.

It has been said that Paul did not bring a letter with him in Acts 9:26-30 to Jerusalem because of the haste of his departure from Damascus. However, we have no authority for believing that an assembly existed at Damascus at this time even though there were certain disciples there (v19), no doubt driven there by the very persecution in which Saul was involved. This writer believes that Saul was received initially by the

assembly at Jerusalem and some of the details of that reception are that (1) he was introduced by the well-known Barnabas; (2) brought before the Apostles; (3) an account heard of his conversion, his call and his confession of Christ. Then “he was with them – at Jerusalem”. When such care is taken to the best of human ability, it safeguards the assembly.

### **THE PERCEPTION OF FITNESS**

The fact that the assembly is a “garden enclosed” suggests to our hearts the delight of God in His gathered people. The wall of separation from worldliness in all its forms, is most unpalatable to the natural mind. Nehemiah would teach us by illustration the importance of the walls, but also remind us that in the walls are gates. The assembly should have gatekeepers like Shemaiah in Nehemiah 3:29. Shepherds in the assembly have been entrusted with the care of the (little) flock (Acts 20:28). Taking oversight involves feeding and caring and none would deny that part of the caring is protective in character. So in every healthy assembly there must be men of discernment, in whom the assembly has confidence, who are true keepers of the door.

While we believe the primary meaning of “building upon the foundation” in 1Corinthians 3:10, involves the responsibility of the teacher, yet practice is the result of good teaching. If care is to be taken as to what is taught, then this includes care as to who is received. This is godly care, in the fear of the Lord, seeking Divine wisdom and guidance, as to who is fit for assembly reception.

The charge has been laid that many make light and not life, the grounds of reception. But surely those who charge this, do not themselves mean that a person can participate in any way in an assembly gathering without some light as to what they are doing and why. Can an action without understanding have any meaning to me or to God? However, if it is maintained that to be received a person must reach a certain level of knowledge beyond being able to appreciate that the Lord is present (1Cor. 14:25), and His word is being obeyed (Acts 2:41-42), then this is an extreme that we should avoid. Even more important than a level of knowledge is a teachable spirit and such a spirit should be discernible, in fact, it should be a requirement of reception.

### **THE PROBLEM OF THOROUGHNESS**

Many have stated that they receive all who are clean in life and pure in doctrine, and then with this as their standard, practice “occasional fellowship” and welcome those who will shortly be returning to their denominational place. Such people are received to a breaking of bread meeting, which although it is not their usual practice seem to feel it is vitally important on this one occasion that they obey the Lord. The New Testament never supposes a breaking of bread apart from an established assembly testimony, and never suggests reception to a breaking of bread.

Perhaps it is because at the breaking of bread meeting, the back seat is evident, and at this time, letters of commendation from visitors are generally read, many have thought reception was to this one meeting. The Scripture teaches reception to the fellowship of the assembly, of which the Lord’s supper is one of the high privileges. Acts 2:41-42 stands in contradiction to any occasional fellowship. To “continue stedfastly” is the pattern of Acts 2, a pattern which can be clearly traced in the corrective letter written to the Corinthian assembly.

The problem of thoroughness is very evident to every assembly elder. A few minutes before the commencement of a meeting, strangers to the assembly present themselves for fellowship. If they come uncommended, and little is known of their doctrine or conduct, is it not reasonable to plead for time to find out? How can we say a person is clean in life and pure in doctrine when they are unknown?

### **A PLEA FOR GRACIOUSNESS**

Even when the Word of God is handled in a spirit of grace and love there will be those who will be offended by its truths. Although this is unavoidable, there is no excuse for being personally offensive in our conduct. A kind and gracious treatment of all who come to the assembly’s meeting place, will be honouring to that blessed Name in which we gather.



Autonomy may not be the best term to use in speaking of the assembly as being responsible to the Lord alone. We are not self-governed, for the assembly is the “House of God” where there is Divine authority (the Word of God), and Divine rule, (the Holy Spirit). However, neither is the assembly under the control of other assemblies or other men. A right understanding of the seven stars in the right hand of the Risen Lord, and of His position as He walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, will give me to see that each assembly is directly linked to Him. It is therefore through Him the one assembly is linked to another.

Letters of commendation are clearly part of the pattern of the New Testament assembly (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1; 2Cor. 3:1-3, etc). The letter given to a receiving assembly is to inform them regarding the believer who is visiting or coming to reside among them. To act upon the contents of this letter is the responsibility of the receiving assembly. The letter in itself is not a ticket of admission. Responsible brethren will answer to the Lord alone as to how they handle such a commendation.

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## Get to Know Your Bible

### NEW TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 5.

#### THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

In the Gospels, the theme is that of the Son revealing the Father. Luke’s Gospel tells of the birth of Christ, the Son of Man Who came forth from God and His life and work as the Perfect Man down here. Luke completes the story in the book of the Acts with the Spirit revealing the Lord risen from the dead, the birth of the Church, the Son having returned to the Father, a Glorified Man up there.

The O.T. commences with five historical books, the Pentateuch, written by Moses. The N.T. opens with five books which are historical in character. These books present the facts which form the foundation upon which the whole structure of the Christian faith is built. In the four Gospels we read of the Lord working distinctively with His disciples. In the Acts we see the Holy Spirit working through the apostles.

In Acts chapter 1 the Holy Spirit is promised; Ch. 2, appeared unto them as cloven tongues like as of fire; Ch. 4, filled Peter as he preached; Ch. 5, Ananias lied to the Holy Ghost; Ch. 6, the apostles were “full of the Holy Ghost”; Ch. 7, Stephen was full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; Ch. 8, the Samaritans received the Holy Ghost; Ch. 10, when Peter preached to the Gentiles, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the Word. In later chapters, Paul and Barnabas were filled and were at times, forbidden by the Holy Ghost. “They assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not” (Acts 16:7).

The Gospels conclude with the resurrection of Christ. The book of Acts takes up the theme from that point; “With great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 4:33). From the day of Pentecost onward, they were indwelt, empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit. Through their witness many thousands trusted Christ for salvation and identified with Him in His death through the waters of baptism. Local churches were established, and from these assemblies of the Lord’s people the Gospel spread and so extended the work of the Lord in their own local districts. Despite opposition without and failure within; “The Word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied” (Acts 6:7), and “So were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5).

“Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). This was fulfilled uniquely and fully in Acts chapter 2. Pentecost is as unrepeatable as Calvary. There was the *sound*; ‘a rushing mighty wind’, heavenly, mighty, sovereignty, which filled all the house leaving no room for anything else. There was a *sight*: ‘cloven tongues like as of fire’. There was a *sign*; ‘began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance’. God is now



using the tongue instead of the sword. The preaching of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, like fire, consumes the dross, breaks the bonds of sin, softens the hardest heart, illuminates the darkness, reveals Christ as Saviour and tests the reality.

The Gospels in the N.T., like the book of Genesis in the O.T., form the beginnings. The book of Acts, like the book of Exodus, tells of the coming out from the old into a new order. It presents a risen Lord Jesus Christ working through His apostles by the Holy Spirit. It must be emphasised in studying the book of the Acts that the believers were indwelt by the Holy Spirit but as yet, they did not possess the full canon of the Holy Scriptures. In Acts, there is a transition period before the other books of the N.T. were written and the church epistles were available. Some practices in the early church period became obsolete with the completion of the written doctrines of the full canon of the Holy Scriptures. All doctrines and practices must therefore be supported by scriptural authority from the church epistles. Ten of Paul's epistles were written during this period and provide the context and confirmation of the doctrinal teaching in the book of Acts.

### THE WRITER

Luke is the only Gentile writer in the New Testament. He was inspired to write about the spread of the Gospel to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. Luke was a travel companion of Paul, indicated by the "we" passages (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18; 27:1-28:16). He never mentions his own name.

### THE WITNESS

"Ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This is the key verse. This ever widening circle of witness gives a general outline of the book: Jerusalem chapters 1-7; Judæa chapters 8:1-9:31; the end of the earth, the Gentile countries of chapters 9:32-28:31. Luke tells us in his Gospel that when the Lord Jesus was on the Cross; "A superscription also was written over Him in letters of Greek (the language of Athens), and Latin (the language of Rome), and Hebrew" (the language of Jerusalem) (Luke 23:38). Luke's Gospel tells of the Lord's visits to towns and villages. In Acts, Luke writes about the Gospel, the preaching of the Cross, reaching out to the cities and great centres of habitation in the then human world. Thirty nine different cities and thirty different countries, provinces and islands are referred to and almost all of them are located outside the land of Israel.

In chapters 1-12, Peter is the prominent witness. He was the apostle to the circumcision. In chapters 13-28, Paul is the prominent servant. Peter was regarded as being unlearned and ignorant (Acts 4:13), a fisherman from Bethsaida in Galilee, brought to the Lord by his brother Andrew. Paul, a tentmaker from Tarsus in Cilicia, was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the perfect manner of the law, and was arrested by the risen and glorified Christ as he went to Damascus (Acts 22:3-8). At conversion each of these men received a new name from the Lord. Peter was baptised and Paul was separated by the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4; 13:1-3). Both were filled by the Holy Ghost (Acts 4:8; 13:9). Both were opposed when they each healed a lame man (Acts 3:1; 14:8). They thought that Peter was drunken. They said Paul was mad (Acts 2:13-15; 26:24-25). We are all quite different one from another yet commissioned by the risen Lord Jesus Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We also have at our disposal, power to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

The word "witness" is a key word in Acts being used over thirty times. Sometimes it was received as the Word of God and not the word of man so that people were saved through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. On other occasions the witness was rejected and the witnesses were persecuted, yet they considered it an honour to be counted worthy to suffer for His Name. It is still our privilege and responsibility to be "witnesses unto Me" (Acts 1:8).

### THE WORK

In the first verse Luke refers to his Gospel, "The former treatise have I made, ... of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). In the Gospel account we marvel at the life and work of the Lord Jesus as He lived on earth. In the book of the Acts, we read of the continuation of the work of the Lord in the lives of

His disciples as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. When the law was first preached, 3000 men were killed (Ex. 32:28). As the first recorded message was preached after the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, 3000 were saved. The period of the Lord's life on earth was approximately 33 years. Acts covers a period of about 33 years, AD 33-66.

### THE WORD

Four features summarise the spread of the Word of God:

- 1) Power (1:8). "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you". This was fulfilled, "When the day of Pentecost was fully come" (2:1).
- 2) Preaching (4:2). They "Preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead".
- 3) Persecution. This was foretold by the Lord in Matthew 22:1-10. Stephen was martyred, James was killed, Peter was imprisoned, and the last 8 chapters record Paul's captivity chapters 21-28.
- 4) Progress. Six sections of this book mark the advance of the Gospel over major obstacles. These refrain verses are very important. They summarise the work and develop the order of the book as given by the Lord (1:8). As in his Gospel, Luke records events in their moral associations not just in simple sequence. This is the longest book in the N.T. It is the last historical book in the Bible yet it should not just be studied as history. It is written in an orderly way to give a deeper understanding of God's programme and purposes coming out from the old order and into the new order of His dealings with mankind. If the book of Acts is understood and studied with this development and victory in mind, it will thrill and encourage our hearts until we reach the last page.

Acts 6:7 – JERUSALEM. "And the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of priests were obedient to the faith". This was in spite of the continued hatred of the elders, scribes, Pharisees, and the Jewish council. Possibly some of these priests had seen that the veil of the temple had been rent in twain.

Acts 9:31 – JUDÆA, GALILEE and SAMARIA. "Then had the churches rest through all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied". This was after the stoning of Stephen and great persecution and opposition over Temple ritual and worship.

Acts 12:24 – ANTIOCH (in Syria, 11:19). "But the Word of God grew and multiplied". This was in spite of the blasphemy of Herod, the killing of James and the imprisonment of Peter. This was triumph over nationalistic reasoning's and Jewish prejudices.

Acts 16:5 – GALATIA, ANTIOCH (in Phrygia 16:6). "And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily". This was the victorious message of the Grace of the Gospel overcoming the vehement hatred of Jewish legalists.

Acts 19:17-20 – PHILIPPI, THESSALONICA, ATHENS, CORINTH, EPHESUS. "So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed". This summarises the triumph of the Word in these Gentile cities over the paganism and heathen superstition of the Roman world.

Acts 28:30-31 – ROME. "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him". This may seem to be an abrupt conclusion to the book. The book of Acts ends with the glorious completion of the fulfilment of God's plans, purposes and programme as commissioned by our blessed risen Lord Jesus Christ in Acts 1:8. This was a great encouragement given by God to His servants, and to all His servants even today, who preach the glorious Gospel. Paul was not controlled by Cæsar nor Rome but all was in the hands of the Lord who sent him. "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16).

## THE EPISTLES

### THE WRITERS

The New Testament Contains twenty seven books and has three sections:-

Historical – The Gospels and the Acts

Epistolary – Paul's Epistles and the General Epistles

Apocalyptic – The Revelation

The second division begins with thirteen letters written by the apostle Paul. Nine of these are called church epistles being written to seven churches. Three were written to individuals. Five were written while he was imprisoned in Rome. The other writers are James, Peter, John, Jude and the anonymous author of Hebrews.

### THE EPISTLES WRITTEN BY PAUL

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2Tim. 3:16). They are God inspired, that is, brought into being by the breath of God. God breathed out the scriptures. This does not mean that He breathed into the authors. He did not surpass the personality of the human author but raised it to a higher level of activity beneficial for:-

- (1) Doctrine – the act and content of the teaching
- (2) Reproof – warning by rebuke and conviction
- (3) Correction – setting right the wrong negativity but positively training and instructing in righteousness

In Romans, Ephesians and Thessalonians there is an emphasis on the great doctrines of the Cross, the Church and the Coming. In Corinthians, Philippians and Thessalonians, there is reproof for the lack of sanctification, unity and practical holiness. In Galatians, Colossians and Thessalonians there is correction of the denial of justification by faith alone, denial of the supremacy of Christ as Head and wrong thinking about saints that had fallen asleep and coming apostasy. This blend and overlapping of truth means that an overall study of the epistles is essential. We cannot treat each book as a text book for cloistered knowledge on a specific subject.

### THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST

As in all the Scriptures, Christ is the key to the nine church epistles written by Paul:-

**Romans:** Christ our Righteousness; "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ" (3:22).

**1Corinthians:** Christ Crucified; "We preach Christ crucified" (1:23).

**2Corinthians:** Christ Glorified; "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, ... For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God" (1:19-20).

**Galatians:** Christ our Liberty; "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free" (5:1).

**Ephesians:** Christ in the Heavenlies; "Blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (1:3).

**Philippians:** Christ our Object; "The high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (3:14).

**Colossians:** Christ our Hope; "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27).

**1Thessalonians:** Christ: His coming; "The presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming" (2:19).

**2Thessalonians:** Christ: His Revelation; "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels" (1:7).

### THE ATTACK UPON THE CHURCHES

It is to be stressed that the attacks upon each of the seven churches to which Paul wrote, were attacks upon the Person and Work of Christ:-

- (1) Romans by religious partiality (Rom. 3:9)

- (2) Corinthians by assembly carnality (1Cor. 3:1,3,4)
- (3) Galatians by Judaistic legality (Gal. 2:21)
- (4) Ephesians by coming disloyalty (Rev. 2:4)
- (5) Philippians by Christian disunity (Phil. 2:1-3)
- (6) Colossians by Gnostic philosophy (Col. 2:8)
- (7) Thessalonians by believers perplexity (1Thess. 4:13).

The local assembly, Paul wrote, is “The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Tim. 3:15). Testimony is still under attack and increasingly this is not due to minor opinions about church order or personalities, but hostility against those that believe the historical accuracy of the Bible that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead. He is the Risen Head, the glorified Saviour, our Redeemer and soon coming Lord. This great conflict between the assembly of God’s people and the world, the flesh and the devil will be seen to increase in the Epistles of Peter, James, John and Jude.

#### THE ORDER OF THE CHURCH EPISTLES WRITTEN BY PAUL

There is great merit in studying the epistles in the order given to us in the canon of the New Testament.

The doctrine of Romans coming first brings *Confirmation*. The writings to Corinth and Galatia are largely *Correction*. The teaching to the churches at Ephesus, Philippi and Colossians is *Constructive*. The words written to Thessalonica are *Comforting*. Thirteen of the New Testament Epistles, that is almost one half of the books of the New Testament bear the name of the apostle Paul. The words ‘letter’ or ‘epistle’ are practically interchangeable. As customary in that day, a writer would begin a letter with his name. Following his salutation, Paul made it a practice to add a note of thanksgiving for the readers. However, the lofty spirit and tone of the doctrinal sections distinguish them from the ordinary letter of that day. The spiritual eminence, inspirational vitality, permanent meaning and Divine authority give each epistle a meaning and quality that will forever distinguish it from a letter. Paul made it a practice to dictate his letters to an amanuensis (scribe) writing the concluding words himself.

The epistle of Hebrews is anonymous. John does not state his specific name in his Gospel. Luke does not record his literal name in Luke’s Gospel or Acts. The writer of Hebrews was so well known to the first readers, that they would have no doubt who wrote it because Paul’s influence upon it is evident.

Paul’s care of all the churches developed in his journeys and ever expanding sphere of labour. His epistles were not abstract studies in theology from the pen of a cloistered scholar. They arose from real life situations, answers to vital questions and pastoral care to feed and protect the flock from coming dangers. The sequence of writing by Paul as well as Peter, John and James indicate the development of increased persecution and the heresies which threatened the spiritual wellbeing of the churches.

#### PAUL’S PERSONAL EPISTLES

Four of Paul’s epistles are addressed to individuals as to their destination. This is evident in his letter to Philemon. However, it is obvious that the two letters to Timothy and the letter to Titus are extremely important for assembly life. The latter three were written following his first imprisonment.

#### THE PRISON EPISTLES

The letters written during Paul’s first imprisonment, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians are mainly Christological. The lesson is to dwell upon the lofty truths concerning the Person of Christ, His work, holy offices and coming glory to sustain us in the most dark, trying earthly circumstances. First Timothy and Titus were written after his first imprisonment, while 2Timothy, his final words, were penned during his second imprisonment before his death. The writings of Paul, compare with Job and the Psalms as we are allowed to share the inward feelings, the heartfelt throbs and burdens that he carried for his kinsman, the unsaved and the care of all the churches. This attitude of meekness, and humble obedience is vitally essential for the study of the Epistles.

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## Sound Doctrine

**“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1Timothy 4:16)**

A servant of God is not to be carried away by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14) and he is exhorted to hold fast to the sound doctrine of the Word of God. As a good minister of Jesus Christ he is to be rooted in the word of faith and in sound doctrine (1Tim. 4:6).

The apostle John advises us that if we do not abide in the doctrine of Christ we transgress and do not have God (2John 9). We are admonished by the apostle Paul to hold fast to the faithful word and be able to exhort and to convince the gainsayers with sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). We are to reprove, rebuke and exhort others with all longsuffering and doctrine (2Tim. 4:2). We are also enjoined to withdraw from those who do not hold the true doctrine (1Tim. 6:3).

We have summarized here, a few vital basic doctrinal truths a minister of God should hold on to. We are to be well grounded in sound doctrine.

### **The Holiness and Righteousness of God**

Everyone will readily agree that God is holy, righteous and just. The saying, “As is the God, so is the worshipper and as is the *guru*, so is the disciple”, is known all over India. This dictum itself should convince one of the hopelessness of the religious understanding of the general public. Such people very easily compromise with their God on the plea that “there is no sin to the mighty”. They excuse **themselves** by saying that they are doing only what their gods did! These sinful men are like such gods who only wink at sin. It is but natural, as they do not want to be condemned.

One of the reasons why people are not receptive to the gospel message is that they either underestimate or do not comprehend the *holiness* of God.

“Holiness of God is not to be conceived as one attribute among others; it is rather a general term representing the conception of His consummate perfection and total glory. It is His infinite moral perfection crowning His infinite intelligence and power. There is a glory of each attribute viewed in abstract and a glory of the whole together. God’s intellectual nature is the essential basis of His moral holiness. Infinite moral perfection is the crown of the Godhead. Holiness is to the total glory thus crowned.” – Hodge

Holiness is the only means by which holiness can be diffused. The holiness of God is quite alien to human understanding, and particularly to the general Indian concept, “*Holiness* becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever” (Psalm 93:5). “GOD hath sworn by His *holiness*” (Amos 4:2). Such scriptural passages will explain the impeccable holiness of God.

The awfulness of God’s holiness and the absolute righteousness of God demand a just punishment to be meted out to *sinners*. God’s perfect standard of justice is proclaimed in Deuteronomy 19:21, “And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot”.

Having decreed, “The soul that sinneth, it shall *die*” (Ezek. 18:4), God who always *loves* the sinner, had to find a way whereby He could justify the unjust, and yet vindicate His righteousness. How has this been accomplished? This we attempt to show in the chapter entitled “**The Central Theme of the Gospel**” (See TOP No. 25).

Pandit Nehemiah Gorey for years challenged whether anyone could produce a text from the Indian Shashtra's and Vedas asserting that the Supreme Being has ever **created** anything, or asserting in our modern sense of the words, His is **holy**, or **just**, or that **He loves** men.

## The Love of God

The Scriptures declare, “God is love”. But the converse is not true. There is a danger in over-emphasizing this glorious fact at the expense of other truths. Men say, “If God is love, He won’t cast men into hell”. They forget that God is as holy, just and righteous as He is love. But, nevertheless, it is the love of God, which constrained Him to send His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to atone for the sin of the world (John 3:16). God’s wisdom, might, majesty and glory can be and are declared in some degree by His created heavens (Psalm 19), but Jesus Christ alone could reveal God’s heart and the true love and compassion He has towards men. We are apt to say too little of God’s love. *Love* is the greatest power in this world to woo and win souls. Make much of the love of God and the love of Christ, but remember that those who proclaim this truth must *live it*. Read often 1Corinthians 13 and, above all, practice it. The only right motive for the work for Christ is found in 2Corinthians 5:14. Does that love *constrain* us enough?

## The Deity of Christ

Indians in general acknowledge Jesus Christ, as a holy *sadhu*. Muslims acknowledge Him as a sinless prophet. The whole world accepts Christ as the best of noble men. If Christ is not what He claimed to be – **God**, the second Person of the Godhead – He is the greatest deceiver that the world has ever seen, and the death He died on Calvary can never atone for even a single sin of a man.

How can we prove the deity of Christ?

1. **The Testimony of God the Father:** “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).
2. **His own Testimony:** “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30; see also John 8:58 and 11:25).
3. **The Testimony of His Works:**
  - a) Power over the elements (Matt. 8:23-27).
  - b) Power of evil spirits (Mark 5:1-21).
  - c) Power to forgive sins (Luke 5:17-26).
  - d) Power to raise the dead (John Ch. 11).
4. **The Testimony of Scripture:** (See Ps. 95:6,7; Isa. 9:6; Matt. 1:23; Rom. 9:5; 1Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:8 and 1John 5:20).
5. **The Fact of His Resurrection:** (See “The Resurrection of Jesus Christ” in this section).

We all will agree that the whole is greater than its part, so also the offering of Jesus Christ our Substitute, who is the only **Source of all life** (Col. 1:16), which meant more than what meets the just demands of a righteous and holy God.

## The Sonship of Jesus the Lord

The following seven remarkable incidents in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ boldly testify that He is the *Son of God*:

- (1) **His Birth** (Luke 1:35). (2) **His Baptism** (Luke 3:22; John 1:34). (3) **His Life** (John 1:4; Matt. 16:16). (4) **His Dealings** (John 1:49). (5) **His Works** (John 5:36; 20:30,31). (6) **His Death** (Mark 15:39) and (7) **His Resurrection** (Rom. 1:4).

There are six ways by which we can respond to *His Eternal Sonship*:

- (1) **Accusation of Blasphemy** (Matt. 26:63-66). (2) **Mockery** (Matt. 27:40). (3) **Fear** (John 19:8). (4) **Belief** (1John 5:13). (5) **Worship** (John 9:35-38) and (6) **Confession** (John 11:27; 1John 4:15).

## The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The apostle Paul writes, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1Cor. 15:17). The resurrection of Christ is the one great proof that God has accepted Christ’s sacrifice made at Calvary (Rom. 4:25). Hence, throughout the book of Acts, the apostles testify to this truth. Their testimony was believed

by large numbers, who themselves were guilty of His death, many of whom were Jewish priests, and believing this they had to accept the fact that Christ was the very Son of God. For He was “declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead”. (Read Rom. 1:4; Acts chapters 2, 3 and 4 carefully).

Christ’s resurrection is the only assurance by which we are sure that we too shall be raised up, “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming” (1Cor. 15:23); and last of all the wicked dead. The bodies of saved Christians will be *raised, transformed* and made *glorious* like unto His resurrected body, and those that die in their sins will also be raised, judged, condemned and cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

Proofs of Christ’s resurrection are abundant:

1. Over 500 eyewitnesses all at one time (1Cor. 15:6).
2. The amazing change in the disciples from fear to boldness (compare John 20:19 with Acts 4:13).
3. The change of observance from the seventh day or Sabbath to the first day of the week or the Lord’s Day.
4. The constantly recurring feast on the first day of every week, called the Lord’s Supper.
5. The experience of communion with the living Christ.

### The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Our Lord *Himself* declared plainly, so as not to be misunderstood, “I will come again, and receive you unto Myself” (John 14:3); and commanded the church to remember Him in the breaking of bread “*Till He come*” (1Cor. 11:26). At His ascension *angels* declared, “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 1:11). The writings of the apostles are full of this subject; *Paul* said, “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout”, etc. (1Thess. 4:16); *Peter* wrote, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” (2Pet. 3:10); The apostle *John* said, “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him” (Rev. 1:7); *Jude* and *James* also testified to this very fact (See Jude 14; James 5:8).

It should be noted here that some of these passages refer to the second stage of Christ’s coming. The first stage is His descent *for* the church into the air to receive her, and the second stage, His coming *with* His church and the holy angels for judgment and the setting up of His millennial kingdom.

This hope of Christ’s coming is of great practical value. It warns us to be *watchful* (Matt. 24:42-44; Mark 13:32-37); stimulates *sobriety* (1Thess. 5:2-8; 1Pet. 1:13); fans the flame of *faithfulness* (Luke 12:42-44; 19:12-27); encourages *endurance* (Heb. 10:36,37; James 5:7,8); enjoins *earnest endeavour* (1Cor. 15:51-58; Luke 19:13); builds *temperance* (1Pet. 1:7 and 4:13); and produces *purity* in the lives of His people (1John 3:3).

Three times in the last chapter of the last book (Rev. 22:7,12,20), Christ says, “Behold, I *come* quickly”. If the people of India are warned of His coming, in the right way what a witness it will be when He ***does come*** and take away His waiting church (1Thess. 4:13-18).

### The Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures

Dr. Pierson has correctly said, “The Bible must have been produced by good men or angels, by bad men or devils or by God Himself.

“***Good men or angels*** could not have produced it for they would not impose on man a fraud by claiming that it is a divine revelation: ***Bad men or devils*** could not produce such a book for it is obviously their level in its moral and spiritual teachings: and hence the only alternative is to accept it as ultimately of ***divine origin*** and authority. Peter therefore wrote that, ‘Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit’ (2Pet. 1:21). This gives the correct solution to the problem.”

We may also add that it is evident that neither the devil nor wicked men would write about their own doom



in the Bible, especially what is revealed in the book of Revelation.

The entire Bible is God-inspired, and it is holy. Then what is the regard we give to this divine Book of inspiration? The Indian preacher brother Bakht Singh used to read it only on his knees. If it is God's word how much do we honour it by implicit obedience and firmly stand on its truths? "But the truth and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23).

### **Substitution**

Please see chapter "*The Central Theme of the Gospel*" (TOP No. 25).

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## **The Death of Christ Reveals God's Wisdom**

If the cross was the greatest demonstration of the power of God ever given to man, so was it also the greatest demonstration of the wisdom of God.

All God's works display His wisdom. They are conceived by wisdom and executed in wisdom, so that through them all wisdom shines and appeals to men.

It is seen in the formation of all things (Psalm 104:24), and in the sovereign ordering of all things (Daniel 2:19-23), but if Creation and Providence alike display God's wisdom, the greatest demonstration of all is Redemption. It is in "Christ crucified" that we find the supreme manifestation of Divine wisdom, though to the Greeks it is nothing but foolishness (1Cor. 1:23,24).

This is one of the most remarkable features of Divine wisdom; it is totally at variance with human wisdom. The wisdom of God is foolishness to the world, and the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God (1Cor. 3:19). So irremediably ruined by the fall is man, that the highest, the most cultured, the most intricate involutions of his reasoning powers inevitably lead him to the wrong conclusion in spiritual and divine matters, to that conclusion which is most diametrically opposed to God's own.

We should not be surprised that the advent of Christ has brought this into prominence, for Christ is the touchstone which reveals the nearness or otherwise of the hearts of all men to God, and the measure of the alignment of their minds and purposes to His.

God has by the cross fulfilled His word, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1Cor. 1:19,20). This has been accomplished in a twofold way, first negatively, by working in a way that the wisdom of this world could not recognize and appreciate, and second positively, by employing as the instrument of divine wisdom that which had been specifically rejected by human wisdom as foolishness. For as Paul says, "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 (1Cor. 1:21). God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and the base things and despised things and even things that are not, to bring to nought things that are.

Chapter three of the same epistle uses even stronger language. It says, "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (v19). This means that God actually employs the carnal wisdom of men to defeat and ensnare itself. He permitted it free reign in the rejection and crucifixion of His Son so that it might expose itself in its

poverty and perversity. So the cross of Christ is at once the supreme manifestation of God's wisdom, and the supreme exposure of the folly of human wisdom. Over the crucified Saviour was hung His "accusation" in letters of Hebrew and Greek and Latin, the languages of religion, culture and politics. The various "princes of this world" were represented at the cross, and were united in the rejection of the Son of God. But in their folly they lifted the Sin-hearer upon the divinely appointed tree of curse, there to accomplish by Himself the great work of redemption and to make possible the formation of the Church, that which is, even to the adoring hosts of heaven, the display of "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). The wisdom of this world, and of the princes of this world, came to nought in crucifying the Lord of glory.

This was one of the challenges involved in the divine plan of redemption; how could the wisdom of God reveal the insufficiency and invalidity of the wisdom of this world so that men would distrust and renounce it and rely entirely upon divine revelation? This has been accomplished by permitting human wisdom to annul itself, firstly by the cross of Christ itself, secondly by employing "the word of the cross" as the instrument of divine power in salvation, and thirdly by causing this power to operate most commonly amongst the lowest and most despised classes in society.

But why is this so important, so necessary? Very simply it is "that no flesh should glory in His presence", but that all should be seen to be "of Him", whether in deliverance from the darkness of sin ("wisdom") or the guilt of sin ("righteousness") or the defilement of sin ("sanctification") or the power of sin ("redemption") (1Cor. 1:29,30). The purpose of God is that "all flesh" should see the salvation of God (Luke 3:6), but that "no flesh" should find cause to *glory* therein. Although man has so much of which to be ashamed before God, it seems to be an ineradicable propensity in him to boast. In order that God might receive His due in the glory always and rightly belonging to Himself (Isa. 42:8), and in order that man might be given no single cause for boasting, God has devised a means of redemption which completely exposes man in the flesh, repudiates him, and forever silences him. Both the power and the wisdom of men are revealed in their true colours at the cross. They are shown to be but feebleness and foolishness in the light of the power of God and the wisdom of God there displayed.

From the dawn of time the solution determined by the wisdom of God to the question of how He could judge sin yet forgive the sinner was revealed. In the coats of skin which clothed our first parents, in the more excellent sacrifice of Abel, and in a succeeding variety of Old Testament typical institutions the answer was seen to be substitutionary sacrifice. The prophets declared that this sacrifice would be offered by Messiah Himself, for Christ was the Lamb of God foreordained before the foundation of the world.

The substitute must be a man to take man's place, and to undo, as man, all the mischief of man's fall (1Cor. 15:21,22). Moreover he must be a sinless man, else his life would be forfeit for his own sins, so rendering him quite incapable of being a substitute for another. And if he were to die not merely for another man, but for the whole world, then he must be infinitely more than man. A man, a sinless man, yet infinitely more than man, such is the substitute demanded by the justice of heaven, yet God's wisdom is equal to the occasion. By the incarnation of the Son of God in and by the virgin's womb, and by His voluntary self-sacrifice, the wisdom of God has devised an all-sufficient remedy to man's appalling need. The pity is that we are so accustomed at this late hour of human experience to think of redemption as a historical fact that we fail to appreciate the wonder and wisdom of the conception and execution of its plan. How richly the ways of God repay our scrutiny!

Here too the middle wall of partition is broken down (Eph. 2:14). The chosen nation, separated from the mass of mankind by the possession of God's law, stands condemned by the murder of its Messiah, and as shut up to divine grace for pardon and salvation as the darkest heathen of the Gentile nations. All privilege is forfeited and in the common reconciliation to God of both Jew and Gentile "in one body by the cross" (Eph. 2:16), the enmity is slain. The arrogance and exclusiveness of the Jew is removed by the same powerful solvent as the hopelessness and darkness of the Gentile, the blood of Christ, and both are brought on to a common ground by a common means (Eph. 3:6). It is the contemplation of God's dispensational dealings with men, with the Jewish nation and with the Gentiles, that elicits from the apostle Paul that unique doxology in praise of "the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" recorded

in Romans 11:33-36.

This is God's "hidden wisdom" (1Cor. 2:7), the mysteries imperceptible to men, known only by divine revelation, and "spiritually discerned".

There is a difference of judgment regarding the best rendering of the opening phrase of Colossians 2:3, "In whom (Christ) or in which (the mystery of God) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". The difference is not important because Christ is the substance of the mystery, and the latter is what it is only because it reveals Christ. He is the "Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 22:13), the sum total of divine revelation. If Paul speaks of "riches" in verse 2, he speaks of "treasures" in verse 3. Only by the apprehension of the treasures available in Christ can the believer possess these riches. It should be noted that "are hid" is not a verbal form of the word "to hide". The construction consists of the verb "to be" followed at a considerable distance by the adjective "hidden" or "secret", quite different, for example, from Ch. 3:3. We should render literally, "In whom (which) are all the secret treasures of wisdom and knowledge". The whole point of the passage is not that these treasures are hidden in Christ, but that they are revealed in Christ. All the secret treasures of wisdom and knowledge, essentially inscrutable to man, and unrevealed in former ages, are in Christ as the mystery, and as such are now revealed to us that we may be enriched thereby. See Ch. 1:26,27. What poor bankrupt vanities are the philosophies of men, though they label them "knowledge", compared with divine revelation like this.

The mercy and the justice of God find common ground in the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ. And God's sovereign grace and human responsibility, those apparently conflicting principles, are bound together in perfect harmony. Grace provides the complete solution to man's need at its own charges, but man is responsible to accept the benefits of Christ's sacrificial death by a personal act of appropriation.

Every need has been met, every objection has been anticipated, every impropriety has been avoided in the perfect work of the Lamb of God, planned and achieved by the wisdom of God. Well might wisdom be ascribed to God upon the throne, and to the Lamb (Rev. 7:11,12; 5:12).

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## Enoch Walked with God

We are not told a great deal in the Word of God about Enoch. We can read about him in Genesis 5:18-24; Hebrews 11:5; Jude 14,15. Although the references to Enoch are few and relatively brief they tell us a great deal about the man in a few words, and we would do well to meditate on the truths revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. We read that "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). We know that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23) and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) for "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12). Death, that is both physical death and the second death which is eternal separation from God in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14) are the result of sin. Eight times in Genesis 5 we read the words, "and he died". Enoch was the outstanding exception in that he did not die, for God took him up to heaven to be with Himself. What was it that caused God to take Enoch to heaven before he had passed through death?

### He pleased God

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb. 11:5). Enoch pleased God in evil times. In Genesis 4 the posterity of Adam is traced through Cain to Lamech, and in Genesis 5 Adam's posterity is traced through Seth to Noah who was the great grandson of Enoch. Noah also walked with God (Gen. 6:9). Enoch whose name means "dedicated" or "initiated" was "the seventh from Adam" (Jude 14) and His life can be compared and contrasted with that of Lamech who was also seventh in

line from Adam. Lamech was boastful, a bigamist and a murderer (Gen. 4:18-24). The lives of Enoch and Lamech were completely different, as were the ways in which their lives came to an end.

Adam lived for three hundred and eight years after Enoch was born and Enoch might well have had the benefit of what Adam could tell him of his experiences and of the nature, attributes and ways of God. Enoch lived for three hundred and sixty-five years. This is a short time compared with other lifetimes recorded in Genesis 5.

The days in which Enoch lived were days in which wickedness and sin abounded. Things were getting worse and worse and men's thoughts were evil continually (Gen. 6:5). The times in which Enoch lived were very like the present time in which we live. Wickedness is all around us and God's Word and His will are ignored and ridiculed. God is holy (Lev. 19:2) and ultimately He will judge and punish sin. But God is gracious, merciful, kind and longsuffering (Jonah 4:2) and He withholds and delays judgement so that people have the opportunity to be saved (1Pet. 3:20). Enoch lived at a time which preceded the pouring out of judgment by the holy, righteous God who hates sin. At the present time God is withholding judgement. He does not change (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8) and in His love, mercy and grace is still giving people opportunities to repent and be saved by grace through faith in the Person and completed work on the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8; 2Pet. 3:9).

When Enoch was sixty-five years old his son Methuselah, was born (Gen. 5:21) and "Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years" (Gen. 5:22). Enoch walked with God, obeying and pleasing Him. The name, Methuselah, means "his death will bring it", or "when he is dead it will be sent". Methuselah lived longer than any other person and yet *death* is in his name. It seems that Enoch was aware that God was going to execute judgement on men's sins and that this judgement was going to take place at the end of Methuselah's life. Enoch lived in the light of the coming judgement and he walked with God. Those of us who are believers know that God is going to execute judgement and we should concentrate our minds and use our time and other resources to serve Him and walk with Him in this life.

Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years and during his life time, due to the mercy, grace and longsuffering of God no judgement came on the world. However, in the year when Methuselah died, God executed judgement and the Flood came.

### **Walking with God**

To "walk with God" means that a person is making a steady forward progression, one step at a time, obeying the will of God and enjoying fellowship with Him. Enoch walked with God for three hundred years. We read in Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Enoch obeyed the will of God as His will was revealed to Him. When God revealed a truth to Enoch he believed what God had said and obeyed Him. Enoch did not go ahead of God's revelation of truth, he did not live in accordance with his own ideas. We read, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). The Word of God shows us where we are spiritually. It reveals to us our spiritual condition and shows us the way to go as we seek to walk with God. Enoch did not deviate or fluctuate, he walked with God, living consciously in the presence of God, in continuous habitual and consistent fellowship with Him, seeking and doing His will. Enoch believed God and lived a life which was separated from the evil world around him. He was dedicated to obeying, pleasing and serving God. In the days in which we live we should, as enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit who dwells in every believer (1Cor. 6:19) live our lives in the light of the truths God has graciously revealed to us in the Scriptures.

It is impossible to please God if we do not have faith in Him (Heb. 11:6). By faith we believe what God says, we believe His promises. Abraham "believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). Enoch had faith in God, and pleased God (Heb. 11:5). Enoch knew God, and to know Him is to love Him, to want to pray and meditate on His written Word, wanting to be in His presence and worship, serve and obey Him.

### **God took him**

Enoch did not die for God took him to be with Himself (Gen. 5:24; Heb. 11:5). Enoch and Elijah were both

godly men possessed of great faith and neither passed through death but were taken directly to heaven (2Kings 2:11). Enoch was taken away before the judgement of the Flood came and his translation prefigures the return of the Lord for believers who will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air (1Thess. 4:13-17) before God sends the judgements of the Tribulation period. Noah and the seven people with him in the ark were preserved during the Flood and are a type of the Jewish remnant which will be preserved during the Great Tribulation.

Enoch prophesied of the Day of the Lord and coming judgement saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgement upon all" (Jude 14,15). This prophecy was the first given through a man, and refers to the second stage of the Lord's Second Coming when He will come in glory *with* His saints to judge the ungodly.

Those of us who are believers should walk with God, seeking to serve and obey Him, being motivated by love for Him. Soon "we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ ... So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:10-12). All who stand before the Judgement Seat will have been saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8) and will be judged there for things done during their earthly lives (2Cor. 5:10). At the Judgement Seat our salvation will not be in question, but rewards will be given or withheld depending on the faithfulness of our service.

Enoch was a man of outstanding faith and he pleased God. Enoch's life and works were evidence of his faith. To please God our deeds and words must reveal the reality of our faith (James 2:17). Those of us who are believers should live lives which are separated from the world and to God (Ps. 1:1,2; 2Cor. 6:14,17) witnessing and showing the love of God to those we meet. We should walk with God, not being conformed to this world but, as we commune with Him in prayer and feed on and obey His written Word, we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). As we do these things we will be motivated to serve Him in the assembly and to make known the way of salvation to those who are lost.

Enoch was taken to be with God without any warning, and believers could be raptured to be with the Lord at any moment. Enoch was a man of outstanding faith. His life and works were evidence of his faith, and he pleased God. May we love, serve and please God in whatever time remains until we are taken to be with Him forever.

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## His Ways

He might have built a palace at a word,  
Who sometimes had not where to lay His head;  
Time was, and He who nourished crowds with bread  
Would not one meal unto Himself afford;  
Twelve legions girded with angelic sword  
Were at His beck, the scorned and buffeted;  
He healed another's scratch, His own side bled,  
Side, feet and hands with cruel piercing gored,  
Oh, wonderful the wonders left undone!  
And scarce less wonderful than those He wrought:  
Oh, self restraint, passing all human thought,  
To have all power, and be as having none;  
Oh, self-denying love, which felt alone  
For need of others, never for its own.

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# MEN OF GOD SERIES

## (1) ABRAHAM : THE FRIEND OF GOD

God called him, "Abraham My friend" (Isa. 41:8). We read that "The LORD appeared unto him" seven times. Such were his home conditions that the Lord could draw near unto him as "He sat in the tent door" (Gen. 18:1). "The LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" (Gen. 18:17). A friend is one whom we can share intimate secrets, disclose purposes, enjoy closeness and walk alongside knowing that he is dependable. A knowledge of God, not a display of gift, is essential for the path of faith. The altar, the tent and the well were features of the life of the pilgrim patriarch in his fellowship with God.

### THE PATH OF FAITH

"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). He left "Ur of the Chaldees". He left Hur, the moon god; he looked up at the "stars". He crossed the Euphrates; his descendants were to be like "Sands of the sea". A man of clear vision, we read six times that "He lifted up his eyes and looked". He dwelt in a tent; "He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

The Lord taught us that; "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). We live in this world but we are not part of it, we are passing through as strangers and pilgrims. We are to forsake the world, not improve it. We are to leave it, not mend it. Worldliness is a great hindrance to spiritual progress.

It has often been pointed out that:

Abraham was *hindered* by Terah, the old man (Gen. 11:32)

He was *harassed* by Lot, the worldly man (Gen. 13:7)

He was *hurried* by Sarah, the flesh (Gen. 16:2)

He went out: "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy fathers house" (Gen. 12:1). This was a repeat of his initial call to leave Mesopotamia. The Lord, "Called him alone" (Isa. 51:2). Salvation is a personal transaction. The path of faith requires intimate, individual fellowship with God.

Men of God are tested. Abraham was tested with the RICHES of Sodom (Gen. 14:23), Joseph – to RULE his own passion, Moses – with REBELLION in the camp, David – in his hour of RELAXATION and Peter – as to the REPROACH of Christ. A man or woman is never truly known until he or she is truly tested. R.C.Chapman said that before salvation he was afraid to die: after salvation he was afraid to live. Do we dwell in the misty lowlands of unbelief or rise to the lofty peaks of faith? Do we paddle in shallow swamps of carelessness or launch out in dependence upon God? This closeness to God is developed in our prayer life. We need preaching men; we need praying men and women. Get to know God for yourself, His Person, Power, Promises and Purposes. This is the key to progress in the Path of Faith.

It is often a lonely path and always a costly path. "Lot went with him" (Gen. 12:4). Lot went with the man who went with God. Lot eventually abandoned tent life and settled in a house in Sodom, (Gen. 19:2). Is our Christian life second hand, do we just accompany others, in the assembly are you just a passenger?

He went down: In a time of famine, "Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there" (Gen. 12:10). He had three defections when he seemed to lose sight of the promises. He said, "They will kill me" (Gen. 12:12). How could they kill him when the "seed" that God had so often promised had not yet been born?

He went up: "Abram went up out of Egypt" (Gen. 13:1). He went up to "Bethel" (Gen. 13:3 – the House of God). He went back to where it all went wrong. Failure need not be final. Too often saints leave and they do not come back. When repentance and confession is evident, God will forgive and restore.

He went on: "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (Gen. 13:17). "The Canaanite was then in the land" (Gen. 12:6). "The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land" (Gen. 13:7). The opposition had doubled. In chapter 13, we also read for the first time about "strife" and "brethren" (Gen. 13:8). The first problem dealt with at Corinth is contentions (1Cor. 1:11). Division allows the enemy to strengthen.

### **Abraham, the Friend of God was:-**

A MAN OF FAITH – He went out but did not know where (Heb. 11:8). He believed God would grant the promised seed but he did not know how (Acts 7:5). He was willing to offer up Isaac but he did not know why (Heb. 11:17).

A MAN OF SEPARATION – God made many promises about what He would give to Abram, yet he spent most of his life giving things up. He gave up Ur (world), Terah (his father, Acts 7:4), Lot (worldly man), Ishmael (carnal man), Isaac (his only son, Gen. 22:2) and even parted with his beloved Sarah ("Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" Gen. 23:2). All who will live in faith following the greatest example of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham, will find it is a lowly life of separation and self denial.

A MAN OF PURITY – In the energy of the flesh, he produced Ishmael, (Gen. 16:16). In Genesis 17:5 God changed his name to Abraham, the father of many nations and gave him the sign of the circumcision of the flesh to verify the everlasting covenant (Gen. 17:13).

A MAN OF HUMILITY – "He bowed himself toward the ground" (Gen. 18:2); "Abraham fell upon his face" (Gen. 17:17); "Which am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). God will lift us up if we get low enough. 'Keep low if you desire to grow', is spiritual advice.

A MAN OF RULE – God said "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment" (Gen. 18:19). How unlike the family of Lot. Sarah could call Abraham "lord" as he called God "Lord" four times (Gen. 18:27-32). In the Bible, we only see glimpses of the lives of great men as they appear in public. God knew about the home life of the "Friend of God". When Abraham was hidden from public view things were right before God at home.

A PRINCELY MAN – God promised to give him the land yet for one hundred years, he passed through possessing none of it except a burying place for his dear wife. For that he weighed out the price; "Four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant" (Gen. 23:16). As the man of faith passed through, the heathen of the land testifies and said; "Thou art a mighty prince among us" (Gen. 23:6).

"And Abraham journeyed, going on still..." (Gen. 12:9). We shall consider him at the following locations:-

- (1) MOREH** "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem (Sychar, John 4), unto the plain (oaks) of Moreh" (Gen. 12:6). "And there builded he an altar unto the LORD" (v7); "And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent" (v8). For one hundred years, from seventy five to one hundred and seventy five, Abram's tent of camels hair was searched by storm and sand. Separated from his family and his country: he passed through the land; he paid his way with his faithful Sarah by his side; he arranged the marriage of his son to preserve him from the heathen; there was no foundation in his tent; the only things which he built were altars.
- (2) MAMRE** "Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre (fatness), which is in Hebron (fellowship), and built there an altar unto the LORD" (Gen. 13:18). There was *faith* in his walk, *fatness* in his soul, *fellowship* with God and *fragrance* in his worship. His altar went up (praise), his well went down (provision), his tent was for moving on (as a pilgrim).
- (3) MORIAH** "Get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22:2). When his hopes were high, after twenty five years of waiting, he now had been granted the promised seed. He was familiar with God's voice. Character is moulded by discipline. Nearness to God is very costly. He is now to enter into God's thoughts as to offering up human sacrifice. God looked down the long corridors of time, He saw, "The place afar off", God, "Spared not His Own Son" (Rom. 8:32). "The



friend of God", must walk a lonely pilgrimage. Abraham went out from the *relationships* of his former life (Heb. 11:9). He yielded the *right* of first choice (Gen. 13:9). He *refused* the riches of Sodom (Gen. 14:23) and he grieved as he cast out the bondwoman and her son (Gen. 21:10-11). Finally, "He that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son" (Heb. 11:17). All Abraham had left was God and the Word of God.

He learned that the Blessor (God) was greater than the blessing (the seed). "Abraham rose up early in the morning". This was a GOING OUT INTO THE UNEXPLAINED. A GOING ON TO THE UNEXPLORED. A GOING UP TO THE UNEXPECTED. God told him, WHO ("thine only son, Isaac"), WHAT ("A burnt offering"), WHERE ("Moriah"), WHEN ("Third day"). A day, a night, a day, a night, "the third day". It was a long journey but God never told him WHY. Trials are the allotment of God's dear people. Tests are often unexpected. Trouble comes suddenly. At Calvary it was asked, "Why, what evil hath He done?" (Luke 23:22). At the cross the Lord Himself asked, "Why ... Me?" (Psa. 22:1).

"And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah Jireh" (God will see, God will provide – Newberry) (Gen. 22:14). In prison Paul said, "But my God shall supply all your need (provide for, fulfil every need of yours) according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). God's peace is better than knowing the reason why. God wanted Abraham, his faith, his heart, more than his greatest blessing, his only son. This is the last record, the highest point, of God speaking directly to Abraham.

- (4) **MACHPELAH** "Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah" (Gen. 23:19). The path of faith led by the oak of Moreh, the plain of Mamre, the mountain of Moriah. Now we see him at MACHPELAH – which means "double, the place of two doors". Abraham believed there was a door in and a door out; a way in and a way out of death. Abraham believed in resurrection. He offered Isaac; "Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead" (Heb. 11:19). Sarah had been his faithful wife, sharing his pilgrim tent as they tramped the path together. She died aged one hundred and twenty seven. Now he is left lonely. "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her". This is the first record of a man weeping. Resurrection will end all sorrows. We "sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1Thess. 4:13).

God is pleased to be called, "The God of Abraham" (Matt. 22:32), "The friend of God" (James 2:23). The Princely Pilgrim has passed on his way to his fatherland beyond the stars. "For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

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## Questions and Answers

**Question:** In the Old Testament, musical instruments, such as the timbrel and harp, were used and encouraged, particularly in the Psalms. Are these still to be used and, if not, where does Scripture teach that they should not be used? If clapping of hands is allowed in the Psalms (Ps. 47:1), why do assemblies refuse to let it be used in the meetings today?

**Answer:** There is no New Testament Scripture that would sanction the use of musical instruments in the gathering of the Lord's people in this present New Testament age. To quote the Old Testament as authority for the use of any musical instrument is inadequate ground. If we were to introduce the timbrel (a percussion instrument) or the harp (a stringed instrument) of Judaism into New Testament service, then we would have as much authority for bringing in, for example, the incense and the vestments of the same system. Why not bring in a sheep or a bullock?

The use of music belonged to the Old Testament period when God was dealing with Israel as a nation. The ritual of that day has given way to the reality we now have in Christ. We have, by the grace of God, been

bought on to entirely different ground in this present dispensation. The priests with their special garments, the earthly sanctuary, the literal animal sacrifices, the music, the incense and the altars have all been replaced with New Testament spiritual counterparts. The New Testament epistles make this abundantly clear, “Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:13). “By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks for His name” (Heb. 13:15). The context of 1Corinthians 14:15 rules out all thought of using a musical instrument. The singing is to be “with the spirit” (the reference is to one’s own spirit as moved by the Spirit of God) and “with understanding also” – neither of which qualities is found in a timbrel or a harp!

The principles set out in answer to the first question apply equally well in the answer to the second. The clapping of hands, as an expression of praise to God and joy in His presences, is a physical activity inappropriate to this age of the Spirit.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

(Colossians 3:16)

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**Thou art permitted to speak for thyself... Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian... (Acts 26:1,28)**

**J**ust prior to the apostle Paul being sent from Cæsarea to Rome by Festus to stand trial before Cæsar, he appeared before king Agrippa for examination to verify the *“crimes laid against him”* by his own Jewish people. Festus’ dark mind was ignorant regarding the Jews history and their grievances against Paul, leading to his arrest. Festus anticipated that Agrippa, himself a gentile, through his acquaintance with such matters would understand the charges first hand. With great pomp, the king, the chief captains and the principal men of the city gathered for the occasion.

### **Thou art permitted to speak for thyself...**

At Agrippa’s request, Paul in calm dignity and showing no bitterness from more than two years of imprisonment, first acknowledges the kings expertise in all Jewish ways before imploring him to listen patiently to his defence (Acts 26:3).

In a masterly way Paul lays out before the king and all present the manner of his zealous Pharisaic background, his dramatic conversion on route to the city of Damascus in pursuit of those who dared to name *“Jesus of Nazareth”*, and his obedience to his new commission by the resurrected Christ in taking His glorious Gospel, through God’s help and preservation, to the gentile nations: *“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me”* (Acts 26:18).

Paul linked the reality of resurrections hope between his pre and post conversion days challenging all present with the statement, *“Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”* (v8), exposing the hopeless beliefs of the pagan minded hearers in the judgment hall while indicating the basis of the charges against him. The Jews, like Paul in his stubborn early days, refused to

accept that this “hope” pivoted in the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. A woman call Martha had to learn this truth when the Lord revealed to her that, ***“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?”*** (John 11:25,26). As was Martha, so Paul after an objection by Festus, challenges Agrippa about his belief in the fulfilment of the witness borne by the Old Testament prophets concerning the virgin birth, life, sufferings, death, resurrection and glorification of the Christ of God. This movement of God ***“was not done in a corner”*** but evident to all of which Agrippa was, without gainsaying, able to recognise; ***“... Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest”*** (v27).

### **Almost thou persuadest me...**

It would appear that Agrippa was not prepared to face the obvious response to which Paul had brought him and sought tactfully to deviate from yielding to Christ. Paul had previously written, ***“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”*** (2Cor. 5:11) and later at Rome with the Jews ***“he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not”*** (Acts 28:23,24). We should be aware of satanic workers who seek to persuade men against the truth, even twisting God’s Words to beguile, as with Eve. Paul never used such devious methods, faithfully expounding the Scriptures to bring individuals to faith in Christ.

### **To be a Christian**

Did Agrippa perceive the loss of face involved, possible showing disdain? Did his wealth, position, power and sinful lifestyle bind him so much that his eyes were blinded to a true appreciation of who Christ was and to the true riches to be found in Him? His desire for short term gain and glory would end in eternal pain and loss.

While many today find shelter under the name of Christianity, the majority sadly are not genuine “Christians” and could never be called by the other names given to those who truly have the Spirit of ‘Christ in’ them; a believer, saint, disciple. They unlike Saul of Tarsus have never had a true conversion experience and remain as king Agrippa, outside the kingdom of God through unbelief. ‘Romanism, cults, orthodox groups, excitable movements etc.’ all with their organisational ritualism and powerful administrations, often with much wealth, do nothing but eat away at the truth of the Word of God with their false doctrines and practices, ***“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away”*** (2Tim. 3:5).

Maybe you are well acquainted with the truth of the gospel of Christ and even give mental accent to it but allow this vain world’s glamour and glory, position and power to blind you to that which the living God wants to give you. This world is set for destruction! Let king Agrippa be a powerful object lesson to deter you from a like response in “excusing” yourself from those glorious eternal blessings that alone come through confession of Christ, ***“forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith”***. Therefore, ***“repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance”*** (v18,20), to prove a genuine conversion experience.

Moses centuries earlier had counted the cost and forsook the house of Pharaoh and Egypt, ***“Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward”*** (Heb. 11:26). Grasp who CHRIST really is and allow this reality to persuade you to confess Him, to become a TRUE Christian, a believer, saint, disciple. There will be suffering for sure, but then glory. You will have no regrets. How many poor souls are there in Hell, tormented over making a costly excuse? You are urged not to become one of them.

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