

The Old Paths – July / September : 2021 – № 31

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Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. ... It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.

(John 5:24; 6:63)



From the Editor's Desk

“Continuance”

**“Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine ... Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; *continue* in them”
(1Timothy 4:13,16)**

COVID-19 continues to disrupt our lives. Education has been disrupted, business has been ‘stop/go’, travel has been curtailed then permitted, and even meetings have been restricted and then recommenced. This may be seen in our spiritual lives. Believers find these interruptions to be distracting, discouraging and even depressing. How are we to continue? How can we *continue* to serve God?

NOAH – Continued to WORK. “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark...” (Heb. 11:7). “The days of Noah”, were marked by violence, corruption, material obsession and moral degeneracy, like, “the days of the coming of the Son of Man”. “Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). Noah lived righteously, continued to preach righteousness and to build an ark. Every plank, every nail showed that Noah was leaving. “But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing” (2Thess. 3:13).

HANNAH – Continued to WEEP. “She was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore” (1Sam. 1:10). “I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD” (1:26). “For this child I prayed” (1:27). “And Hannah prayed” (2:1). Even her husband said to her, “Hannah, why weepiest thou?” In these challenging times the Lord records each tear of every burdened sister who continues to pray. “Pray without ceasing” (1Thess. 5:17).

NEHEMIAH – Continued with the WALL. “Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall” (Neh. 5:16). In times of reproach and challenge, there are those who compromise and seek to build bridges. Godly elders are needed to fortify assembly testimony by continuing to maintain walls of separation. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2Cor. 6:17).

DANIEL – Continued at the WINDOW. “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his window being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Dan. 6:10). Daniel was a man who would not change. He knew he would be cast into the den of lions. His window looked toward Zion, the beautiful city of God. God promised that there would be a return to Jerusalem after 70 years. Are we continually looking for the Lord’s return? “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

TIMOTHY – Continued in the WORD. “Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine ... take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them” (1Tim. 4:13,16). The pandemic may disrupt home life, business life and assembly life. We may be in “lockdown”, but each believer has the Lord and the Bible for oneself. “Give attendance to reading”.

There is much that we can *continue* to do, that the pandemic cannot hinder. “They *continued* stedfastly” (Acts 2:42).

...And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all...
(Galatians 6:9,10)

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The Prayer of the Lord Jesus in John Chapter 17

It would be helpful to read the whole of John chapter 17, but especially verses 1-6 and 25.

Introduction. The Lord Jesus and His eleven disciples (Judas having previously gone out from them) had left the Upper Room and were descending the steep slopes of the city of Jerusalem and approaching the brook Kidron. It was at this point that the Lord spoke this prayer. After this they would cross the brook (John 18:1) and enter into the garden of Gethsemane, which was on the western slopes of the Mount of Olives.

A perfect prayer. What have been recorded for us here in John chapter 17 are the holy, inner thoughts of the Son of God in intimate communion with the Father. These were utterances and communion between Divine persons – one on Earth and one in Heaven! Here was a real man on Earth living in the conscious, constant, uninterrupted fulfilment of the Father’s will! It seems it was an audible prayer, certainly heard by John and probably by the rest of the disciples as well.

Lessons for us. This perfect prayer of the perfect, dependent man has many lessons for us in the days in which we live. There are features in this prayer that could and should be seen in us. The Lord Jesus ever felt the need of prayer, not only at this critical time prior to Calvary, but throughout His recorded life on Earth His pathway was marked by prayer and dependence on His father God. (Some instances of His prayer life are recorded in such passages as Matt. 11:25-26; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; John 11:41-42; John 12:27-28, etc.). But what about you and me? Are our lives marked by a dependence on God in all circumstances?

The value of prayer. There are many examples in Scripture of men and women of prayer. It's also instructive to notice that if anyone were something for God in their lives, they invariably were men and women of prayer! Prayer doesn't appeal to the flesh, doesn't receive the applause and acknowledgement of others and isn't documented in assembly magazines. But it is the believers' communication with the God of Heaven; it brings us closer to God; it's our antidote to fainting or giving-up (Luke 18:1) and it focuses our thoughts on the needs of others. Without prayer we can never please God and never live the life of victory! The importance of prayer cannot be over-estimated. We might be happy to systematically read God's Word, yet often we can struggle to pray consistently!

Examples of those who were marked by prayer. In the O.T. Hannah honoured God by her prayer and kept her vow (1Samuel 1:11,24 and 2:1-10), Jabez prayed a concise, God-honouring, spiritual prayer (1Chron. 4:9-10) while Daniel prayed a courageous prayer, thanking God for upholding him when all seemed against him (Daniel 6:7-10). Think also of Hezekiah (2Kings 19) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 32). In the N.T. Zacharias and Elizabeth prayed that God would give them a son under naturally impossible circumstances (Luke 1:13), while James 5:17-18 reminds us of Elijah's prayers – not a ritual, but something specific and real.

Simple analysis of John chapter 17. The prayer can be divided into three main sections:

Vv. 1-5. The relationship between the Father and the Son. (See v.5).

Vv. 6-19. Prayer for the living disciples. ("them", "these". See v.12 and v.15).

Vv. 20-26. Prayer for believers in the future. ("shall believe". See v.20).

We notice that of the 26 verses in John chapter 17, just the first 5 verses are taken up by the Lord concerning Himself and His Father and their relationship. The remaining 21 verses of the prayer concern others – those that were then living (vv. 6-19) and those that would believe in the future (vv. 20-26). So, at this critical time in His earthly experience, with Calvary looming before Him (and He, being omniscient, knowing all that Calvary would involve), His prayer was primarily concerning others and not self! How different from us! How do we react when circumstances press in on us? Are our thoughts just of ourselves and our situation? How refreshing to see the way the Saviour prayed now that "His hour had come". The main subjects of the prayer are believers – present and future – those that were "given to Christ" (see vv. 9,11,12). We are linked to Christ via creation, but here we see we are linked by foreknowledge and salvation! (v.6).

Some features of the prayer:

v.1. "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to Heaven, and said, Father..."

This verse shows us **how**, **where** and **what** He prayed and **Who** He prayed to.

How He prayed. In this instance the Lord "lifted up His eyes". In Gethsemane, in the face of all that lay before Him, He knelt down (Luke 22:41) and fell on his face, prostrate on the ground in prayer (Matt. 26:39). In 1Timothy 2:8 the brethren are taught to lift up holy hands in prayer, whilst Paul recalls bowing his knees in prayer (Eph. 3:14). Only regarding one occasion do we read of anyone sitting down praying (David: 1Chron. 17:16). It's not so much the position, but our attitude and character that's important when we come to pray, although godly reverence is paramount (Psalm 138:6).

Where He prayed ("... to Heaven ..."). We, citizens of Earth and time, can communicate with Heaven itself. Prayer elevates us beyond the sphere of Earth. Those three favoured disciples (Peter, James and John) left the hustle and bustle of everyday life below them when they went up into the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17) – they were never quite the same again afterwards. Peter remembered the experience vividly 30

years later (2Peter 1:16-18). They were alone in the presence of their Lord and spending time with Him. Such should be the experience of prayer with us, coming quietly into the presence of God and away from the distractions around us (Matt. 6:6).

Who He prayed to (“... Father ...”). This prayer was prayed directly to the Father. What reverence from the Son of God as He approached His Father in prayer! Notice the words the Lord uses as He prays to the Father – “Father” (v.1), “O Father” (v.5), “Holy Father” (v.11) and “O righteous Father” (v.25). How we should approach God reverently in prayer, yet with holy boldness. The dignity and power of prayer is seen in that we can approach one unsullied in His holiness yet hearing each individual prayer of His people.

What He prayed. The prayer was for spiritual things – that God’s glory might be served and God’s will might be fulfilled in the lives of others; certainly a lesson for us today.

Other features of the prayer. The first six verses of chapter 17 reveal to us how the Lord Jesus brought glory to the Father (vv. 1,4-5), received authority from God (v.2), accomplished a work for God (v.4), witnessed in the name of God (v.6) and had intimacy with God (v.5; see also vv. 22-25).

He brought glory to the Father (vv. 1,4-5). In verses 1-5 glory and glorification are mentioned 5 times, referring to the sum total of the attributes of God. The Lord exhibited a moral glory in His walk, His words and in His works when here on Earth (v.4). After completing the work of salvation, He returned to the Father with an acquired glory (a glory that He didn’t possess before (1Pet. 1:21)), while in verse 5 we see His pre-incarnate glory that He always had in fellowship with the Father before the world was. This was veiled in human flesh while on Earth, but would shine forth again in a glorified body on His return to Heaven.

Our responsibility today. How can we bring glory to the Father today? How can we magnify, reflect and radiate Christ in our daily lives? Well, firstly by the proper control and not the misuse of our bodies – really by what we are/our character (1Cor. 6:20) – and secondly by what we do/our works (Matt. 5:16). Human society today is primarily taken up elevating and glorifying self, but we, as believers, should ever seek to elevate and glorify Christ! So many in the world can be described like Belshazzar in the last expression of Daniel 5:23: “and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified.”

He had power (authority) from God (v.2). This was a power (authority – Gr. “*exousia*”) uniquely given to Christ. Angels have great invested power and even Satan himself has much power, but only the Lord is all-powerful. He had the authority to give eternal life to all mankind (an authority that only He had), but that eternal life only became real and operative for the many who place their faith and trust in Him. So, this verse teaches against “universal salvation”. Our faith rests in One who has authority over creation, but also over salvation. As wonderful and as majestic is His authority over creation, even more wonderful and more majestic is His ability and authority regarding salvation. In the future His authority will be acknowledged universally (Phil. 2:10-11).

Our responsibility today. What authority have we been given from God? Colossians 1:13 reminds us that, as believers, we have been delivered from the power (authority) of darkness into a much higher authority. We have the supreme authority of the Bible to direct the way we live our daily lives and the way we gather as companies of God’s people. We have an indwelling power (authority) of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. Also, we have Divine authority to preach the gospel (Matt. 28:18-19), as well as the power (ability) and authority to stand against Satan. God has provided the armour and the weapons, we have the responsibility to use them (Eph. 6:10-18)! The Lord Jesus exercised the authority given to Him, but do we exercise the authority and responsibility that has been given to us?

He was doing a work for God (v.4). Despite the opposition, the Lord Jesus continued and completed that work. In John 4:34 we read of His desire to “finish His work” (i.e. the Father’s work). Here in verse 4 we read of Him finishing “the work” which the Father had given Him to do. Therefore, our Lord made the Father’s work, His work! He was doing God’s work in God’s way.

Our responsibility today. We all have a work to do, generally and specifically. All believers have the responsibility of living God-centred, holy lives (1Peter 1:15-16) and of witnessing to others, either by word or deed, of the saving power of God in our lives. In addition, there are specific works that some have been

gifted for, like public evangelism and teaching. Many today say that they are involved in work for the Lord, but are we engaged in the work of the Lord? (Note especially the word “of” in 1Corinthians 15:58.)

He witnessed in the name of God (v.6). In verse 6 the Lord Jesus “manifested” (the idea is that He revealed, showed) the name of the Father to those around Him. How did He do that? He did it by His essential godliness (“He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father”, John 14:9) and by His person and character. He represented God before men, not only because He possessed Divine attributes, but by the fact that He was God.

Our responsibility today. In the history of the nation of Israel (God’s earthly people), on the Day of Atonement the High Priest went into the presence of God to represent the people before God (Leviticus 16). He then came out from the presence of God to represent God before the people. We note the order here. The High Priest’s witness to the people would have been shallow and valueless if he first hadn’t been in God’s presence. So it should be with us – our witness before others can only be of any value if we too show essential characteristics of godliness and knowing God’s will, by first having been in His presence.

He lived close to God (v.25). The word “known” appears three times in verse 25. The Son had an eternal and intimate knowledge of the Father. The unsaved world only has a superficial knowledge of God and has no desire to get to know Him (John 1:10). Believers today have come to know Him by faith, through the indwelling Holy Spirit and the revealed will of God.

Our responsibility today. How well do we know God? How intimate is our relationship with Him? In natural walks of life, you get to know someone better the more you have been continually in their presence e.g. as husband and wife. You get to know what they like and what they dislike, and learn more of their character as time goes on. So it is with God. The more we are in His presence (via His Word and prayer) then the more we will know God’s thoughts and mind, and His will and desires for us. As a result, we will become progressively more like Him.

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Worship in John’s Gospel

We might have expected John’s sublime Gospel to be full of examples of worship, but they are few compared to Matthew and Luke. Even the worshippers mentioned by John are a strange and unexpected collection of people. A woman who had been living in sin, a man who had been born blind, a woman whose act of worship was severely criticized, and a group simply described as “Greeks”. The examples given emphasize the humility of a true worshipper – no one deserves to be a worshipper of the living God, but worship is the spontaneous response of those who have “tasted that the Lord is gracious”.

On the other hand, John’s Gospel, perhaps more than any other, contains in almost every verse that which would lead the believer to bow in worship before the Son of God and the Father who sent Him into the world. However, we will confine ourselves to the clear references to worship.

Ch. 4 – The Importance of Worship

Most would have dismissed the Samaritan woman as unlikely to ever become a true worshipper. But the Lord saw it as a “must” to go through Samaria in order to meet her. It was the woman herself who introduced the subject of worship into the conversation. Was she trying to avoid the issue of her sinful life by changing the subject? Possibly, but the Lord opens up the subject in such a wonderful way that it may well be that her words expressed a genuine longing in her heart to have a right relationship with the living God.

With the words “the hour cometh, and now is”, the Lord indicates that a new dispensation was beginning in

which outward forms and earthly temples “made with hands” (Acts 7:48), whether right (Jerusalem) or wrong (“this mount”), were no longer relevant. Without going into the reasons for the change, the Lord shows that now the important thing would be for worship to be real and sincere – “in spirit and in truth”, empowered by God’s Spirit and inspired by God’s word. But He also shows her that true worship would be an expression of a relationship with God which she herself could come to enjoy. It would be worship of the Father, thus implying that the worshippers are His children. Yes, even this woman, with all her sin, could be forgiven, cleansed, and brought into God’s family! Now we worship the Father who is fully revealed in His Son. While the Son came to seek and save the lost, the Father is seeking the same ones to be His worshippers.

Ch. 9 – The Emergence of Worship

The case of the man born blind is a clear illustration of the illumination of the Spirit in the salvation of a soul. It was vision which never existed in Him before. It is the same in salvation, it is a new creation, we once were darkness, “but now are we light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8). The same is true of worship. We may have engaged in something called “worship” and attended “places of worship”, but we were never true worshippers until we could say, “We are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

It is interesting to trace the progress of the man born blind. First there was the obedience of faith. The Lord said “go and wash...”, and he went and washed and came back seeing. Then there was the public confession of what had taken place: “Whereas I was blind, now I see” (v. 25), although he could not say much more than that the man who healed him was called Jesus (v. 11). Then he realises that He must at least be a prophet (v. 17) and one who did God’s will and worshipped Him (v. 31). Finally he declares plainly that this Man must be “of God”, for no one had ever opened the eyes of one born blind before. At this point he was excommunicated. The Lord Jesus found him and asked, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God” (v. 35).

No doubt he had already seen many faces since his eyes were opened. There were the incredulous neighbours (v. 8), his own parents who were more concerned about their own social standing (v. 22), and the hostile, sneering, Pharisees who hated the very name of Jesus. But now he is face to face with One whose face radiates divine love and glory. “Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on him?” “Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee”. His education was complete: “Lord, I believe” he said, and “worshipped Him” (v. 38). What a day that was for a blind beggar! It began in sightless darkness, as did every day. But now he is worshipping in the light of the presence of the One who had transformed his life. “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18).

Ch. 12:1-8 – The Fragrance of Worship

Although the word “worship” is not found in this passage, it presents a beautiful picture of true worship. We can note three things here: the humility of a true worshipper, the appreciation expressed by worship, the influence of true worship.

Humility. Once again, we see that worship is not the privilege of men only, although theirs is the privilege of audible public worship. Mary is found three times at the feet of the Lord (Luke 10; John 11 and 12). She not only anointed His feet but also wiped them with her hair, taking the place of a handmaiden of the Lord.

Appreciation. Worship is the expression of our appreciation of what God is. The English word “worship” was originally “worth-ship”. We declare how precious He is to us. Judas was able to calculate the value of the spikenard and criticize Mary’s act as “waste”. But Mary gave the best she could and must have laboured and saved for years to purchase this expensive imported ointment. She would have loved to be able to give Him much more.

Influence. It filled all the house – true worship fills the assembly with the fragrance of Christ. It remained upon Him – through all His sufferings the Lord would be able to sense the fragrance of Mary’s thankful devotion, and know that, through His sacrifice, there would be many more like her. It remained upon her –

she would always have the satisfaction of knowing that she “had done what she could” when she had the opportunity, and that with the Lord’s approval.

Ch. 12:21 – The Advance of Worship

Among the multitudes which had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebrations there were “certain Greeks” who had come up to worship. The presence of gentiles with an interest in the God of Israel in Jerusalem does not seem to have been unusual, as we can see from the case of the Ethiopian in Acts 8:27 as also from the presence of proselytes on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:10. The request of these Greeks to “see Jesus” seems to be a sign to the Lord that “the hour is come” when He would be not only crucified and resurrected, but glorified.

His parable of the corn of wheat dying to bring forth much fruit, shows that He had much more in mind in giving His life on the cross than the salvation of Israel. He had already spoken of other sheep which were not of that fold, whom He must also bring (10:16). There on the cross He would draw all men unto Himself (12:32). The temple was to be “a house of prayer for all nations” and in the Millennium the incense of true worship will ascend from every land (Malachi Ch. 1). All this is the fruit of Calvary. In fact, we can see a mighty river of worship and praise, flowing from the crucified Saviour, growing and increasing, until heaven and earth are saturated with its sound: “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever” (Revelation 5:13).

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The Acts of the Apostles

Chapter 10:1-16

Acts chapters 10 and 11 are transitional; they mark the start of a new phase in the spread of the Gospel. Gentiles will be brought into the blessings already enjoyed by **(a)** saved Jews, and **(b)** saved Samaritans. This will be the third use of the keys of the kingdom by Peter, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”, (Matt. 16:19).

Acts chapter 2 details the beginning of the body, the church. Perhaps this is best summarised by the verse, “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into **one body**, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1Cor. 12:13). Acts chapter 10 details the beginning of the **new man**. This is summarised in the verse, “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain **one new man**, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in **one body** by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph. 2:15,16). The fact of saved Jews and saved Gentiles equally in this new and growing organism (not an organisation!) is something entirely new in history. Only the grace of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit could achieve such an outcome.

Acts chapter 10 is as much about the process whereby the mind of Peter is converted to the reality of the Gospel reaching out to the Gentiles as it is about the salvation of Cornelius. Indeed, the stress is more on Gentiles having the gift of the Holy Spirit poured upon them than about Cornelius’ reception of the word. The placing of Jew and Gentile on the common ground of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ transcends Old Testament Scriptures about blessing Gentiles.

Just as Saul and Ananias had separate but confirmatory visions and revelations in Acts chapter 9, Cornelius and Peter have separate but confirmatory visions in Acts chapter 10. In Acts 10:1-8 Cornelius is prepared for Peter; in Acts 10:9-23 Peter is prepared for Cornelius. Both men were praying and both received visions. But first we must meet Cornelius.

Cornelius and his vision (v.1-8)

The introduction is given, “There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius”. Cæsarea was a garrison city named after Cæsar Augustus. It was the Roman administrative capital of Judæa with a splendid harbour built by Herod the Great. It was a well-fortified city with some 5,000 infantry stationed there plus a squadron of cavalry. Cornelius was a Roman centurion of “the band called the Italian band”. Cornelius was a career soldier. If a cohort commander he had under his authority at least 600 men, but if this was an auxiliary cohort, with recruits who were not Roman citizens, he may have commanded some 1,000 men.

He is described as being “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway”. It appears that he had come to reject the pagan religious practices of the Greco-Roman world to accept monotheism, that is, there is one God. This may have been as a result of observing the ethical standards of Judaism and while he may have attended synagogue services he does not appear to have become a Jewish proselyte. While Cornelius was pious, having a sacred awe and reverence, he did not at this stage know the salvation proclaimed or forgiveness of sins through the Gospel. His personal convictions characterised his family also and he certainly fulfilled the later description ‘he that feareth God and worketh righteousness’ (Acts 10:35). His religious position presently is one that has reverence for the God of the Jews rather than being a Jewish proselyte or God-fearer (e.g. 13:16,26), that is, as a more formal adherent of Judaism.

The devotion was expressed in two ways: **(a)** by being generous to the needy (possibly to Jews but also to Gentiles, who were predominant in Cæsarea) and **(b)** by regular prayer to God. While religious practices are not the same as regeneration, nevertheless Acts 11:14 suggests that he had a definite desire to find and know God in a personal way.

Cornelius the seeker after God then receives a vision about 3p.m. one afternoon, the Jewish “hour of prayer” (Acts 3:1). The time points in this narrative are important: this is **‘afternoon, day No. 1’**. It is interesting that God is communicating direct to an, as yet, unsaved Gentile, and by a daytime vision. Cornelius sees “an angel of God” coming unto him, which again is unusual in that the ministry of angels in the Old Testament were usually associated with the nation of Israel. Here the angel comes to Cornelius and calls him by his name! The effect upon Cornelius is described: he was afraid! This is entirely understandable as it would likely be the last thing that Cornelius expected. Fear in the presence of a spiritual manifestation is entirely a natural reaction.

Although Cornelius looked on the angel, no description of the appearance is given, just his reaction saying “What is it, Lord?” The word “Lord” here has no ‘theological significance’, it is equivalent ‘Sir’, that is a title of reverence or awe in the presence of a superior. What a wonder to receive the response “Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial [as a memorial offering] before God”. His actions on earth have been taken note of in heaven! The sincerity of his prayers and alms proved that his heart would respond to the truth of the Gospel, concerning our Lord Jesus Christ.

But the vision is a command to action. Cornelius is instructed as to the next step: “send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter”. While a revelation may be to the heart and understanding; a vision, perhaps, is more to do with the mind and direction to activity. So messengers are to be sent 32 miles south along the coast to Joppa to find Peter. The Lord knows the location and present availability of his servants! Remember that it was at Joppa that Jonah disobeyed when commissioned by God with a message to Gentiles, Jonah chapter 1. Peter’s current lodging address is given as the house of “Simon a tanner” by the seaside, which is not surprising as tanners would use seawater in their work.

It would be Peter who “shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do”. The angel was not entrusted with preaching the gospel message. That privilege is entrusted to men, as only the subjects of grace can preach the gospel; evangelism can only stem from personal experience. The angel puts all the responsibility on Peter.

Cornelius acts immediately and sends two household servants with a trusted soldier who shares Cornelius’ piety. To these three men Cornelius rehearses the detail of his vision and sends them to Joppa.

Committing the task to this group ensured duplication of testimony, which in turn would ensure reliability and underscore credibility.

Peter and his vision (v.9-16)

The deputation from Cornelius set off to Joppa the next morning and presumably travelled by horse to enable them to cover the 32-mile distance between Cæsarea and Joppa to arrive by noon. As they were nearing Joppa Peter, not knowing that he soon would have visitors, “went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour”. This was **noon on day No. 2**, that is some 21 hours after Cornelius had received his vision. The flat roof of the tanner’s house, possibly under an awning, was Peter’s intended place of prayer. While it was a place of privacy, above the level of industry below, prayer to God does not require the aid of a special building. No temple or synagogue is needed for prayer!

While engaged in this spiritual exercise, Peter “became very hungry, and would have eaten”. It would seem that prayer was broken off so that food could be requested and a meal prepared, “but while they made ready, he fell into a trance”. This is not hunger-induced, but is a spiritual state when the attention is so concentrated and absorbed so that all other external senses are partially or entirely suspended. Yet as the revelation is about food the context is most appropriate. In many respects the person ‘stands outside’ of themselves to receive this communication. Astonishment or amazement is involved and normal rational thought processes are suspended.

The vision Peter receives is immediately connected with heaven, he “saw heaven opened”. Then he saw “a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to earth”. So this is the mind of heaven for earth, with “four” suggesting that it is a message about something of universal application. This great sheet or sailcloth is interesting in itself, but the main point was what the sheet contained.

Strict food rules and dietary laws from the days of Moses set Israel apart from other nations and helped to maintain their separation, see Leviticus chapter 11. These food laws evidenced God’s parental care, reinforced Israel’s uniqueness as God’s earthly people and preserved them from social eating with non-Jews. Now God is going to withdraw such prohibitions. Christians are not under Old Testament rules and non-Jews are no longer considered unclean or common. This revelation is now being made to Peter by the sheet coming down from heaven, which contained “all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air”. In this vision Peter saw examples of creatures that walk, crawl, creep or fly and, very evidently from the detail that follows, they are unclean beasts as viewed by Jews.

Next he hears a voice, “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat”, which would be a most shocking command to a devout Jew who is scrupulously observant of the dietary laws. So it was here; and Peter, who recognises the voice that speaks, responds with “Not so, Lord”. This is another of Peter’s spontaneous responses, this one containing the paradox of freely acknowledging Lordship, but objecting to the command. Those who call Christ Lord must bow to His word.

Peter’s protest is on the basis that he had “never eaten anything common or unclean”. Ezekiel had made a similar protest (Ezek. 4:14). Peter recognised that the creatures on the sheet were ceremonially unclean, per Leviticus chapter 11. The Lord’s second statement takes account of Peter’s longstanding Jewish prejudice, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common”. The Lord had already taught this (Mark 7:18-23). Here God repeals the food laws by removing the Levitical prohibitions.

So there can be no doubt in the mind of Peter, the whole vision of the sheet was repeated three times. While twice should be sufficient for abundant testimony, Peter with his Jewish preferences and prejudices was evidently slow in the uptake. The final detail in the vision was of the sheet being “received up again into heaven”, signifying that all distinctions are removed regarding Jew and Gentile in heaven.

And then Peter has visitors coming to the gate of the tanner’s house!

(To be continued D.V.)

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Get to Know Your Bible

NEW TESTAMENT OUTLINE – Paper No 10.

FIRST THESSALONIANS

The 1st Epistle to “the church of the Thessalonians” (1:1), was written to a company of believers recently saved, zealously sounding out the Word of the Lord in much affliction and desiring to know more about the Coming of the Lord.

The chronology, character and contents of Paul’s epistles are commonly grouped as giving us six epistles written before his first imprisonment; 1 and 2Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 and 2Corinthians and Romans. These two epistles written from Corinth on the second missionary journey, to the young believers at Thessalonica are called the eschatological group among the Pauline writings, meaning the doctrine of the last or final things. Both the epistles give great prominence to the truth of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are three books of the Bible named after women. The book of Ruth is about the bringing in of a Gentile stranger to share in God’s programme of Redemption. The book of Esther in the Old Testament tells of the preservation of God’s earthly people in spite of Gentile opposition. The city of THESSALONICA was named after the half sister of Alexander the Great. The first epistle is written to a persecuted company of believers, largely Gentile, who; “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for His Son from heaven” (1Thess. 1:9-10). It is interesting to note that the letter to the church at THYATIRA, is written to an assembly in that city named after a woman, the daughter of one of the generals in the army of Alexander. The believers there had likewise been delivered from religious fornication, and; ‘Things offered to idols’ to await; “The Morning Star”. To them the Lord said, “Hold fast till I come” (Rev. 2:25-27).

The predominately Gentile background of the believers at Thessalonica is the reason why there are no Old Testament quotations in either epistle.

THESSALONICA

The city, in Paul’s day, was the chief seaport of the Roman province of Macedonia. It ranked with Corinth and Ephesus as the main ports of the provinces of Achaia and Asia. It was also located on the Egnatian Way, the main Roman road from Rome to the Orient. Most of the inhabitants were native Greeks, but many Romans also lived there. Orientals and Jews likewise populated the city. The pagan Greek religion of the largest segment of the population produced many forms of idolatry and immorality. The Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica was very influential when Paul preached there. In the Second World War, the Nazis extracted thousands of Jews and executed them. Today, the city is called Saloniki or Thessaloniki.

TIMING OF THE EPISTLE

Reference to Acts chapters 17 and 18 as well as 1Thessalonians, clearly shows that Paul wrote this epistle from Corinth, possibly shortly after he arrived in that city (Acts 18:1). Roman records of Gallio’s proconsulate (Acts 18:12), in the early 50’s make it possible to be confident that this epistle was one of Paul’s earliest inspired writings, written AD 52 or early AD 53.

After his imprisonment and scourging at Philippi (1Thess. 2:2), Paul passed on to Thessalonica with Silas and Timothy to preach the Gospel. His stay at Thessalonica was not limited to the three weeks in which were the three Sabbaths when he went into the synagogue (Acts 17:2). He laboured there with his hands for his own support, (1Thess. 2:9; 2Thess. 3:8). He received material supplies there more than once from Philippi (Phil. 4:15-16). The preaching of the Gospel resulted in the salvation of many Gentiles (1Thess. 1:9; Acts 17:4). A church was formed and the acknowledgement of assembly elders of repute (Ch. 5:12-13), would indicate a longer stay in spite of severe opposition.

The preaching of the Gospel at Thessalonica was received by those who believed in, “much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1:6). As at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:46), at Corinth (Acts 18:6-7) and at Ephesus (Acts 19:8-9), having preached the Gospel to the Jews, when they rejected it, he turned to the Gentiles. He may have continued to have meetings in the house of Jason (Acts 17:5). His stress in his preaching seems to have been the second coming and glory of Christ, (1Thess. 1:10; 2:12,19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11,23-24), and that they should walk worthy of it (2:12; 4:1). Those who attacked Jason’s house said; “these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus” (Acts 17:7). They perverted the doctrine of, “His kingdom and glory” (2:12), as a ground for the charge of treason against Cæsar. This was the charge the leaders of the nation brought against the Lord Jesus Himself (John 18:33-37; Matt. 26:64,65). Such was the uproar of the rabble mob in the city that the brethren sent away Paul and Silas by night to Berea. The young believers at Thessalonica became missionaries themselves. “For from you sounded out the Word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing” (1:8). Paul was hindered in his desire to return but he sent Timothy whose account of the wellbeing of the church at Thessalonica was highly favourable and gave occasion for Paul’s first epistle.

TONE

Paul wrote with love, fervent affection, simplicity and gentleness as though talking to his beloved children to explain his absence. He wrote as ‘a nursing mother’ (2:7-8), would desire the health and welfare of her children and to cherish them with the deep yearnings of sacrificial love (2:17-18). He exhorted and charged everyone, personally as “a father doth his children” (2:11). As a mother he cherished; as a father he charged; seeking to strengthen, to bring to responsibility, to individually encourage each believer, to “walk worthy of God, Who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory” (2:11:12).

Having left them amid great opposition and hostility (Acts 17:10), Paul writes in these five chapters to express his CARE for the young converts; his CONCERN for them amid continued persecution, his CONFIDENCE that as they suffered temptation that they would stand fast in the Lord; to COMFORT some who had been bereaved of loved fellow believers and to CORRECT a restlessness to the neglect of a pure, sober, temperate, God pleasing walk. The practical features of a God pleasing life (4:1), will merit further study. It is to be stressed that the call in the opening verses of chapter 4 is to purity not matrimony.

TEACHING

Paul’s constantly recurring prayer and thanksgiving, based on Timothy’s report was; “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” (1:3). They turned in “faith” resulting in work done. They toiled in “love”, which enabled the doing of the work to exertion, fatigue and strain amid trial. They tarried in “hope”; this “patience” encouraged stedfast endurance under persecution. However, some too, exclusively dwelt on the doctrine of the coming “kingdom”, so as to neglect the sober-minded discharge of present duties (4:11-12). Some who had lost relatives by death, needed comfort and instruction in their doubts as to whether those who had died before the Lord’s coming again would have a share with those found alive in His kingdom then to be revealed. Others required correction as to sins against chastity and sobriety, (5:5-7), and charity (4:3-10; 5:13-15). The advent hope is an incentive to proper assembly order and personal sanctification in spirit, soul and body (5:23).

THEOLOGY

First Thessalonians has been rightly called, The Epistle of the Rapture. The amazing account of Bible doctrine that the apostle was able to fit into his short time at Thessalonica are clearly indicated by references to Election (1:4); The Power of the Holy Spirit (1:5; 4:8; 5:19); The Trinity (1:3-5); Sanctification (4:3; 5:23); The Resurrection (4:13-14) and the Day of the Lord (5:1-3).

The Second Coming is mentioned in each chapter:

Salvation Assured “Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for His Son from heaven” (1:9-10).

Service Reviewed “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His Coming?” (2:19).

Saints Stablished “To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His Saints” (3:13).

Sorrow Banished “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (4:16-18).

Sanctification Perfected “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:23).

The key verses are in chapter 1:9-10. “How ye turned to God from idols (Attraction), to serve the living and true God (Allegiance); And to wait for His Son from heaven” (Anticipation). Verse 10 presents our Lord Jesus Christ as “Our Deliverer from the coming wrath”. We are to “wait up for”, eagerly, expectantly: His arrival is anticipated, “out of the heavens, even Jesus” (Humanity) “His Son” (Deity), “Whom He raised from the dead” (His Resurrection), “from Heaven” (His Ascension); guarantees our Deliverance, “delivereth”, present tense, “away from the coming wrath”. It is a fact of our salvation, based on the Gospel truth of death and resurrection that we will be raptured, caught up before the period of the Great Tribulation on earth.

SECOND THESSALONIANS

TIME

The two epistles are so clearly related that a few months are all that is needed to pass between the writings. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy are still together (1:1). They were together at Corinth (Acts 18:5,11) but Silvanus is not mentioned in Acts after this time. Sufficient time must be allowed for the reports of continued persecution to be received and the problem of idleness seemed to have increased (3:6-15). The likely time of writing would be AD 54, following the evidence based facts outlined in comments on the first epistle.

THANKSGIVING

“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren” (1:3). These words are again repeated, adding “beloved of the Lord” (2:13). Paul’s cause for continued thanksgiving was because of their salvation, sanctification, belief in the truth, exceeding growth in faith, abounding love toward one another and patient endurance amid persecutions and tribulation. The reasons for writing this second epistle are:-

To COMFORT young believers in trial and continued awful persecutions.

To CONFIRM the teaching of the first epistle relative to the Imminent Rapture.

To CONTRADICT the contents a spurious letter (forgery of Paul’s writings) teaching that they were already in the Day of the Lord.

To CALM the assembly, agitated and upset by trials and false teaching.

To CHARGE any who were idle in work and busybodies in troublemaking.

To CENSURE the man solemnly, who continues in deliberate disobedience to apostolic doctrine.

To CONTINUE the prophetic teaching introduced in the first epistle.

The thanksgiving (1:3) is similar to the words of 1Thessalonians 1:2-3. Compare the prayers of 1Thessalonians 3:11-13 and 5:23, with chapters 2:16-17 and 3:16. The apostle continues to write in the same sympathetic style and kind words as the first epistle. His tenderness as their father in the faith and his humble request for an interest in their prayers are again found in this epistle. In this, the shortest of Paul’s nine letters to the churches, note his four prayers for the glory of Christ (1:11-12; 2:16-17; 3:5,16).

The pre-eminence of the Lord and His full name "Lord Jesus Christ" occurs eighteen times. Each of the three chapters end with prayer. He warmly addresses his readers as "brethren" seven times.

TROUBLE

"Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:6-8). To encourage troubled believers, the apostle shows that this is all in keeping with God's righteous purposes. Divine enablement is available to steadfastly endure amid sufferings, knowing that God will not allow their unjust sufferings to go unpunished and if we suffer, we shall also reign with Christ, being counted worthy of the kingdom of God. The word "rest" is a noun, not a verb, it is relief, the reversal of present conditions, the relaxing of tension and stress. It is not rest from labour but the loosing of a taunt bowstring, fallow land given rest after years of ploughing. "With us" writers, suffering saints will enjoy "rest", while upon their adversaries the Lord pours our righteous retribution.

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him (at the Rapture), That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, not by letter as from us, as that the Day of the Lord (not as AV) is at hand (now present)" (2:1-2). The word "troubled" here means to not be agitated, perturbed or alarmed. If they were already in the Day of the Lord (God's wrath on earth) this would deny the Hope of the imminent Rapture. A fake "letter" claiming apostolic authority, teaching this false doctrine had troubled them. The lesson must not be missed. We must be aware of those who claim special revelations, of rumours and new translations today.

TRIBULATION

For a proper understanding of the apocalyptic (end time) section, (1:6-2:11), it is essential to see the distinction between the *Rapture of the church* when we shall meet the Lord in the air (1Thess. 4:15-18); the *Day of the Lord* which shall come as a thief in the night, (1Thess. 5:2-11) and the manifest brightness of *His coming to reign on earth* (1:6-2:11). The believers were not afraid that the Lord had come but they were fearful that they were already in the Tribulation. Paul had not taught about any signs being seen on earth before the Rapture but the believers were being misled by false teaching that since they were enduring such persecution and trials that they were already in the Day of the Lord. Paul now teaches that before the Day of the Lord, the Great Tribulation, there will be signs on earth:

(i) Apostasy. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come (it will not be) except there come a falling away first". Literally, "could not come, it will not be, because the apostasy comes first" (2:3). This will be a complete forsaking of all truth concerning God and deliberate rebellion against the Word and authority of God.

(ii) The Man of Sin. "That man of sin be revealed" (2:3). The man of lawlessness, a person not a system, the wilful king, the antichrist, the embodiment of "sin" will be "revealed", sudden manifestation, he will be no longer hidden.

(iii) Removal of Restraint. "And now (logical sequence of the theme) ye know what withholdeth ("that which" – neuter, "restraineth")". The presence of believers on earth, they must first be removed by the Rapture. As salt, the presence of saints on earth hold back the corruption; they are as light in the increasing darkness. Compare the restraint by God upon Satanic evil in the days of Noah (Gen. 6:3), and in the days of Job (Job 2:2).

"Only He (masculine) who now letteth will let (same word as restraineth), until He (the Person of the Holy Spirit) be taken out of the way ("midst")", (2:7). Believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit will be caught up at the Rapture and the present convicting and restraining work of the Holy Spirit in the day of Grace, will cease.

"And then shall that wicked (lawless, singular, embodiment of rebellion against God) be revealed, (by Satan, only used here in N.T., to denote the unveiling of something evil) whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit (breath) of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming" (2:8).

In 1Thessalonians we learned that God has not appointed us to tribulation wrath (1Thess. 5:9), that is coming upon rebellious, wicked Christ rejecting mankind. This cannot happen when those who are saved by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ are still on earth. What is holding back the wrath of God is the present working of the Holy Spirit and the presence and prayers of the Lord's dear people. The next event is the call to meet the Lord in the air, the imminent, imperative, instantaneous Rapture taught in these two vital epistles.

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By Love Serve

Can you make a bit of sunshine? – Make it
And to some dark clouded corner – Take it,
Any thoughtful little action – Do it,
You will never, I assure you, – Rue it.

And the sad are soon encouraged – By it,
So throughout the days now coming – Try it,
BE YOUR BEST, and unto others – Give it,
By God's grace be all HE wants, and – Live it.

– H.E. Jennings.

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Eye Witnesses of His Majesty

In the Gospel according to Matthew, the Son of God is brought before us as the King, the Lion of the tribe of Judah; and "where the word of the king is, there is power (Eccl. 8:4). In chapter 1, the King's genealogy is marked with divine precision as Son of David and Son of Abraham, the roots of promise; chapter 2, the wise men come from the East with their interrogations and gifts, saying, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?"; chapter 3, John the Baptist heralds His coming with the wilderness cry, "Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand"; chapter 4, the King is tempted; chapters 5, 6 and 7, we have the King seated on the mountain giving His governmental policy.

But let us go back and look for a little at the mountain scene in chapter 4: "Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

The Mountain of Temptation

The first man was tempted in a garden; Israel was tempted in the wilderness. Jesus stood and conquered where Adam and Israel fell. Taking up a smooth stone from the brook of inspiration, our Fore-runner smote the enemy with "It is written." Here is the great example for all the saints of God: "By the word of Thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Psa. 17:4). With Lot it was the well-watered plains of Sodom; for Achan it was a Babylonish garment, gold and silver; the passing evil age for Demas; and what shall we say of this present day with its powder and paint, its love of pleasure more than "lovers of God"? the scanty dress and shorn hair; alas! Many have come down from their excellency to pay homage to these modern gods. May we have grace given to turn away from these evils to the mountain, and from the mountain to the very throne of God, to see the One Who has overcome.

“And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him: And He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...” (Matt. 5:1-12). Here we have:

The Mountain of Teaching

Let the reader observe the symphony of the blessings. “Blessed are the poor.” “Blessed are the pure.” “Blessed are the peacemakers.” “Blessed are they that mourn.” “Blessed are the meek.” “Blessed are the merciful.” When we put these on and wear them before men, we shall know the next experimentally. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake”; all these beatitudes will be seen in their fulness when the King comes in His millennium glory, but surely we expect to see them now in the followers of the Lamb of God. He was the One that exemplified them all in His perfect walk – “the poor,” “the pure,” “the peacemaker,” “the mourner,” “the meek,” “the merciful”; and because of this He was persecuted for righteousness. How often we see the opposite to all this – the proud, the haughty, the quarrelsome. Let us “put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col. 3:12,13).

“And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, He was there alone” (Matt. 14:23).

The Mountain of Prayer

The Son of God was pre-eminently the Man of prayer, and what an example for His people; if one dare speak for all, this is where we fail, in waiting upon God. Reader, let me ask you what about your prayer life? You may be a preacher, Sunday school teacher, leader among the people of God, or quietly serving the Lord in your business or in the home, but if prayer is lacking, the life is powerless. The sanctuary goes before the platform, the secret place of the Most High goes before public service. We must stand before God if we are going to stand before men – “inside the veil,” then “outside the camp.” Do we talk as much to God in private as we do to men in public? Are we often on our feet talking, and seldom on our knees praying? Let us look again at our blessed Lord: “And it came to pass, that as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). “And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). In Mark’s Gospel, where Christ is seen as the busy servant, we read, “And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35).

Let us climb another mountain. “And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light, And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with Him” (Matt. 17:1-3).

The Mountain of Glory

There on the mountain we see the coming Kingdom in miniature when the gates will lift up their heads and the everlasting doors open wide to receive the King of Glory. Moses the former, and Elijah the reformer, the one speaking of the law, the other of the prophets; but these heavenly visitants suggest another picture: Moses, our sleeping dead, who will be quickened when Jesus comes: Elijah, the living saints who will be changed and put on immortality; Peter, James and John, Israel in her place of testimony once again with the nations at the bottom of the mountain. As we look upon the glory even now we put it on, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2Cor. 3:18). “When they were awake, they saw His glory, and the two men that stood with Him” (Luke 9:32). “Let us not sleep, as do others” (1Thess. 5:6). Samson slept and lost his seven locks (Judg. 16:19), Saul slept and lost his spear and cruse of water (1Sam. 26:12), while the bridegroom tarried the virgins slept (Matt. 25:5), while men slept, the enemy sowed tares (Matt. 13:25). Shall we not bestir ourselves from the sleep of death that is all around, to keep awake and see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?

“Our former transports we recount,
When with Him in the holy mount,
These cause our souls to thirst anew
His marred but lovely face to view.”

“The the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them, And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:16-20).

The Mountain of Commission

Here we see the risen Lord giving His disciples their marching orders. He had said before “come,” “tarry,” now He says go and make Christians, then baptize them and teach them to observe all things.

When we turn over to the Acts of the Apostles, we see how faithfully the apostles carried out their Master’s instructions: “Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41,42). “And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). Thus the early church set out on her heavenly journey for the Father’s house, guided by the four great landmarks: “The apostles’ teaching,” “the fellowship,” “the breaking of bread,” and “the prayers”: and of her it is written: “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them (Acts 5:13).

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Literature Distribution

“The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people ... So the posts ... went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king’s commandment” (Esther 8:13,14)

Distribution of gospel literature plays a very important role in the service of an evangelist. The spoken word of God and the written Scriptures of truth and life, are like the seed that germinates and yields results in the lives of men. The ‘word’ is the *seed*. It may be either the spoken or written Word; as such, gospel literature containing the word of God creates profound and lasting impact in the mind and soul of its readers. Thus, the distribution of literature should occupy a major part of the daily work of an evangelist.

The Effectiveness of Literature

The following quote will reveal the real value of these little printed messengers:

“Tracts can go anywhere. They know no fear, never tire, nor die. They can be multiplied without end, can travel long distances at little expense. They run up and down, like the angels of God, giving to all, and asking no gift in return. They can talk silently to one as well as to many, and to many as well as to one. They require no public hall to tell their story in, but can use the kitchen or the parlour, the office, the closet, the highways or the footpath.”

“They take no note of scoffs, jeers or taunts, and cannot be angered. Though they will not always answer questions, they can tell their story many times over. And they can speak on every subject, and do it wisely and well. Then can, in short, be vehicles of all truth, teachers of all classes, benefactors of all lands.”

The Charm of Literature Ministry

An unknown Puritan writer wrote a tract entitled, ***'The Bruised Reed'***; it was read by one Richard Baxter, and God changed his heart and he was saved. Baxter then wrote a book entitled, ***'Baxter's call to the Unconverted'***, and through it another named Philip Doddridge saw the light and received life. After a while he wrote a book titled ***'The Rise and Progress of Religion'***. This book fell into the hands of one William Wilberforce, and he was wonderfully saved too. He in turn wrote ***'A Practical View of Christianity'*** and a lazy, intellectual, unconverted, Scot minister named Dr. Chalmers read it, was greatly influenced and was truly converted. The influence of Chalmers is even now felt all over Scotland. In England a man named Leigh Richmond read Wilberforce's tract and he too met his Saviour, and he in turn wrote ***'The Dairy Man's Daughter'***, and this book change the hearts of thousands of men all over the land and brought a great revival.

"Gospel tracts have a life of their own that other modern media do not have. The fleeting images of the TV or DVD cannot outlast the gospel tract which may disappear into a pocket or a drawer to be pulled out at a later date to be re-read. Eternity alone will reveal the winding trails that some gospel tracts have taken in their travels. In losing confidence in the effectiveness of these tracts, we have actually lost confidence in God's willingness to use 'the foolish things of the world to confound the wise'." – Selected.

The Effectiveness of Literature Distribution

The following story will illustrate to us how God works miracles through the printed page and the value of literature distribution.

A young man was once distribution gospel tracts and he gave one to a gentleman on board a ship. The man said: "Tracts! Thank you. I used to give them out myself, but I have given it up long ago! You know nothing comes of it". The young man was not discouraged but said, "Well sir, it was a tract given to me that was the means of my salvation". "Really, that's interesting, tell me about it". So the young man patiently narrated that while he was passing down a certain street some years ago in a certain town one evening, a gentleman gave him a tract, which led him to Christ. The surprised older man stopping him and enquired eagerly, "Tell me, when did that happen?" The young man gave the date and time as nearly as he could remember. "Why", said the gentleman, "it must have been me gave you the tract because that was the very place where I used to give out tracts for years".

Let us not get discouraged but distribute literature liberally, praying that God may work miracles in His own mysterious way.

Missionary William C. Irvine, who was ministering for the Lord in Karnataka, in South India, during the first half of the last century, quotes an interesting extract from a letter written to him by one Mrs A. Devashagayam that reads:

"My father, the first convert in Sivakasi, Satur Taluk, Ramnad District (in Tamil Nadu) became a Christian way back in 1856, before he ever saw a single Christian, by reading tracts and Bible portions brought to him from Madurai". This is a unique case further proving the value of the silent printed messengers of God.

A teenager hailing from South Tamil Nadu was working in a used paper shop belonging to his uncle at Madras (now Chennai). They used to buy old papers, old books, magazines and newspapers and would sort them out based on their quality and pack them off to paper mills for re-cycling. As this boy was engaged in his work, one day an old Tamil magazine 'Sthanapathy' meaning 'Ambassador' brought out by a few brethren from Christian assemblies attracted him. As he was reading he was graciously stirred to accept the need for salvation and attended a meeting held at a Gospel Hall, the address which he found in that magazine. He heard the gospel preached by a visiting evangelist and by the grace of God, he was wonderfully saved and became a faithful witness for the Lord. God graciously blessed his life. In the mercy of God, in due course, he started helping that particular magazine ministry and today he shoulders the responsibilities for its production and distribution, thus bringing blessing to many people.

Sales of Scriptural Portions

Innumerable conversions have taken place over the years through the reading of Gospel portions. The free gift of a Gospel was instrumental in the conversion of Pandita Ramabai and in bringing her to Jesus Christ.

A friend writes, "Last year, I met a man genuinely converted as a result of reading of a Gospel, sold by some preachers in the course of their preaching expedition. He is now a baptized believer and is standing firm for the Lord in the midst of a Catholic community".

In the booklet, 'Goodwill Toward Men', Mr J. Duthic of Hada, writes about the outcome of colportage ministry in a certain district in North China. (Note: the word 'colportage' means one who takes literature, visiting places and houses selling and distributing them. During the days of D.L. Moody, he encouraged such work and started publishing valuable but cheaply priced booklets, under the general series "Colportage Library" which was a means of blessing many.)

"A colporteur worked in that district for many years without seeing any definite outward results. But within the last three or four years a good number of men had accepted Christ, and after being baptized were received into the fellowship of the church. In one small mountain village we now have some 21 Christians in fellowship and others are enquirers. All this began with the dissemination of the Scriptures, and no one knows how many may yet be won for Christ in that region as a result".

The best time to sell Gospel portions would usually be after open-air preaching: It is easy to sell portions by calling attention to certain verses in them, related to the subject just preached. It is unwise to distribute tracts or attempt to sell Gospels while the preaching is going on. Some think Gospels should never be *given* away free. But it is generally wiser to sell for a nominal price, though exceptions to this rule may be necessary. The idea is that if the recipients pay a small sum, they will be inclined to put to better use the material they buy.

This may also be done during visitation work in parks, seashores and other public places where people often assemble and can leisurely hear what we have to say. After a personal word or testimony, we can present the Gospel portions and other booklets, which explain the truth of the Gospel message delivered. Before we set out on visitation work, we must be careful to stock sufficient quantity of literature for distribution. We should have a few titles or tracts in different languages as well, so that the needs of people of various languages may be met.

In free distribution of literature there is bound to be a certain amount of wastage. Each and every tract may not bring in results. However, we are to discriminate and try to avoid misuse, exercising utmost care. Care should also be taken to ensure that it is not wasted as a result of indiscriminate distribution. The one who distributes literature should know the contents of the tracts and booklets he distributes, so that he can suitably select a tract to meet the needs of the person he meets. Generally, distribution among children should be avoided, as chances of the literature being torn or misused is greater. But that cannot be a hard or fast rule. Adolescent boys and girls who show signs of conviction may be able to read it out to their illiterate parents and adults at home so that the good news will spread in the villages. We may also appeal to them to read it out to members of their household, especially to the elders. We should make sure that one tract reaches every home in the area of the village we visit. We may also have some stock of literature suitable for children and the little ones.

We must not forget to pray for God's blessing on the printed word and for those who distribute them, spending time and energy and who often suffer fatigue in this rather monotonous work for God.

Literature Ministry

In towns and cities, where most people are educated and are able to discern, we must distribute different types of booklets presenting Gospel messages suitable for different categories of people, like school children, college students, the business community, elite circles, and the general public, etc. We must cater to different religious peoples as well. A servant of God should also acquire books and booklets dealing with different religious subjects, wrong teachings, cults etc. As he meets people of different walks of life and

makes acquaintance with them, he must be able to assess their real need and try to present books that would convince them so that it would help the individual most. If he finds an individual who is really interested and has a thirst of the things of God, he should not hesitate even to buy a suitable book that would be most helpful for that individual.

Evangelists should always keep a sufficient stock of Bibles, New Testaments, Gospel portions and booklets on various Gospel truths, and suitable follow-up materials helpful to refresh converts. He must also have some useful devotional books, which he can give or lend to believing Christians as well. People who are keen on spiritual matters and earnest to study the Word of God should be introduced to Bible correspondence courses that have sound graded books containing the Gospel and doctrinal truths. They should also have helpful books on Christian life and growth, which would effectively supplement their ministry and bring eternal blessing.

In these days of electronic media, evangelists must also possess recorded Gospel messages and testimonies, to be handed out to the interested persons and during house visiting.

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The Unique Acclaims of the Son of God

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- As the Co-Existent, Co-Eternal Son – He is the divine **Administrator** of God's Purpose and of God Councils (Heb. 1:3)
- Before His Incarnation – He **Adorned** the Writings of the Old Testament Scriptures (His lowly descent into Manhood) (Psalms 2; 22-24; Isa. 53; Luke 24:27 etc.)
- At His Birth – He **Alarmed** a spurious King and impious Jewish leaders (Matt. 2:3)
- In His Youth – He **Astonished** Doctors of the Law by His Understanding (Luke 2:47)
- At His Baptism – He Received the **Adulation** of God the Father (Matt. 3:17)
- During His Ministry – He **Amazed** the Multitudes with His Words and Miracles and proved His **Authority** over disease, demons and death (Matt. 7:28,29; Mark 1:27; 6:41-43)
- At His Trial – He **Affrighted** an unjust Roman governor and judge (John 19:8)
- By His Death – He **Answered** the Righteous Demands of God against Man's sin and guilt (Rom. 3:21-26) as the Pre-**Appointed** Lamb
- In His Resurrection – He **Ashamed** the Powers of Death and Hell (Col. 2:15)
- In His Exaltation – He **Ascended** to Sit on the Right Hand of the Throne of God (Heb. 1:3; 12:2)
- At His Future glorious Manifestation – He will **Astound** the World by His Glory and His Judgments (2Thess. 1:6-10)
- Throughout Eternity – His **Accolades** will be **Acknowledged** and **Appreciated** by His Redeemed People (Rev. 5:12)
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MEN OF GOD SERIES

(5) NOAH : FOUND GRACE IN THE EYES OF THE LORD

“Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9)

The earth was filled with violence, corruption and moral degeneracy and fast heading for utter destruction. This is not a statement about conditions in the modern world, but it is a summary of the “days” in this world about four thousand five hundred years ago. The Lord said, “As it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man” (Luke 17:26). The ancient “days of Noah” and the present “days” before the Lord’s coming again are just the same. What should we, as believers, do in such “days”? Should we try to improve or circumvent the conditions? Should our voices be heard in world forums for change? Should we vote for those who claim to seek global betterment? Should we try to stir a sense of urgency in an apathetic society with ‘left behind’ films? What did Noah do? He was a righteous man who witnessed for God in dark “days”. He lived in separation from the unrighteous, violence and corruption of his generation. “Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9).

In the Days of Noah:

1. THE WILL OF GOD WAS DEFIED

“God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 1:27-28).

“The LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth” (Gen. 6:7).

Creation, springing from God’s hand was perfect. Eden’s garden surpassed improvement. Our first parents were pure in innocence, the unsullied reflection of God’s own image. “Yea, hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1). The devil attacked; sin entered into the world, into the heart of man and into that first family. Jealousy, envy, malice and rage filled the heart of Cain. The blow is aimed and Abel is murdered; bringing violence, sorrow, curse and death upon the earth. The book of Genesis is about two seeds and two families. The first; chapter 1 to chapter 11, developed in violence and corruption until God brought it to an end in the flood of waters. “And God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Gen. 6:13). God does not “repent” of His purposes. God’s first thoughts are God’s final thought. God changed His method of dealing with mankind. Noah and his family were placed on a new earth in a new covenant. “And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 9:1). The changes of God’s ways from innocence to promise, to law, to grace, are for His glory in His all wise programme with mankind.

2. THE WORK OF GOD WAS CORRUPTED

“And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31).

“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth” (Gen. 6:11-12).

The wisdom, love and power of God, manifest in the magnificence of a full working creation brought satisfaction and glory to God Himself. The brilliance of light unclouded, the beauty of that Paradise unblemished, the fragrance and fulness of its verdant pastures was to be the scene of communion between God and His creature. Eden’s sun was eclipsed. Darkness descended upon the brightness. The flowers of the garden became distant memories as man was driven out. The thorns and thistles, sorrow and sweat, distance and death have marked the generations of Adam since sin entered into this world. In the days of

Noah, evil had come to a head as the population increased. Man's corruption before God and his violence to his fellow man had reached a zenith so that judgement had become necessary. "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). In the modern age, the media through modern communications fill the mind, thoughts and imaginations of mankind. Life has become a soap opera. Man's imagination is focused upon actors, film stars, amusement and sport. On the screen is fiction, but on the streets of cities on earth, violence and murder is a reality in a brain washed society. Lies, deception, horror and moral corruption blind the minds of those who believe not. Global humanity, without shame as manslayers and whoremongers have become beastly and "fierce" (2Tim. 3:3). The violence of "the beast", the falsehood of "the false prophet" (Rev. 13); and the corruption of the "scarlet woman" (Rev. 17) will bring the wrath of God upon this earth, not by flood but by fire (Rev. 18,19). What did Noah do in his day? "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generation" (Gen. 6:9).

3. THE WARNINGS FROM GOD WERE IN VAIN

"The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2).

"And the LORD said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh, yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years" (Gen. 6:3).

When earth was formless and void the Spirit of God moved to bring form and fulness to the firmament. "By His Spirit He hath garnished the heavens" (Job 26:13). God communed with His creation in the cool breeze in the evening of the day.

When God's Sabbath of rest was disturbed by sin, He graciously covered the shameful state of Adam and Eve, with coats of skin. A widening span developed between the holiness of God and rebellious man. Yet, God provided a way back as by Abel's offering of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. The generations increased in wickedness and defiance. The Spirit strove with man before the flood. God gave loud testimony; He raised up witnesses to send forth the thrilling note of truth. He sent preachers to warn and call to repentance. In the seventh generation, Enoch's trumpet did not give an uncertain sound. Such was the burden of God's servant that even the name he gave to his son, Methuselah, warned that judgement was coming to the old world. "His days shall be an hundred and twenty years" (Gen. 6:3). This is respite. Here is space to repent, to turn, to pray for forgiveness. Like Nineveh, had they repented the judgement might at least have been delayed. What did Noah do?

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11:7). This verse begins and ends with the word "faith". "Faith is ... the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Faith believes the Word and Warnings of God. "Faith cometh by hearing" (Rom. 10:17). In the days of Noah, no rain had ever been seen. No evidence was given other than God's Word. "Fear" – "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). The Ark was proof of Noah's faith, as he "prepared"; each nail, each plank was a witness and condemnation to the world. Noah was marked by fear, faith, work, labour, patience and preaching. "Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness" (2Pet. 2:5). The people did not hear an invitation to enter into the ark. It is ridiculous to preach that, large though it was, there was room in the ark for the whole population of earth. The people were "disobedient" (1Pet. 3:20), occupied with pleasure and social things; they had no interest. They heard a call to repent of their evil ways from the preacher of righteousness. Noah was 500 years old when God first spoke to him (Gen. 5:32). Noah was 600 years old when the flood came (Gen. 7:6). The ark was "a preparing" for 100 years. Noah witnessed and worked in the power of the Spirit yet only eight souls were saved. The rest perished in the flood and are presently in the prison of perishing spirits in hell (1Pet. 3:19).

There are two voices in the world today. One is the lives of God's people and lips that preach repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). The only power holding back the evil at the end of the Day of Grace, is that of the Holy Spirit; "He who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way" (2Thess. 2:7), and the presence of believers "what withholdeth" (2Thess. 2:6). God is longsuffering. We are still in this world to be shining as lights in the darkness, our lives to be as salt amid corruption.

4. THE WRATH OF GOD WAS IMMINENT

“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matt. 24:37).

“The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (1Pet. 3:20).

The days of Noah are mentioned by four writers in the New Testament, Matthew, Luke, Peter and the writer to the Hebrews. The first reference in the N.T. is by the Lord Himself. It is interesting that the Lord did not mention the wickedness but the carelessness and wilful ignorance of the people. “For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matt. 24:38-39). Life went on as normal, buying and selling, planting and building. The people planned on staying. Noah was building an ark; he was leaving.

The mass of the people today are marked by complete denial of the claims of God, a total lack of repentance and no discernment of the times. Their chief interests are pleasure, sport, hospitality, social enjoyment and entertainment in spite of God’s warnings of imminent events. In Revelation the masses of earth are described as “earth dwellers”; they do not just live on earth but they are characteristically “earth dwellers”; living as though this materialistic, fleshly life will continue forever, wilfully ignorant of impending doom. Even the Rapture of the Church, when we shall go in and the door shall be shut, will not alter the attitude of the world at large, as they live only for time and earth.

Today, before the Rapture, the only explanation why we, who are alive and remain, are here on earth is God’s longsuffering. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some even count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2Pet. 3:9). Noah preached for 100 years. “He condemned the world” (Heb. 11:7). He prepared the ark, “wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1Pet. 3:21). It was of the mercy of God toward Noah that when the great deep was broken up and the windows of heaven were opened, that his three sons were safe in the ark. The triumphs of the Gospel of Christ reached the descendants of Ham, Shem and Japheth in Acts chapters 8, 9 and 10. The Ethiopian, Saul of Tarsus and Cornelius, identified with Christ in the waters of baptism.

WHAT DID NOAH DO?

“But, (lovely word) Noah found Grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8).

How did Noah react to these “days”? How did Noah live? What did he do? What should we as believers do in these, “Last days” (2Tim. 3:1)?

God is not looking for great men. God is seeking men and women who have learned to lean upon a Great God. Like ourselves, the story of Noah began with, “Grace”. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20). “By grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8). We can identify as we sing: “Amazing Grace”. “These are the generations of Noah” (Gen. 6:9). In his own day and generation, among his fellow men, Noah by his life and testimony; “condemned the world” (Heb. 11:7). He was separated, different, a contrast to the world. The Lord said concerning His own; “The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). “Noah was a just man” (Gen. 6:9). Noah was the first man in the Bible to bear this noble title, “just” (righteous). He “became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Heb. 11:7). With faith in his heart and uprightness in his life amid abounding wickedness, he preached righteousness loudly by his deeds. “And perfect (unblemished) in his generations” (Gen. 6:9). He was perfect amid wickedness, unblemished amid abhorrent evil, blameless surrounded by violence. Amid sneers, mockery and ridicule, Noah obeyed God. He built a ship so vast, without rudder, without sail, designed to float, constructed on dry land and as yet it had never rained. Animals, male and female, small and large, fierce and tame, were to live in peace inside the ark, while humans outside murdered each other.

“And Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). In holy separation from the evils of his day, he conducted himself with habitual communion with God. To walk with God is the secret of blessing. To walk with God we must

know the will, word and ways of God. “Walk worthy” (Eph. 4:1); “walk not as other Gentiles walk” (Eph. 4:17); “walk in love” (Eph. 5:2); “walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8); “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (Eph. 5:15). Faith will triumph, unbelief will perish. With anguish, the antediluvians saw the ark rise peacefully above the billows. The preacher of righteousness opened his window heavenward upon the mountains of Ararat, to receive the dove, “in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off” (Gen. 8:11).

Noah was a faithful preacher, a careful builder, a family man, a spiritual man knowing (before Leviticus chapter 11 was written), the difference between clean and unclean animals. Noah was a priestly man; the first man that we read about specifically who built an altar, spontaneously without command (Gen. 8:20). “He planted a vineyard: And he drank of the wine, and was drunken” (Gen. 9:21). Noah, after a long life of saintly eminence, affords a sad occasion as he lies in drunkenness. Beneath his habitual outward piety, lay a fallen Adamic nature, a lesson to us all. Like Adam, he partook of the fruit of the tree, in Noah’s case, the vine. The result, like his fore parent, was nakedness. Adam’s sin brought in the curse upon the whole human family. Noah’s sin brought a curse upon one third of his family. Few believers reach heaven without some storm of failure and reproach. The failures of great men are faithfully recorded in Scripture, to teach us our vulnerability to the world, the flesh and the devil.

There was only One Who lived on this earth Who was absolutely perfect. He passed through the deep waters for us at Calvary. “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts: all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over Me” (Psa. 42:7). He took our place to provide for us a Shelter and Salvation from the storms of God’s wrath against our sin. He has passed through and out of the deep waters of death; through deaths dark angry billows, up to the Throne of God. He is the Guarantor of the Covenant. “I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth” (Gen. 9:13). Soon, we shall see Him on that rainbow circled Throne, (Rev. 4:3). ‘The days of the Son of Man’, will be when He is in control of the earth. His Name is called, “Jesus Christ the Righteous” (1John 2:1).

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Misinterpreted Texts

1Thess. 4:13-14 – “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him”

The subject of these verses is Resurrection, “Jesus died and rose again”, not Rapture. This is not a rebuke from the apostle, but an affectionate form of address. We seek to emulate this affection toward the many and eminent expositors that take other views on this section of the chapter.

The apostle is dealing with, “them that fall asleep” (present tense) or “that are lying asleep” (1Cor. 15:6,18,20). Their bodies are in the grave and their spirits are with the Lord, which Paul says is, “far better” (Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59; 2Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23). Even this is a comfort to those whose believing loved ones have departed. They are again described as “them also which sleep in (through) Jesus” (1Thess. 4:14). “Them that fell asleep” (passive participle), “them that are put to sleep” through Jesus. This is a temporary condition, they are asleep pending the time when they shall be awakened. The term implies rest. They rest; the precious body of the believer has been sown as a seed in the ground pending resurrection. “Through Jesus”, the name of His Humanity, His Work as Saviour. The stress is not on the power of the Lord at His coming, or the position of Christ in heaven, but He has identified with them in death, He is the first fruits in resurrection and they “through Jesus”, are guaranteed resurrection. This is to relieve the anxiety of those who mourn the passing of these dear ones. They are at no disadvantage, they will be awakened.

Paul says ‘do not go on sorrowing’. Natural grief and sense of loss is not inconsistent but do not despair. The future is based on the past. “Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again”, He conquered death,

and rose by His own power, “even so”, as associated with Him in resurrection, “...will God (the Subject of the action) bring with Him (Christ)”. This is parallel to the expression, “Jesus died and rose again”. That is, bring their bodies from the grave in oneness with our Lord Jesus Christ. “The dead in Christ shall rise first” to receive their changed bodies as they are caught up with those who are alive and remain to meet the Lord in the air (1Thess. 4:16-17).

...in Heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body... (Philippians 3:20,21)

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As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

(John 3:14,15)

When Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler, came to Jesus one night seeking answers (John 3:1,2), he did not expect to be referred to an incident that occurred many centuries earlier concerning his forefathers, as they were nearing the end of their long wilderness journey recorded in the Book of Numbers, chapter 21, verses 4 to 9. There is no doubt that Nicodemus grasped the importance of the truth that the Lord sought to teach him that night. One wonders what thoughts must have gone through his mind a few years later when, with Joseph of Arimathæa, he assisted in the removal of the Lord’s body from the cross whereupon He had been lifted up, before laying it within a new sepulchre until the glorious resurrection morning (John 19:39). This action was evidence of their faith in Him. While neither had consented to His crucifixion, both came to realise the necessity of it as the basis for the forgiveness of their sins and their acceptance before God, a truth so expressively put in verse many centuries later by a young woman called Amelia Hull, written on the night of her conversion, which led to her father’s conversion the next morning:

Oh, why was He there as the Bearer of sin,
If on Jesus thy guilt was not laid?
Oh, why from His side flowed the sin-cleansing blood,
If His dying thy debt has not paid?

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness

The Israelites had again murmured against God who had faithfully provided for their every need in the wilderness as they made their way slowly to the “Promised Land”. But His provision they despised, and as punishment the LORD sent deadly fiery serpents among the people such that many died from their bites. Death was certain; there was no cure, and they knew it! In their desperation, they confessed their sin and sought respite. The serpents were not removed but Moses was instructed to make a brazen fiery serpent and put it upon a pole such that when anyone who was bitten should look upon it, they would be immediately healed. It was the only way of salvation for all, young and old, male and female.

It had to be an intentional look of faith by the dying, not a casual, half-hearted glance. They had to look individually; others may have carried them to a convenient position but could **NOT** look on their behalf. They may have been at the foot of the pole or looking from a distance through a gap in the tents. It was not the serpent of brass, harmless as it was, that was the cure but their active faith in God's word. Any who showed contempt for such a simple but effective cure, died from the venom.

Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up

In the cross of Christ, God has dealt with a far greater problem, brought about by the venomous word of the *"old serpent"*, the devil, in the Garden of Eden at the dawn of time, causing our forefather Adam to disobey God and sin. ***"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and so death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"*** (Rom. 5:12). Again it is stated, ***"The sting of death is sin"*** (1Cor. 15:56). Have we realised the seriousness of our own sin? Are we willing to admit, ***"I have sinned"***, individually? Our sin will put us in Hell if not dealt with before we physically die and we need to be saved before that day arrives.

God has provided **ONE** cure to deal with sin and it remains the **ONLY** cure for us all irrespective of age, gender, education, social standing, culture or nationality. His eternal Son was born into this world as a perfect Man, without sin, in order to allow Himself to be lifted up by cruel hands on a cross, as the serpent was upon the pole. We may not understand all that was involved for such a necessary death, even a sacrifice, for God to deal with our sin but we can be certain this is the **ONLY** effective cure that God could and has provided. The price of the lifeless brazen serpent was negligible; the cost to God was immeasurable, He gave His best, His ***"ONLY Begotten Son"***. There is no other Saviour for sinners but Christ Himself.

Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish...

But will you repent and believe, that is to confess and forsake your sinful ways and to express a determined faith in the Person and Work of Christ, believing that He died on the cross for your sins? Those who do are guaranteed that they will never perish in Hell but like Nicodemus, Joseph and Amelia of past days will become certain possessors of eternal life that can be enjoyed even from conversions day.

Many stumble at the cross work of Christ for various reasons. The brazen serpent became an object of veneration to the Israelites until king Hezekiah destroyed it (2Kings 18:4). Millions across the world today wear crosses or crucifixes as charms or superstitiously thinking such items can protect them from various kinds of harm but who want nothing to do with the Christ who was lifted up for their sins. Such ornamentation is devilish at its origin. Genuine Christians ***"walk by faith, not by sight"*** (2Cor. 5:7). Christ has eternally bruised the *"old serpents"* head, risen up from the dead and sits in Heaven above. In recognition of these truths you should cast any such items away, looking by faith to Christ alone as Amelia Hull's hymn exhorts:

"Look, look, look and LIVE"

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