

Christendom Astray

by Robert Roberts

A revised text using
the New International
Version of the Bible

The Bible Message: A New Edition of “Christendom Astray” for the 21st Century

In 1862 Mr. Robert Roberts delivered a series of twelve lectures in Huddersfield, UK, on the theme of the teaching of the Bible. These lectures were published, expanded in 1884 and edited on subsequent occasions, most recently in 1951. To mark the 150th anniversary of these original addresses a new edition is offered which, it is hoped, will make the text more accessible to readers in the 21st century.

Divine principles do not change with time, even though our understanding of them may progress or regress. Human understanding of prophecies regarding the divine hand at work in the world may change with the passage of time and yet the final endpoint remains clear. The original author dealt very thoroughly with all aspects of God’s message and, as far as has been possible, the thrust and detail of his work have been maintained in this edition.

The following changes have been made to assist in ease of reading. Bible quotations are now from the New International Version (2011) and citations are shown as footnotes to each page rather than within the text. Some changes in vocabulary, grammar and spelling have been made to increase readability.

Although every effort has been made to ensure that this text remains faithful to the original, some alteration in wording, and occasional omissions, have been made. Such revisions were necessary in order to relate the text of the book to the New International Version (2011), to add clarity, and to remove details of matters that were more pertinent to the time when the lectures were given.

This new version is offered in love for all who read it or who find it useful as a reference.

Finally, I thank Christopher Finney for his diligence in proof reading and for his help in finalising this text.

Paul Routledge

Chelmsford – August 2012

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version (Anglicised Version)

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Contents:

- Chapter 1[A] An Introduction to the Bible [p.4]
Chapter 1[B] How can the Bible be understood [p. 5]
Chapter 2[A] The Nature of Human Beings [p.11]
Chapter 3[A] Are the Dead really alive in Heaven? [p. 15]
Chapter 3[B] The Counter-Argument examined [p.16]
Chapter 3[C] Bible Teaching about Heaven and Hell [p. 23]
Chapter 3[D] What will happen to the Wicked? [p. 26]
Chapter 4[A] Immortality – A Gift to the Faithful at the Resurrection [p.29]
Chapter 5[A] Judgment [p.33]
Chapter 6[A] God [p.42]
Chapter 6[B] The Spirit [p.47]
Chapter 6[C] Angels [p.50]
Chapter 6[D] The Nature of Christ [p.54]
Chapter 6[E] The Crucifixion [p.61]
Chapter 7[A] The Devil - Introduction [p.66]
Chapter 7[B] Satan [p.71]
Chapter 7[C] The Devil – An explanation [p.77]
Chapter 7[D] Demons [p.84]
Chapter 8[A] The Kingdom of God [p.86]
Chapter 8[B] The Kingdom of God and our Salvation [p.98]
Chapter 9 God's Promises to the Patriarchs [p.101]
Chapter 10 The Kingdom of God: its Purpose in God's Plan [p.115]
Chapter 11 Christ – the Future King of the World [p.124]
Chapter 12 The Covenant made with David and the Kingdom of Israel under Christ [p.134]
Chapter 13 The Second Coming of Christ [p.150]
Chapter 14 The Hope of Israel [p.159]
Chapter 15 The Difficulties of the last Days before the Return of Jesus [p.168]
Chapter 16 What must a Person do to be saved? [p.176]
Chapter 17 The Commandments of Christ [p.188]

Chapter 1 [A]: Introduction to the Bible

"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine (teaching). Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to fables."¹

The teachings of mainstream churches today have deviated from the original teaching of the church in the earliest days of Christianity. Many people, and church leaders, accept that the teachings of mainstream Christianity must adapt with time as a result of progression of understanding within the church or in order to remain in step with society. The quotation (above) indicates that change would take place. As a result the true gospel message has become obscured. We ask: "What is the truth" – the true message?

So as to re-discover Bible truth we have just one source – for the Bible is God's voice to men and women. It is important to study it carefully, to seek to understand it and to respond positively to its message. For this it is not necessary, and often quite unhelpful, to believe that a vicar or priest or any other minister of religion will spring to our rescue. The idea of "holy orders" is not found in the Bible – it is message than all can read and understand for themselves.

This book will have as its starting point the understanding that the Bible is a book of Divine authorship. We look now at its structure. It is made up of 66 books which were written by authors over a long period of time.

It opens with five books, known as the "Five books of Moses," a history written by Moses, about matters relating to the time before Moses himself and to his own part in the history of Israel. This history forms the basis for all that follows. These books give an account of the creation of the world and of humanity, and then detail the origin and experience of the Jewish nation, Israel, the chosen people of God. The choice of Israel is recorded in these words:

"Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you (Israel) to be his treasured possession."²

The five books also contain the laws which God delivered through Moses, for the constitution and guidance of the nation. At times, some people have questioned the reliability of such ancient writings but readers will possibly recall that Jesus himself used these writings to teach about himself ³and endorsed the writings as the voice or word of God. The divinity of Christ and his testimony to the truth of scriptures that were written before his presence on earth should be sufficient to help us realise that Moses and Christ stand or fall together. There can be no middle ground.

The next twelve books present the history of the Jews over several centuries. They are, however, more than historical accounts as they show divine principles in action.

¹ 2 Timothy 4:3-4

² Deuteronomy 14:2

³ Luke 24:27

The book of Job which follows is also divinely inspired but its content does not deal specifically with the history of Israel. It records God's interaction with Job as an individual at a time when the nation itself did not exist.

Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, are the inspired writings of two of Israel's most famous kings. The divinely inspired writings, although written with the natural genius of literate men, are reflections of heavenly wisdom. The remarks of Jesus in connection with these scriptures make it clear that they are not merely of human origin

Seventeen books make up the writings of the prophets. As we read from Isaiah to Malachi we read numerous messages from the prophets to the nation of Israel. These messages were written so that the nation should be corrected and more enlightened about God, his purpose and their relationship to him and with one another. They contain teachings about the development of character and the behaviour that God seeks to find in his people. In addition, and of considerable value, the prophets paint word pictures about God's long term purpose with humanity.

The writings described so far make up what we call 'The Old Testament'. This is followed by 'The New Testament'. The dividing point is marked by the birth of Jesus.

The first four books of the New Testament are known as 'the gospels' and they contain a historic record of the life and work of Jesus, the promised Messiah (Christ). The record is vibrant, amazing and makes each one who reads it marvel at the character and person at its centre, the Lord Jesus, the one sent to bring salvation to a suffering world.

Jesus entrusted a number of specially chosen men (apostles) to spread the good news of the gospel. In the Acts of the Apostles that follows the gospel accounts, we read of their work and of the establishment of the early church.

The remainder of the New Testament is made up of a series of letters (epistles) which were sent to the early Christian communities. They contain practical instruction about the type of people Christians ought to be and also, in a general and incidental way, make known higher aspects of the truth as it is in Jesus. Without the letters it would have been scarcely possible for us, in this remote age, to have understood the entirety of Christianity to have held a true and living hope of personal salvation.

Sixty-six books in one volume, complete and consistent throughout. More than forty disparate authors who came from all walks of life, from king to shepherd bring God's message to us. Although composed over many centuries, it has absolute unity of spirit and displays completely consistent principles. Such a message is beyond human authorship – it is a literary miracle. The authors themselves claim divine inspiration and testified to this by lives which involved personal submission to every kind of disadvantage including brutal treatment and martyrdom at the hands of violent men.⁴ The value of the Bible is immense since it offers guidance for living today and hope of life tomorrow. Any who choose to neglect it reject the only book that can possibly be a revelation from the Deity and throw away the hope of personal salvation. By failing to honour God, and choosing rather to honour humanity, those who discount the message of the Bible may enjoy temporary advantages in the few years of their mortality but ultimately pass into oblivion.

⁴ Hebrews 11 outlines specific details by way of example.

The effect of the Bible is to make a person who studies it, better, happier and wiser within the full context of life – and the development of qualities that please God within a person are the pleasing qualities that, by grace, lead to eternal life.

The modern tendency to disbelieve the Bible is traceable to a number of causes. These probably include the moral inconsistency of professing Christians and the natural thoughts of the human mind. (As far as the latter is concerned there have been various attempts to get rid of a book which exalts the authority of God over human plans and desires.) There is, however, another source of disbelief which is found in what the mainstream churches have traditionally taught but which is not found in the Bible at all!

This short book will show that in the course of religious history there has been a great departure from the truth revealed by the prophets and apostles, and that the religious systems of the present day are a mixture of truth and error that tends, more than anything else, to mislead and confuse even devout and intelligent minds, and so prepares the way for scepticism.

This suggestion sometimes meets with astonishment as it begs the question of how the Bible could have been studied by men of learning for hundreds of years without it being understood by many of those who claimed to be Christian. Is it even possible to imagine that all the thousands of clergy and minister set apart for the very purpose of ministering in its holy things are all mistaken?

It is openly admitted, as a matter of history, that in the early ages, Christianity became so corrupted as to lose even the semblance of true Christian teaching and that for more than ten centuries, Roman Catholic superstition was universal, and enshrouded the world in moral, intellectual, and religious darkness. The term "the dark ages" stems from recognition of this fact. After this period we learn of the Reformation when the Bible became more widely available within society.

The Reformation was supposed to have brought in a period of clearer understanding – and this it did in part. To a large extent Protestants (those who protested at Roman Catholic teaching), tend to believe that the Reformation abolished all the errors of Roman Catholic teaching and gave us the truth in its purity. However, those who led the Reformation, such as Luther and Calvin, did not claim to possess divine infallibility. Their interpretation of truth must be examined in the light of the clear teaching of the Bible and that is what this book will seek to do. Consider this question: Was it likely that the Reformers would immediately be able to emancipate themselves from all the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church which had influenced so many for so long? Was it not likely, rather, that their achievements would be only partial?

History shows that this was the case. Although it has been described as a "glorious Reformation," in the sense of liberating human intellect from grip of a corrupt religious system, and establishing individual liberty in the discussion and discernment of religious truth, it was a very partial Reformation, so far as clarifying the fullness of the true Christian gospel was concerned. Many of the greatest heresies of the Roman Catholic Church were retained, and still continue to form the foundation of the mainstream Protestant Church and among its denominations.

The ready availability of Bibles today may be considered by some as a guarantee against serious mistakes in understanding. This ought to be the case but, unfortunately, people tend to live such busy lives that they leave the interpretation of the Bible to those who are paid to offer its meaning from the many pulpits. Of those who can tell you what they believe, only a few could explain why they hold particular beliefs. Most simply continue to take as truth, to take for granted, that which the mainstream religious denominations preach and have faith in the 'experts' in religion.

Occasionally prominent leaders among these churches seek to bring true teaching to light. For the most part the teaching of such leaders goes unheeded and the established teachings continue to be promulgated by a religious system that finds change inherently difficult to manage. In this way scriptural truth is strangled at its inception.

What is the remedy? How can truth be found in our day? Those who are serious in their quest for truth will need first to throw aside tradition and to assume personal responsibility, recognising that it is their duty to read the Bible for themselves. Diligent and devoted study will result in a different but not an unwelcome discovery. The liberated mind will find that the basis of truth is different in many vital respects to that which is commonly taught by mainstream churches; this new understanding will allow such a person to be in possession of a strong and fervent faith.

[B] How can the Bible be understood?

The Bible teaches that the scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation.⁵ This involves the communication of ideas through the language it uses. Therefore, with certain qualifications, we can believe that the Bible means what it says. This may seem an obvious point – and it is. However, there are many people who believe that as the language is the Word of God, that it must be unduly complicated and need others (especially those of the clergy and priesthood) to give a meaning to it that others can understand. Let us, then, look at a few statements from the Bible and see what we can make of them for ourselves:

- The Lord God will give to him (Jesus) the throne of his father, David.⁶
- One who will be ruler over Israel.⁷
- The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion.⁸
- This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven.⁹
- May he rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.¹⁰
- May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him.¹¹
- In my vision I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven...He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him.¹²
- The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders – with great glory.¹³

This book will suggest that these texts appear to teach that Christ is coming to the earth again, and that when he does, he will set aside all existing rule upon the earth and reign personally in Jerusalem, as universal king. However, is this how they are understood by mainstream denominations for the most part?

The answer is based of cases of actual experience. “Oh! No such thing!” is the instant response; “what the prophet says is spiritual in its meaning. Jerusalem refers to the church, and the coming

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:15

⁶ Luke 1:32

⁷ Micah 5:2

⁸ Micah 4:7

⁹ Acts 1:11

¹⁰ Psalm 72:8

¹¹ Psalm 72:11

¹² Daniel 7:13-14

¹³ Isaiah 24:23

of Christ to the earth to reign as king means that the time is coming when he will be supreme in the hearts and affections of men and women.

Clearly the second interpretation is weaker than the first. The Bible directs us to understand its message, and although it does not give specific instructions on how to do this, it performs this function in a direct and sensible way by the use of language that is not beyond anyone of us to understand (even if, on occasions, there are passages which, in their totality, are hard to understand). This simple and straightforward method of understanding Bible language can be illustrated from prophecy. The Bible tells of an event before it happens. The outcome is clear – as, having been recorded historically, there being no doubt about what happened. Here is an example:

“I will turn your cities (cities of Israel) into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aromas of your offerings. I myself will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins.”¹⁴ “You will become a thing of horror, a byword and an object of ridicule among all the people where the LORD will drive you.”¹⁵

There is no dispute about the way in which this prophecy has been fulfilled. It is clear that the words refer to the literal nation of Israel and their land, and that in fulfilment of the prediction they contain, real Israel was driven from their real, literal land - which became really and literally desolate for hundreds of years. Israel, the Jewish nation, has become a literal byword and an object of ridicule throughout the earth.

As there has been a real and literal fulfilment of this prophecy, on what principle are we to reject a literal construction of the following one?

“I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be **one king** over all of them and they will never again be two nations or divided into two kingdoms.”¹⁶

Mainstream Christian denominations usually, with this and other similar predictions of a future restoration of Israel and their reinstatement as a great people under the Messiah, contend that they mean the future glory and extension of the Church. The reflecting mind cannot contend for such an understanding of them in the light of the clear way in which the prophecies of Israel’s difficult times were literally fulfilled.

Here is another example:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Leviticus 26:31-33

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 28:27

¹⁶ Ezekiel 37:21-22

¹⁷ Micah 5:2

How was this fulfilled? We find out in the New Testament that "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod ..."¹⁸ The fulfilment of the prophecy was in exact accordance with a literal understanding of the words that were written down - as everyone knows.

The question may be asked as to whether, then, the Bible makes uses of figures of speech. Undoubtedly it does but this does not interfere with literal understanding. Metaphor is one thing; literal speech is another. Both have their functions, and each is so distinct from the other, that ordinary discrimination can recognise and separate them, even when they appear in the same sentence. This will be evident on a little reflection.

We use metaphors in common speech without causing obscurity. We are never at a loss to recognise metaphors when they are used, and to understand their meaning. We rarely, if ever, fall into the mistake of confusing the metaphorical with the literal. The difference between them is too obvious. When we talk of political dictators "trampling the rights of their subjects under their feet," we mix the literal with high metaphor; but no one is in danger of supposing that rights are literal substances that can be crushed to pieces under the mechanical action of the feet. The expression "to turn green with envy" has nothing to do with the colour yet its meaning is clear to all who hear it.

When then we turn to the Bible, it will be found that this is mainly the character of its composition. As a revelation to human beings, it is a revelation in human language. It is not a revelation of words but of ideas, and hence everything in its language is secondary to this purpose.

Examples of Biblical metaphors include:

"But as for you (Israel), the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are."¹⁹

In this metaphor, the fact that Egypt is metaphorically spoken of as an "iron-smelting furnace" does not interfere with the fact that there is a literal country of Egypt.

Here is another example:

"And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades."²⁰

The metaphor used here is clearly about the town of Capernaum and its future prospects. No one would believe that the literal city was to have been taken from the earth to heaven or that it would literally descend to Hades (hell).

Metaphor is found frequently in scripture but this is very different from an indiscriminating interpretation that seeks to 'spiritualise' everything and which, thereby, obliterates almost every original feature in the text with the result that the word of God loses its primary meaning.

There is another style of divine communication which is neither literal nor metaphorical, but which is still sufficiently distinctive in its character to prevent its being confused with either; and also sufficiently definite and intelligible to allow clear understanding. This style is the symbolic style, which is largely employed in what may be called political prophecy. In this case, events are

¹⁸ Matthew 2:1

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 4:20

²⁰ Matthew 11:20

represented by symbols. Examples include the use of an ‘animal’ to represent an empire, ‘horns’ for kings, and ‘rivers’ for nations.

When these symbols are used there is no reason to move to the mode of ‘spiritualisation’ as when reading texts that use metaphor. It is special in its character but it can always be identified where it occurs, and its use is always clear from the context. The literal is the basis; the elementary principles of divine truth are communicated literally; its more complex aspects are elaborated and illustrated metaphorically and symbolically. The one is the step to the other. Only those who understand the literal are in a position to understand the symbolical. The literal is, as it were, the alphabet of spiritual things. Therefore, it is necessary to rid ourselves of any previous notions that may have been based upon the ‘spiritualisation’ process before we study the Bible text.

Finally we must reflect about the two different parts of the Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament. Quite a number of people who hold to mainstream Christian teachings are dismissive of the Old Testament. They say that the New Testament is the basis of their beliefs and that the Old Testament no longer has any real meaning or importance. They place little, if any value on it as it is made up of more ancient texts with little apparent relevance to Christianity. This is a big mistake to make; a mistake that has been very harmful to an understanding of true teaching.

The “first covenant” (as given in the Five Books of Moses in the Old Testament) or the old constitution of Israel has been abolished. However, it is far totally untrue to suggest that what God communicated through the prophets has no value. The New Testament itself shows this clearly. Paul, writing in the New Testament says to early Christians, “You have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”²¹ The ‘Holy Scriptures’ could only apply to the Old Testament. When Paul made the statement, the New Testament was not in existence. Think about the importance of such a statement – the scriptures of the Old Testament are able to make us wise for salvation. If this is the case, how can it be correct to speak of the Old Testament having no value?

To make the point more fully, let us reflect on what the apostle Paul said when he appeared before King Agrippa:

“But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”²²

Now, if, in preaching the Christian faith, Paul spoke of that which the prophets and Moses had spoken about, it is obvious that Moses and the prophets must contain much of value in terms of the Christian faith. Much more could be said to illustrate this point. Another useful example is that of the citizens of Berea who examined the scriptures (Old Testament) every day to find out whether what they were hearing was true – and consequently many of them believed the New Testament gospel message.²³

²¹ 2 Timothy 3:15

²² Acts 26:22-23

²³ Acts 17:10-12

Finally we could consider the very words of Jesus when speaking to those of his day: "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."²⁴

Christianity is rooted in the Old Testament. The New Testament follows on from the Old but without the Old Testament we would find it much more difficult to understand the teaching of the New Testament. Both testaments reveal God's purpose with the people who received them but both are important in revealing consistent divine truths about topics such as the very nature of God, the nature of man and God's ultimate purpose in creation. Together they thoroughly equip the servant of God for every good work.

Chapter 2[A]: The Nature of Human Beings

In nothing will mainstream Christian teaching seem to be further off track than in its understanding of the nature of human beings (man). The nature of man will be examined on the basis of Biblical teaching and also on the basis of scientific knowledge. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that the teaching that says that each person has an inner soul which continues to have an existence after death (the doctrine of the immortality of the soul) is untrue. If a Christian does not understand this they will not understand the truth about the work and teaching of Jesus Christ.

The commonly held belief runs something like this: Our organic bodies are not essential to our identities. What is important is the immaterial, immortal spiritual being that lives within our organic bodies. The true 'self' is believed to be an indestructible inner spirit called the soul. The organic body, it is accepted, is made from the dust of the ground²⁵ but the 'essence' is believed to have come from God himself - to be, in fact, a part of the Deity - a particle from the divine nature, which possesses its own intelligence and which exists independently from the source from which it was taken. In accordance with this view, death is not considered to affect a man's being. It is regarded simply as the end of the organic body, which liberates the deathless, intangible man from the bondage of mortality. This intangible man, this 'immortal' soul then departs to spiritual regions – to a place of eternal happiness in heaven or to a place of eternal misery known as hell – the destination being dependent on the way a person has lived in the days of his mortality on earth.

In opposition to this view, we shall show that the Bible makes it clear that man has no immortal existence in any form; that he is a part of God's creation in exactly the same way as the animals of the field are. His organised substance and his life-power are from God. God created man and sustains his existence on average for about seventy or eighty years at the end of which his life power returns to God and his organic body returns to the dust of the ground. Let us consider the evidence, taking first, the evidence from the natural world around us.

It has been argued by those who take a mainstream view, that matter cannot think. Therefore, they argue, a person must have some immaterial essence within that does the thinking and of reasoning. If the essence is immaterial, they then argue, the essence must be indestructible and therefore immortal. Of course, inanimate materials such as wood and iron cannot think or reason, but is substance in every form and condition incapable of thinking? This argument, most frequently offered in the past, falls at the first consideration. Scientists claim that the universe and all that we know sprang from matter. Life, they say, originated and developed from inorganic material and developed through evolutionary processes until the present position is reached. In this way we can see that this line of scientific response answers the very criticism that earlier

²⁴ Luke 16:31

²⁵ Genesis 2:7

theorists suggested. If on the other hand, as the Bible teaches, the universe and everything within it is the creation of a supernatural power, then it is absolutely reasonable to suggest that this power created beings with the power to think. Christians rightly claim this power to be God. He is the source of everything and he is omnipotent - and all things are possible with God.

The scriptures teach plainly that man is a creature of material organisation endowed with life from God and ennobled with qualities which make him "the image of God"²⁶; but nevertheless mortal.

We turn now to the Scriptures, whose voice is more authoritative than the fallible deductions of philosophy. On opening the Bible we find complete agreement with the natural facts about the nature of man which corresponds to the facts of science.

First, we consider a most surprising fact. The term 'immortal soul' is nowhere to be found! You would expect a term that is commonly heard from the pulpit, and a term that is linked with such a fundamental teaching would be found somewhere in the Bible if it were really a true teaching – and particularly so when you consider that all the essential teachings of Scripture are plain, unequivocal, and frequently repeated.

The existence and creative power of God, His future purpose, the Messiah-ship of Jesus Christ, the purpose of his life on earth, the promise of his return and the doctrine of the resurrection, to name but a few, are all stated as plainly as language can state them; but of the doctrine of immortality of the soul, *there is not the slightest mention*.

This fact is acknowledged by theologians, but it does not seem to suggest to them that the teaching is a fiction. When pressed they may suggest that the reason the Bible does not mention this teaching about the nature of man is because, as it is so self-evident, no mention is necessary. This is very unsatisfactory. It would be much more appropriate to suggest the very opposite significance to the silence of the Scriptures on the subject. If the immortality of the soul is to be believed without sanction from the scriptures, merely on the assumption that it is self-evident, then it would be possible to uphold any teaching which we favour. Surely a more rational course to pursue is to suspect the validity of a doctrine and subject it to the severest scrutiny. In taking this course of action we will find that the teaching breaks down completely. The Bible is not silent on this matter, even though it says nothing about the immortality of the soul. It supplies direct and conclusive evidence of the absolute mortality of man.

In the Bible the word "soul" simply means a breathing creature. The use of the word 'soul' in the older translations of the Bible is now translated as 'being'. It is applied to Adam in Genesis.²⁷ The same word in the original text is used of the creation of the animals and it is translated as 'creature'.²⁸ Elsewhere the word is simply translated as 'people'.²⁹

The term is also used in other ways. The older versions of the Bible talk about an 'idle soul'³⁰ which newer translations translate as the 'shiftless' – thus the 'idle soul' or idle person (the shiftless) go hungry; older versions talk about the soul being relieved when fed³¹ but the meaning is clarified in modern translations and clearly describes people who bartered for food to keep themselves alive. Most frequently the term 'soul' appears in modern translations in reference to

²⁶ Genesis 1:27

²⁷ Genesis 2:7

²⁸ Genesis 1:20,21,24,28

²⁹ Genesis 12:5

³⁰ Proverbs 19:15

³¹ Lamentations 1:11

the feelings of the ‘inner’ being – all that is within me. There are many examples of this type of usage: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”³²; “I will complain in the bitterness of my soul”³³; “Praise the LORD, my soul”³⁴; and, a final example from the words of Jesus, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”³⁵

The original word occurs in the Old Testament about 700 times, and in the New Testament about 180 times. It is never said to be immortal, but always the reverse. It is not only represented as capable of death, but as naturally liable to it. Consider these quotations:

- “Who can live and not see death, or who can escape the power of the grave?”³⁶
- “People, despite their wealth, do not endure; they are like the beasts that perish.”³⁷
- “The one who sins is the one who will die.”³⁸
- “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a while and then vanishes.”³⁹

There is only one passage that looks a little different from this. It is this: “What good it is for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for his soul?”⁴⁰

As we have seen the word ‘soul’ means ‘being’ and simple substitution of the words clarifies the meaning. If it were necessary to prove this point further, it is worth noting that the word ‘soul’ is translated as ‘life’ in the verse that precedes the quotation. This verse reads, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”⁴¹ If we were to exchange the word ‘life’ for ‘immortal soul’, we would make complete nonsense of the meaning – how can anyone save or lose that which they believe to be immortal anyway? The verse is, in fact, extending a precious promise to those who deny themselves in this life of discipleship will be rewarded with a more precious life at the resurrection - whereas anyone who renounces the gospel to protect his interests in this life will be excluded from the blessings of the life to come.

Returning to Genesis we get to the bottom of the matter. We read: “Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.”⁴² Here we learn that man was made from the ground – that he was a man without life. The life was then added and this gave the man an existence. The life was given to him by a divine source and man became a living being (soul). Sometimes people misread the text and believe it says that a living soul was breathed into the man – but clearly the opposite is true. The act ‘breathing into the man’ resulted in his becoming a living being (soul). The dust formed the ‘being’ which came to have life. Nowhere does the record suggest that he became an immortal being, though doubtless he would have lived had he not sinned for it was sin that brought death.

³² Deuteronomy 6:5

³³ Job 7:11

³⁴ Psalm 104:1

³⁵ Matthew 26:28

³⁶ Psalm 89:48

³⁷ Psalm 49:12

³⁸ Ezekiel 18:4

³⁹ James 4:14

⁴⁰ Mark 8: 36-37

⁴¹ Mark 8:35

⁴² Genesis 2:7

Nevertheless, irrespective of the precise constitution of Adam, his decision to eat from the forbidden tree resulted in a sentence which would return him to the state of nothingness from which he had been developed by creative power. Put simply - he would die.⁴³ This totally disproves any idea that might suggest that he would continue to live! How clearly this is rendered in the following quotation:

“To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat from it.” ... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.””⁴⁴

To say that this sentence merely relates to the body and does not affect the ‘being’ is to play with words.

Abraham described himself as “but dust and ashes”.⁴⁵ Advocates of mainstream Christian thought would wish to correct him: “Father Abraham, you are mistaken, you are not dust and ashes, it is only your body.” Abraham’s unsophisticated view, however, is more reliable than “the wisdom of this world” (the philosophical wisdom) which Paul describes as “foolishness in God’s sight.”⁴⁶

King Solomon was renowned for his divine wisdom. Inspired by the Spirit of God, he penned:

“I also said to myself, “As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from the dust, and to dust all return.”⁴⁷

“No advantage over animals” – the whole text is crystal clear and is a sweeping condemnation in the Bible of the flattering dogma which exalts human nature to equality with Deity.

In conclusion to this chapter we can but emphasise that the Scriptures combine with nature in pronouncing man to be a frail, mortal creature, who, though bearing the image of God, and towering far above all other creatures in intellectual ability, in the capacity for moral judgment and in his ability to relate to the future, continues to labour under a sentence which hastens him to his appointed end in the grave.

It is of the highest importance that this truth should be recognised. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul has been shown to be the first great error of mainstream Christian thinking – an enormous delusion which so many have failed to realise. It has been a great obstruction to the progress of true Christianity! A true knowledge of the nature of human beings is an essential starting point as we continue to explore the theme of this book.

⁴³ Genesis 2:17

⁴⁴ Genesis 3:17-19

⁴⁵ Genesis 28:27

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:19

⁴⁷ Ecclesiastes 3:18-20

Chapter 3[A] Are the Dead really alive in Heaven?

If mainstream Christian teaching has failed to understand the nature of man, it naturally follows that it is astray on the state of the dead.

Death is the greatest fact in human experience bringing grief to the living. Given that the majority of people today tend to accept death as the end of existence, our sorrow at the news of the death of a friend or relative is often a personal grief where we seek to console one another over the 'loss' whilst, at the same time, funerals are seen as the celebration of the life of the one who has died. In previous years grief was more often expressed in terms of sorrow for the deceased. Traditional mainstream teaching says that the spirit of a person lives on after death and that it has gone either to 'heaven', or in some cases, to 'hell'.

If death is merely a change of state, and not a cessation of being, why all this heartbreak for those who have died? It cannot be the result of uncertainties "beyond the grave," because our grief is quite as distressing for those who are believed to have "gone to heaven," as for those about whom doubts may be entertained. Tears flow quite as fast for the good as for the bad, and perhaps, a little faster. There is something inconsistent with the mainstream teaching here. If our friends have really gone to "glory," we ought to feel as thankful as we do when they are promoted to honour "here below"; but we do not. The reason is that the strength of natural instinct can never be overcome by theological fiction.

If the dead are not dead, but they have gone to heaven before those who remain, if they are praising God with others above, they are alive, and, therefore, they have merely changed a temporary living place for an eternal one. They have simply moved out of the body from earth to heaven, or to hell, as the case may be. The word "death," in its original meaning, has, therefore, no application to human beings. It has lost its meaning as commonly understood. It is no longer the opposite of "life." It no longer means the cessation of living existence but simply means a change of habitation. It is no longer possible for a human to "die" in the full sense of the word. He may go out of the body, but he cannot die. Such is mainstream teaching.

So what does the Bible teach? The Bible teaches that which the majority of people recognise to be true based on scientific fact. Death invades a man's being and robs him of existence and consequently in death he is as totally unconscious as though he had never lived. This does not mean that human beings are without hope – for the true hope of the gospel will be examined presently.

The primary idea expressed by the word death is the opposite of life. When considering animals, people seem to find no difficulty in reconciling the mystery of life with the occurrence of actual death. As with animals, so it is with humans. For each human there was a time when they did not exist as for each animal. So with death – both animals and humans cease to have 'being'.

These are the facts of the case from a natural point of view. The Scriptures are extremely clear about what it means to be 'dead'. Here is an example:

"Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years."⁴⁸⁴⁹

Those whose deaths are recorded in the Scriptures are never said to have gone away, but are always spoken of as dying, giving up their life, and returning to the ground.

The same style of language is used when he speaks of the death of the faithful. They are described as "still living by faith when they died." The quotation is emphatic and continues by saying, "They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance."⁵⁰

Jesus, when speaking about Lazarus, recognises exactly what death is: "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he had meant natural sleep. So he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."⁵¹

When Luke records the death of Stephen⁵² he does not indulge in any of the language of high-flown deathbed rapture. He simply says, "He fell asleep." Or when Paul refers to deceased Christians, he does not speak of them as "standing before the throne of God!" The words he uses are in keeping with the other quotations from the Bible: "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope."⁵³

There are no exceptions to these cases in Bible narrative. All Bible allusion to the subject of death is as unlike the comforting words of mainstream Christian teaching as it is possible to conceive. The Bible speaks of death as the ending of life, and never as the commencement of another state. Not once does it tell us of a dead person having gone to heaven. Not once, except as a poetical figure⁵⁴ or for purposes of parable⁵⁵ are the dead represented as conscious. They are always pictured in language that is in accordance with experience - always spoken of as in the land of darkness, and silence, and unconsciousness. Solomon says: "Whatever you hands find to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom."⁵⁶

David incidentally alludes to the state of the dead in the following impressive words: "Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?"⁵⁷ David also offers an answer in a later psalm: "It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go

⁴⁸ Genesis 25:8

⁴⁹ Similar words express the death of Isaac (Genesis 35:29), Jacob (Genesis 49:33), Joseph (Genesis 50:26), Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-6), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), Samuel (1 Samuel 25:1), David (1 Kings 2:1,2,10; Acts 2:29,34) and Solomon (1 Kings 11:43)

⁵⁰ Hebrews 11:13

⁵¹ John 11:11-14

⁵² Acts 7:60

⁵³ 1 Thessalonians 4:13

⁵⁴ Isaiah 14:4

⁵⁵ Luke 16:19-31

⁵⁶ Ecclesiastes 9:10)

⁵⁷ Psalm 88:12

down to the place of silence.”⁵⁸ Indicating complete cessation of being, David also places on record: “Look away from me, that I may enjoy life again before I depart and am no more.”⁵⁹

In addition to these general indications of the destructive nature of death as a cessation of being, there are other statements in the Scriptures that categorically state that the dead have no conscious existence. A clear example follows:

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even their name is forgotten. Their love, their hate, and their jealousy have long since vanished: never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun”⁶⁰

Such clear teachings put pay to any concepts that suggest that the dead love and serve God with greater devotion upon their departure for heaven, or with greater hatred upon their arrival in hell. Clearly, it is absurd to propose that the departed know more in heaven than when alive on earth for as a previous citation recorded, “the dead know nothing.”

Similar texts abound in Scripture. Here are further examples:

- Do not put your trust ... in human beings ... when their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing⁶¹
- Among the dead no one proclaims your name. Who praises you from the grave?⁶²
- For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living – they praise you, as I am doing today.⁶³

These quotations show the clear teaching in the Bible on this matter. It teaches that death is a total obliteration of our conscious selves from God's universe. Such teaching falls into line with our experience and our instincts. And still better, it leads on to clear Bible teachings about resurrection which is necessary if those who are dead are to have life again.

A future life is only attainable by resurrection. This contrasts with mainstream Christian teaching which states that future life is a natural growth from the present, affected neither one way nor the other by the “resurrection of the body.” In fact it is difficult to see any use for resurrection at all if we accept the mainstream view; for if a man “obtains his reward” at death and enjoys all the happiness of heaven of which his nature is capable, it seems incongruous that, after a certain time, he should be compelled to leave the celestial regions, and rejoin his body on earth, when without that body he is supposed to have so much more capability of enjoyment. The resurrection seems out of place in such a system; and accordingly we find that many are abandoned the concept altogether

⁵⁸ Psalm 115:17

⁵⁹ Psalm 39:13

⁶⁰ Ecclesiastes 9:5-6

⁶¹ Psalm 146:3-4

⁶² Psalm 6:5

⁶³ Isaiah 38:18-19

[3B] The Counter Argument explored

Of course, there are passages in the Bible that mainstream Christian teachers use to support their ideas. Although, on the surface, some of these passages seem to offer some agreement with mainstream teaching, not one of them affirms the teachings that are propounded. The evidence they are supposed to contain is purely inferential. That is, they make certain statements which are supposed to imply the teaching but they do not proclaim the teaching itself.

Now, it is important to note this general fact to commence with. It is something to know that there is not a single promise of heaven at death in the whole Bible, and not a single declaration that man has an immortal soul; and that all the supposed evidence contained in the Bible in favour of these doctrines, is so decidedly ambiguous, as to be open to dispute when it comes to working out what is meant. It is important, because the evidence in favour of the opposite view (the one set forth in this chapter so far), is so clear and explicit that it cannot be set aside without totally violating the fundamental laws of the language. This consideration suggests an important principle of Scriptural interpretation: plain, unambiguous evidence ought to guide us in the understanding of what may be obscure. We ought to obtain our fundamental principles from teaching that cannot be misunderstood, and harmonize all difficulties with it. It is unwise to base a teaching on a passage, which, from its vagueness, is capable of two or more interpretations, especially if that teaching is in opposition to the unmistakable declarations in the Word of God elsewhere.

This principle is now applied to the Scriptures cited by those who try to justify mainstream thinking.

The first is the answer of Christ to the thief on the Cross:

“Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”⁶⁴

This is thought to establish the common idea at once. However, the validity of the argument depends on the date of its fulfilment. Now Jesus was not in paradise in the popular sense, that day, for we find him saying to Mary after his resurrection, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father.”⁶⁵ Jesus was not in heaven during at least three days after his promise to the thief. He had been in the grave! The mainstream theorist may then enquire – his body was in the grave but where was his ‘soul’? Modern translations do not use the word ‘soul’ but simply say that Jesus was not ‘abandoned to the realm of the dead’.⁶⁶ The King James translation says in its quaint style: “His soul was not left in hell” (the grave) – his soul, based on this old English translation was in the grave – hardly paradise!

Has it been fulfilled at all? Let us consider the question of the thief. It was quite clear that his mind was not fixed on the idea of going to heaven. He did not say, “Jesus, remember me, now that you are about to go to your kingdom,” but “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”⁶⁷ He anticipated a ‘coming’ - not a ‘going’; and he looked upon it as a future event, and his desire was to be remembered when that future event should be brought to pass – “when you come into your kingdom.” The concept of this ‘coming’ is discussed later. There is good ground for the contention of those who say that Christ’s answer is most properly read with the comma after

⁶⁴ Luke 23:43

⁶⁵ John 20:17

⁶⁶ Acts 2:31

⁶⁷ Luke 23:42

"today" – "Truly I tell you today, you will be in paradise with me."⁶⁸ But in either case, the words are devoid of the meaning attached to them by those who quote them to support the mainstream idea.

The account of the rich man and Lazarus⁶⁹ is the principal argument brought forward with great confidence on every occasion when the mainstream idea seems to require Biblical support. A little consideration, however, will reveal its unsuitability to the purpose for which it is used. We must first realise the nature of the passage of Scripture in question. It is either a literal narrative or a parable. If it is a literal narrative -that is, an account of things that actually happened, given by Christ as a guide to our understanding of the "disembodied" state - then it is perfectly legitimate to bring it forward to oppose the teaching that this chapter has proposed. But in that case it would not only contradict the view of the chapter but also the view as proposed by mainstream Christianity. It would serve to establish the view that was entertained by the Pharisees, to whom the parable was addressed; for it will be found on investigation that it is the tradition of the Pharisees that forms the basis of the parable; a tradition which clashes with the popular theory of the death state in many details.

Look at the details of the parable: see how incompatible they are with the mainstream teaching. The rich man 'lifts up his eyes', being in torment, and sees Abraham 'afar off', and Lazarus in his bosom; and cries, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue." The mainstream view does not allow the wicked in hell to see the righteous in heaven? Nor does it admit of the possibility of conversation passing between the occupants of the two places? And does the popular immortal soul possess fingertips, tongue, and other material members, on which water would have a cooling effect? Abraham denied the rich man's request, adding as a supplementary reason, "And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot." (Is a "chasm" any obstacle to the transit of an immaterial soul?) The rich man asked Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brothers, to testify to them in case they should come to the same place of torment; Abraham answered, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (What need, according to the mainstream view, for a rising from the dead, since a spirit itself would have been sufficient to communicate the warning?) The whole narrative has an air of tangibility about it which is inconsistent with the common view of the state of the dead. In addition, think of heaven and hell being within sight of each other, and of conversation passing between the two places! If we insist upon the story as a literal narrative, we are committed to all these particulars, which are so thoroughly at variance with the mainstream teaching.

Is it a literal narrative? Even orthodox believers talk of it as a parable, which it doubtless is. As a parable, it has nothing to do with the question in dispute one way or other. It was addressed to the Pharisees to teach the lesson that in due time the mighty and rich would be brought down, and the poor exalted; and that if men would not be led by the testimony of Moses and the prophets, miracles (even the raising of the dead) would fail to move them. The parable has no reference to the particular view of the death state which its literal outlines reflect; it bears entirely on the lesson which it was used to convey.

It may be asked, "Why did Christ use a belief that was fictitious when speaking in parables?" The answer is that Christ was not using it with any reference to *itself*, but for the purpose of being able to introduce a dead man's testimony. He wanted to impress upon them the lesson conveyed in the concluding words of Abraham, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be

⁶⁸ In New Testament Greek commas and full-stops are not within the text. They are inserted by translators and as such the translation may be influenced by the beliefs of those who work on the texts.

⁶⁹ Luke 16:19-31

convinced even if someone rises from the dead." He could not have made the point with greater impact than by framing a parable based upon their own theory of the death state, which gave consciousness to the dead, and, therefore, their capability to speak on the subject he wanted to introduce.

When Christ spoke plainly about the dead, his words were in agreement with the principles that were presented earlier in the chapter. Lazarus was not sleeping, but dead. Speaking directly on this occasion, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life;"⁷⁰ "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out – those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned."⁷¹ It is in these plain words of Christ that we are to seek for Christ's real teaching on the subject of the dead, and not in a parabolic discourse, addressed to his enemies for the purpose of confusion and condemnation and not of instruction.

It would be very peculiar if as important a doctrine as the heaven and hell consciousness of the dead should have to depend upon a parable! Those who insist upon the parable for this purpose have to be asked what are we to do with all the evidence already advanced in proof of the reality of death? Are we to make a parable paramount and throw away plain testimony? Are we to twist and violate what is clear to make it agree with what *we think* is meant by that which is admittedly obscure? Is not the opposite rather the course of true wisdom, determining and solving that which is uncertain by that which is unmistakable? If it may be urged, as it has been urged, that it was unlike Christ to perpetuate delusion, and withhold the truth on such an important question as that involved in the parable used, it is sufficient to recall that parables were given to help those who believe understand the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.⁷²

The next Scriptural argument in favour of mainstream theory is generally advanced with an air of great confidence. "Didn't John, in the Isle of Patmos, see the redeemed of every tribe, and language, and people, and nation, standing before the throne of God, and giving glory? Who are these, if the righteous don't go to heaven at death?" This argument is generally felt to be overwhelming. However, set in the context of earlier verses⁷³ we read that we are to learn of "what must take place after this". The sights which John witnessed were representations of things which were to be at a future time, and therefore, when he saw a great multitude praising God, he saw the assembly of the resurrected as they will appear when Jesus comes again.

Next comes Stephen's dying prayer: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."⁷⁴ This is understood to mean that Stephen expected the Lord to receive his immortal soul. To understand this, we need to return to the concept of 'spirit'. Stephen's *pneuma*, spirit or breath, was not *himself*; it was merely the principle or energy that give him life, as it gives all other men and animals life. This principle does not constitute the man or the animal. It is necessary to give them existence, but it does not belong to them, except during the short term of their existence. Stephen's spirit was not Stephen, though essential to his existence. His spirit as an abstraction was God's and proceeded from Him, as have done the spirits of all flesh. This is seen in Job where we read, "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life."⁷⁵ Hence it is said, "If it were His (God's) intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all humanity would perish together and mankind would

⁷⁰ John 11:25

⁷¹ John 5:28

⁷² For a fuller discourse, refer to Matthew 13:10-13.

⁷³ Revelation 4:1

⁷⁴ Acts 7:59

⁷⁵ Job 33:4

return to the dust.”⁷⁶ The spirit is indispensable as the basis of a living man, consisting of bodily organism. It is the life principle of all living creatures. When this life principle, emanating from God, is withdrawn, it reverts to its original ownership, and the created being disappears. This is the idea expressed in Solomon's words, “and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”⁷⁷

But, it may be asked, why should Stephen be anxious about his spirit in this sense? Well, it must be remembered that Stephen looked forward to a renewing of life at the resurrection. This was his hope. *He hoped to get his life back.* Consequently, when he came to die, he confided it to the keeping of the Saviour until that day, and, as the narrative adds, “He fell asleep.” If Stephen's personality, expressed in the pronoun 'he' appertained to Stephen's spirit, and not to the bodily Stephen, then this statement would prove that the spirit fell asleep; and this is just what those who quote this passage deny.

We next come to the words of Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” This seems at first sight to express the popular idea; but let us consider it. Adherents of the mainstream view understand that by this, Paul meant to express the desire to depart from his body and go to be with Christ in heaven. If this was the “away from the body” that Paul desired, the passage would doubtless stand as proof of the mainstream position: but was this the “away from the body” that Paul desired? The context answers the question by defining precisely the idea that was in Paul's mind. It was not disembodiment, as the mainstream idea requires: for he says earlier in the same chapter⁷⁸, “because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” What Paul desired was deliverance from the burden of an imperfect sinful body, and the attainment of the incorruptible body of the resurrection, for, he says, at the start of the chapter⁷⁹, “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling” – or as expressed by Paul elsewhere: “We ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.”⁸⁰

Now, when does this redemption of the body take place? Not at death, for at death the body undergoes the very opposite of a process of “redemption.” It starts to decay. It breaks up in the ground in corruption; not till the resurrection at the coming of the Lord, is it raised to incorruption. Not until then does “presence with the Lord” take place. The scriptures teach: “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever.”⁸¹

There are arguments advanced on Scriptural grounds in favour of the immortality of the soul which do not quite come within the category of "passages" quoted, but are rather in the nature of deductions from Scriptural principles. It may be of advantage to look at some of these before passing on.

⁷⁶ Job 34:14-15

⁷⁷ Ecclesiastes 12:7

⁷⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:4

⁷⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:2

⁸⁰ Romans 8:23

⁸¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

“There is no peace,” says the LORD, “for the wicked.”⁸² This is quoted to prove the eternal torment of the wicked. It surely requires no argument to show that it fails entirely in this purpose. The statement is true, irrespective of any theory that may be held as to the destiny of the wicked. While the wicked are in existence there is no peace for them. It is impossible there could be peace for them, especially looking forward to the time when they shall be the objects of vengeance. But this does not prove (as it is quoted to prove) that they are immortal. Such an idea is utterly precluded by the scriptures quoted.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration⁸³ can be viewed in a number of ways. Clearly, if they were really present, and not seen in the sense of “a vision”⁸⁴, then they clearly were not disembodied spirits. If they were present in the sense of “a vision” then there is no problem in recognising the event in that light. The whole event was doubtless a pictorial illustration of the kingdom, in so far as it represented Jesus in power and glory, exalted over the law (represented by Moses) and the prophets (represented by Elijah), and, therefore, elevated to the position to which the prophets point forward, when, as the head of the nation of Israel, he is King over the whole earth.

“God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”⁸⁵ This passage is a quotation from the Old Testament⁸⁶ and occurs at the time when Moses stands before the burning bush. God reveals himself as the God of the Fathers of the Jewish nation. They were not “dead” in the sense that they had no future hope of resurrection as we read in Hebrews⁸⁷ but were sleeping in the dust of the earth until the day of resurrection. With God, the faithful dead are regarded as living while those who are unfaithful are counted dead (even though they are alive) as their unfaithfulness guarantees them death and exclusion from the kingdom of God. If, indeed, they were already physically ‘alive’, why do they need to wait, as Hebrews says, for the time to come when together with us they will be made perfect?

“In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality”⁸⁸ This passage does not suggest that immortality is a condition that people have within themselves but that the righteous will be granted immortality at the time of resurrection.

“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”⁸⁹ Those who take this phrase as an indication of a soul that is indestructible or immortal must recognise that it is not suggested that the soul cannot be killed. In fact, the verse concludes with the statement: “Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell (Gehenna⁹⁰).”

In summary so far: the scriptures plainly teach that the dead are in a state where they have ceased to have any ‘being’. The Bible knows nothing of an immortal soul but speaks about the resurrection of the faithful when Jesus returns to the earth. Some passages are brought forward by those anxious to cling to mainstream teaching but in all cases the arguments advanced are superficial and cease to have any value at all when framed within the fundamental teaching on the nature of the dead.

⁸² Isaiah 48:22

⁸³ Matthew 17:3

⁸⁴ Matthew 17:9 – the NIV simply says “seen” but Young’s Literal and the King James Version suggest “a vision”

⁸⁵ Matthew 22:32

⁸⁶ Exodus 3:6

⁸⁷ Hebrews 11:39-40

⁸⁸ Proverbs 12:28

⁸⁹ Matthew 10:28

⁹⁰ Gehenna was the rubbish tip outside Jerusalem where the refuse was burnt.

[3C] Bible Teaching about Heaven and Hell

Traditional teaching assumes that the souls of the dead go immediately to heaven or to hell when earthly life comes to an end. The Bible does not teach this nor does it suggest that people go to heaven at all. The church consoles the grieving most often with the idea that upon death the liberated soul flies with inconceivable rapidity to the realms above and that the dead are not taken from us but that they have gone to eternal bliss ahead of those who remain and that eventually they will be re-united when those left behind ultimately join them in heaven. Very much less frequently do we hear the clergy talk about the soul of the departed going to hell since this would offer less comfort to the mourners. Nevertheless, there remains the question of judgment and, if this concept is to have any meaning, it requires both options to be available.

This idea of going to heaven is purely speculative. There is not a single promise throughout the whole of the Scriptures to warrant anyone in hoping for it. There are, doubtless, phrases which, to a mind previously attuned to the idea, seem to support it. Examples include:

- “And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.”⁹¹
- “Great is your reward in heaven.”⁹²
- “But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”⁹³

But the support which these phrases seemingly give to the popular idea, disappears entirely when we realise they express *an aspect* of the Christian hope. God's salvation is not on earth at the present time; indeed, it is not yet an accomplished fact anywhere, except in the person of Christ. It only exists in the divine mind as a purpose. Therefore the only location of reward, at present, is in heaven, to which understanding Christians look as they wait for their salvation to be brought to pass when Jesus returns from heaven to earth. Peter makes this clear in the chapter cited in the bullet points above: “Set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.”⁹⁴ Thus, at present, the reward is currently in heaven but it will be brought to the faithful by Jesus: “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me and I will give to each person according to what they have done.”⁹⁵

On the specific question about whether people are ever granted access to heaven, the evidence is conclusive. Consider the following texts:

- “Who (God) is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.”⁹⁶
- “No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man.”⁹⁷

These teachings are supported in the sense that we have no record in the Scriptures of anyone having entered the heavenly location where Yahweh [The Sovereign LORD] resides. Some may ask about Enoch and others about Elijah.

⁹¹ 1 Peter 1:4

⁹² Matthew 5:12

⁹³ Matthew 6:20

⁹⁴ 1 Peter 1:13

⁹⁵ Revelation 22:12 (This idea is also seen in prophetic passages such as Isaiah 40:10)

⁹⁶ 1 Timothy 6:16

⁹⁷ John 3:13

Of Enoch is it said that he was taken away by God⁹⁸ and of Elijah that he was taken up to ‘heaven’ in a whirlwind.⁹⁹ In this case ‘heaven’ does not necessarily imply the dwelling place of Yahweh but the term is used in a more general sense to speak of the expanse above us. Therefore, no one can say with any certainty where they are - but given the concluding verses of Hebrews 11, a chapter that specifically refers to Enoch and which seems to include Elijah (although not by name)¹⁰⁰, they have still not received that which was promised to them.¹⁰¹

Further, that there is no record of any dead man or woman having gone to heaven. The record opposes this suggestion and states that the dead are in their graves, knowing nothing, feeling nothing, without consciousness, awaiting that call from oblivion which is promised by resurrection. Even, when speaking about David, who is described as a man after God’s own heart¹⁰², and thus as certain of admission into heaven at death (if anybody were) – did not go there:

“Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and that his tomb is with us here to this day...For David did not ascend into heaven...”¹⁰³

This is emphatic and is directly in line with Scripture teaching which explains that those whose faith was well attested in earlier generations would not be made perfect until all are made perfect:

“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”¹⁰⁴

Setting aside then, the unsatisfactory consolation that traditional mainstream ministers may offer grieving relatives and friends upon the loss of a loved one, we now examine the response of the Bible in such circumstances.

Jesus attended Lazarus after he had been dead for four days. Whilst speaking to Lazarus’s sister, Martha, Jesus told her that “Your brother will rise again.”¹⁰⁵

When death had removed some of the believers from the congregation in Thessalonica, the survivors, who had evidently calculated upon their living until the coming of the Lord, were filled with sorrow. Paul writes to comfort them with these words:

⁹⁸ Genesis 5:24; Hebrews 11:5

⁹⁹ 2 Kings 2:11

¹⁰⁰ Hebrews 11:32 – the prophets – and verse 35 remarks on women receiving their dead back to life – referring to Elijah

¹⁰¹ Hebrews 11:39-40 (and see reference 104)

¹⁰² Acts 13:22

¹⁰³ Acts 2:29,34

¹⁰⁴ Hebrews 11:39-40

¹⁰⁵ John 11:23

"Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uniformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever. Therefore encourage one another with these words."¹⁰⁶

The second coming of Christ and the resurrection are the events to which Paul directs their minds for consolation. If it is true that the righteous go to their reward immediately after death, Paul would certainly have suggested such a consolation, instead of referring to the remote, and (in the mainstream view) comparatively unattractive event of the resurrection. The fact that he did not do this shows that it is not true.

How very different these words of comfort are from those offered at a standard mainstream funeral service – there is no mention of souls winging their way to heaven and the like.

The earth we inhabit is the place where Yahweh's salvation will take place, the dwelling place of the resurrected faithful believers in the age to come. This is the message of both the Old and New Testaments. Consider these quotations:

- "For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who in the LORD will inherit the land."¹⁰⁷
- "I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession."¹⁰⁸
- "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth."¹⁰⁹
- "You have made them (the faithful) to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on earth."¹¹⁰

And the end of the present age in which we live is announced in these words:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."¹¹¹

Finally, the angel of the Most High God, in announcing to Daniel, the prophet, gives the same message:

"Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him."¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18

¹⁰⁷ Psalm 37:9

¹⁰⁸ Psalm 2:8

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 5:5 – the words of Christ from 'The Sermon on the Mount'

¹¹⁰ Revelation 5:10

¹¹¹ Revelation 11:15

¹¹² Daniel 7:27

These references, together with others, unmistakably prove that it is on the earth that we are to look for the development of that divine purpose, which is to result in "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."¹¹³

3 [D] What will happen to the Wicked?

Generally today most people tend to think that everyone, unless they have been outrageously wicked, will get to heaven, if such a place exists. Few would believe that the 'immortal souls' of unbelievers or of those who have been just a little 'wicked' – committed just a few 'harmless' sins – would end up in a real place called 'hell'. However, in previous centuries (and you only have to go back to the 19th century) mainstream Christian teachers preached a doctrine of 'hellfire'. This was a place of torture where those who were not acceptable before God were punished throughout eternity.

Do we believe it? Of course not! Intuitive logic tells us that this concept is untrue. If God is merciful, one who seeks justice and harmony as shown in the Bible, how could he possibly permit the majority of people to come into existence with no other destiny than eternal torture?

Rather than believe such teaching most people reject the Bible altogether, and even dispense with God, preferring to take refuge in humanist teaching.

This traditional mainstream teaching about the devil is as thoroughly unscriptural as it is distressingly dreadful. Fortunately, the teaching of the Bible clarifies our understanding.

Bible teaching about the destiny of the 'wicked' is summed up in four words: "The wicked will perish"¹¹⁴. This teaching is clear in the New Testament as the following texts illustrate:

- "The wages of sin is death."¹¹⁵
- "Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction."¹¹⁶
- "If you live according to the flesh, you will die."¹¹⁷

Sometimes it is suggested that as both the righteous and the unrighteous (wicked) die, then there must be some sort of extra punishment that will happen to the unrighteous. The Bible teaches that those who have responded to the call of the gospel will be raised to life – and at that time, some (the righteous) will enter into the kingdom of God – and the unrighteous will not enter, they will die and be excluded from the presence of the Lord. Although there may be some opinion with regard to detail, the following New Testament teaching is helpful.

Jesus says, "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life (i.e. makes the present age the focus of their living) will lose it (at the time of judgment), and whoever loses their life for my sake (i.e. makes the service of Jesus the focus of present living) will find it (will be granted everlasting life at the judgment)."¹¹⁸

¹¹³ Luke 2:14

¹¹⁴ Psalm 37:20

¹¹⁵ Romans 6:23

¹¹⁶ Galatians 6:8

¹¹⁷ Romans 8:13

¹¹⁸ Matthew 10:38-39

All the scriptures are in total agreement on this theme. Consider these quotations:

- “The wicked will be cut off from the land (earth) and the unfaithful will be torn from it.”¹¹⁹
- “When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm for ever.”¹²⁰
- “They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord.”¹²¹
- “But the wicked will perish … they will be consumed, they will go up in smoke.”¹²²
- “They are now dead, they live no more … you wiped out all memory of them.”¹²³

The use of the word ‘hell’ in the Bible can put obstacles in the way of readers as they automatically tend to equate the word with the vivid images that have been associated with it as a result of mainstream teaching in previous centuries. To understand this word, it is not necessary (although it might prove enlightening) to be able to read either the Hebrew of the Old Testament or the Greek of the New. A survey of its use in the English Bible will suffice.

Let us consider Ezekiel for example. The older translations of the Bible talk of Israel’s enemies going “down to hell with their weapons of war.”¹²⁴ More modern translations describe hell as “the realms of the dead”.¹²⁵ Where are the realms of the dead in this section of scripture? Earlier in the chapter we read, “Assyria is there with her whole army; she is surrounded by the graves of all her slain.”¹²⁶ “Hell”, “the realms of the dead” are alternatively described as “the grave”.

In Hebrew the word translated “hell” in the Old Testament is the Hebrew word, *sheol*. It means nothing more than a concealed or covered place. It is, therefore, an appropriate description for the grave, in which a man is for ever concealed from view. Every time the word hell in the Old Testament is used, it can be understood in this context.

In the Greek of the New Testament the word translated “hell” is *hades*. It is equivalent to the Hebrew *sheol*. Linguists know this to be the case and the Greek word has been used by early translators who translated the Hebrew Scriptures into the Greek language.¹²⁷ Again, it refers to the grave.

There is another word translated “hell” in the Greek of the New Testament. The word is *Gehenna*.¹²⁸ This word should not have been translated at all as it is a proper name. It refers to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom which is near Jerusalem. Having been used for idol worship in Israel, Josiah in his reforms gave the valley over for use as a rubbish tip. It received the carcasses of men and beasts and to consume the rubbish and prevent pestilence, fires were kept perpetually burning in it. In the days of Jesus the highest mark of disgrace that the council of the Jews could inflict was to order a man to be buried in Gehenna

¹¹⁹ Proverbs 2:22

¹²⁰ Proverbs 10:25

¹²¹ 2 Thessalonians 1:9

¹²² Psalm 37:20 (consumed – not eternally tortured, a figurative expression)

¹²³ Isaiah 26:14

¹²⁴ Ezekiel 32:27

¹²⁵ Ezekiel 32:27 New International Translation

¹²⁶ Ezekiel 32:22

¹²⁷ The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament translated in the 3rd century BC

¹²⁸ To check the usage see Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 7:5; James 3:6

Thus, Gehenna forms a vivid picture regarding the destiny of the unrighteous – they are subject to destruction and exclusion and, as with those the council of the Jews regarded unworthy, are subject to cremation. Clearly cremation does not imply a state of torture since a dead body is incapable of experiencing pain – and the concept of eternal torture cannot be contemplated since, when the body has been cremated, nothing remains to be burnt.

The picture of the ultimate judgment and the destiny of the wicked is prophetically expressed in this way: “As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me”, declares the LORD (speaking of the time when the Lord will establish God’s kingdom on earth) ... “all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the LORD. “And they will go and look on the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against me; the worms that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.”¹²⁹ This vivid language is picked up and used by Jesus in the New Testament.¹³⁰ It was a vivid warning as, when Jesus spoke the words, the smoke from the fires of Gehenna would possibly have been in the air.

One difficult passage that appears to favour the concept of eternal punishment is given by Jesus when he teaches about judgment. He says, “Then they (the wicked) will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life”.¹³¹ However, as previously quoted, Paul explains that the eternal punishment is “everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord”.¹³² It is not everlasting torment.

Finally, there are symbolic passages in the Book of the Revelation. Speaking of the wicked the text says, “They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever”.¹³³ To insist on taking this description in a literal sense would require that the other symbols and symbolic language are also taken literally. The picture is one in which God’s final triumph is declared, the faithful are saved and the unfaithful are taken away.

Biblical teaching about the destiny of the wicked is becoming increasingly understood by Christians. Eminent clergy have reviewed the topic with care and have reached the conclusion that within the Bible not a single text could be found, in any form or phraseology, which holds out threats of retribution beyond the grave.¹³⁴

Thus the Bible describes a future free from evil - a future of glory and everlasting joy for the righteous, and of oblivion for all the unworthy of mankind. It really is as simple as that.

¹²⁹ Isaiah 66:20-23

¹³⁰ Mark 9:44-48

¹³¹ Matthew 25:46

¹³² 2 Thessalonians 1:9

¹³³ Revelation 14:11; 20:10)

¹³⁴ Autobiography – Reverent Dr, Theodore Clapp

Chapter 4 [A] Immortality – A Gift to the Faithful at the Resurrection

As we have already noted, nature is limited by mortality yet within many human beings there is also a desire for something greater, for perfection and for immortality. Perhaps it is the human desire for immortality that has encouraged some to believe that it is already something that we possess in the form of an ‘immortal soul’. This idea, though, is clearly inadequate. A hungry man may desire food – but this does not mean that he has already had his dinner! The desire for something tends, rather, to suggest that we are hoping and waiting for something. As Paul says, “Who hopes for what they already have?”¹³⁵

The existence of a desire for immortality, however, is of particular interest as, within nature, we note that no instincts or desires exist without an opportunity for fulfilment. Are we hungry? There is food to be eaten. Are we curious? There are things to be seen and discovered. Have we a desire to be kind? There are people to help. Have we conscience? There is right and wrong. Have we an instinct to marvel? There is incomprehensibility in heaven and on earth. Have we veneration? There is God to adore. It might be argued, therefore, that the desire for immortality is, in a sense, the proof of its possibility and consistent with the outworking of the things of God’s creation – from the patterns which we are able to observe.

However, it is accepted that this argument does not necessarily prove that any human will attain immortality. The existence of a desire is no guarantee of its gratification. Such an idea is easily shown to the true. If, for example, a hungry survivor of a shipwreck is washed up on to an island without any vegetation or animal life, he will remain hungry even though he may have an intense desire to eat. Thus, although the desire proves the gratification of the desire possible, it only does so if the circumstances that permit its gratification are in place. It is at this point that the Biblical teaching regarding immortality differs from that of the ancient philosophers. The Biblical teaching is that immortality is a gift to be conferred by God on the faithful at the resurrection, the mainstream Christian view – based on ancient philosophers – is that immortality is already in the hands of humans, the only question that remains is where that endless time will be spent (heaven or hell).

Immortality is the opposite of mortality. When something is described as ‘mortal’ it is limited in its power to continue in life, it degenerates, decays and perishes. It is cessation of being. All human beings are mortal. Mainstream Christian teaching is that mortality relates to a condition (not to the state of ‘being’). Therefore death, rather than being ‘cessation of being’ becomes a change of ‘form’ and a change in ‘location’. As seen in a previous chapter, the nature of humans and of animals is one and the same – but few suggest that the death of an animal relates to a change in ‘form’ or ‘location’.

Consider the following texts from the Bible:

- “As for humans … they are like the animals … All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals.”¹³⁶
- “Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals …”¹³⁷
- “Stop trusting in mere humans, who have but a breath in their nostrils”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Romans 8:24

¹³⁶ Ecclesiastes 3: 18-20

¹³⁷ Genesis 7:23 –relating to the consequences of the Flood

¹³⁸ Isaiah 2:22

Starting at the beginning the Scriptures tell us that “the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground”¹³⁹ and this teaching is confirmed in the New Testament: “The first man was of the dust of the earth.”¹⁴⁰ In describing death, the writer in Ecclesiastes says, “the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit (breath) returns to God who gave it.”¹⁴¹ This teaching is clearly unsupportive of the concept of possession of immortal souls (a term never used in the Bible at all). The Bible teaches that humans are passing forms of conscious life and to each a day of death is appointed because of sin.

The Bible teaches that Adam and Eve were our first parents and they were initially happy to live in the Garden of Eden. We can have confidence in these basic facts as Jesus Christ endorses the teachings of Moses in his own teaching. In addition to this Paul links both Adam and Christ together in a literal sense.¹⁴² With seeming contentment both Adam and Eve enjoy the Garden of Eden as both recognise, at the start, that God demands the absolute submission of our wills and affections to Him as the essential condition of our happiness and His pleasure.

Adam was prohibited from touching a certain tree in the middle of the garden, not because the tree was intrinsically bad, or that there was any sin in the act itself apart from disobedience, but because such a prohibition was, in the circumstances, the simplest and most convenient mode of educating him with respect to his relationship with the Almighty. “Where there is no law there is no transgression,” says Paul.¹⁴³ As long as the tree was free from prohibition, Adam was at liberty to use it as freely as the others; but, after prohibition, it became unlawful for him to touch it. We are not told for how long Adam continued to obey but we know that in the course of time he infringed the divine commandment.

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”¹⁴⁴

The consequence of this act was disastrous, fatal in the real meaning of the word:

“Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and unto dust you will return.’”¹⁴⁵

Here is an explanation of the present condition of the human race. Adam, originally created with a view to possible immortality, was doomed to return to his original nothingness, and then there commenced in him that process of physical decay which results in death. As each of us is descended from Adam, we have, of course, inherited the death-tending qualities of his nature, because no one can bring what is pure from that which is impure.¹⁴⁶ On this principle, death has passed upon all humanity - we find ourselves mortal.

¹³⁹ Genesis 2:7

¹⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:46

¹⁴¹ Ecclesiastes 12:7

¹⁴² 1 Corinthians 15:20-21; Romans 5:12-20

¹⁴³ Romans 4:15

¹⁴⁴ Genesis 3:2

¹⁴⁵ Genesis 3:17-19

¹⁴⁶ Job 14:4

Some people have suggested that God could have prevented this from happening, or that he need not have given a commandment like this to Adam and Eve in the first instance. However, those who think more deeply will have no difficulty in perceiving that the occurrence of such a bitter chapter in human history was incidental to the investiture of man with the Godlike prerogative of freewill; and, further, that its occurrence was foreseen by the Almighty, and intended by Him to be the basis on which He should establish the triumph of eternal generosity and eternal wisdom. It requires no very profound discernment to see that the introduction of evil will lead to ultimate results, so perfectly glorious as to show the infinite wisdom and mercy of God in allowing it.

After the occurrence of the transgression, and the consequent passing of the sentence, a precautionary measure was taken for the purpose expressed in these words:

"He (Adam) must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever. So the LORD God banished him, from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken."¹⁴⁷

These words clearly show that Adam did not possess immortality and measures were put in place to ensure that he was prevented from taking it.

As Adam was mortal, the precautionary measure was a merciful one. Had Adam, in his fallen and unhappy state, become invested with immortality, the earth would have become peopled with undying sinful men and women, who in the course of ages would have multiplied and overcrowded the globe, and developed a scene of indescribable confusion and misery. But this terrible calamity was averted. Adam was excluded from access to the other tree, which, under a provisional arrangement, had been endowed with life giving virtue; and so continued mortal: and his descendants, innumerable, sin-stricken, and wretched, are mercifully swept away, generation after generation, like grass before the mower.

At this point, it is worth reflecting on how unsatisfactory the notion is, that we will all be saved provided we "do good." Adam, by human standards, "did good" as he simply ate of a fruit that would make him particularly wise. It may have appeared "good" but it was not "good" from the divine perspective. Adam was to have loved the LORD his God, to have respected and obeyed Him. In this greater sense, he failed the LORD and sinned - even though the 'offence' may seem, to those who style themselves as 'humanitarians', to have been inspired by a good motive. The fact is that each one of us must be forgiven and justified before we can be saved. In our natural state we are without hope.¹⁴⁸

The Scriptures are the only source of information that offers us any rational account of the present mortal and afflicted condition of mankind. Equally, they are the only source of information concerning our future destiny. Job asks, "If someone dies, will they live again?"¹⁴⁹ This is the question which it is the special function of the Bible to answer. From no other source can we procure an answer. If we speculate upon it as a philosophical problem, we grope in the dark.

There is no process in nature from which we can reason on the subject. There is no real parallel to resurrection. A seed deposited in the ground springs again, and renews its existence by the law of its nature. The power to spring again is part of itself. Not so with human beings. Consider these further words of Job:

¹⁴⁷ Genesis 3:22-23

¹⁴⁸ Ephesians 2:12

¹⁴⁹ Job 14:14

"At least there is hope for a tree: if it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fall. Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant. But a man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more."¹⁵⁰

Yet again we learn that the dust has returned to the ground, and his life spirit has returned to God who gave it: and though both dust and the *person* who resulted from their combination has ceased to be, and if he ever "lives again," it will be the result of a fresh effort on the part of Almighty power.

That he will live again, is one of the wonderful teachings of the Word of God. "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man."¹⁵¹ It was the special mission of Christ to bring this truth to light. He proclaimed himself the "Resurrection and the life,"¹⁵² adding, "The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." Jesus did not come simply to revitalise some spiritual awareness within mankind but to open a way of deliverance from the physical law of death which is sweeping them into the grave, and keeping them there. He came to make resurrection possible for those who would respond faithfully to his message so that ultimately their lowly bodies should be transformed so that they will be like his glorious body.¹⁵³ Jesus spoke of the day of resurrection as something that would happen "at the last day"¹⁵⁴ and consequently we know, as Paul told Timothy, that "Christ Jesus ... has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."¹⁵⁵

Many other texts also make this teaching clear:¹⁵⁶

- "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."¹⁵⁷
- "He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."¹⁵⁸
- "You refuse to come to me to have life."¹⁵⁹
- "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."¹⁶⁰
- "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."¹⁶¹
- "Having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."¹⁶²

Reading these passages leads us to one conclusion. If immortality was and remains the natural present possession of men and women from the moment they take their very first breath, there is little meaning in the texts which speak of it as something that will be given to faithful men and women as a future gift. How can anyone be promised that which they already possess? The divine promise is that God will award eternal life to those who seek for glory, honour, and

¹⁵⁰ Job 14:7-10

¹⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 15:21

¹⁵² John 11:25

¹⁵³ Philippians 3:21

¹⁵⁴ John 6:39

¹⁵⁵ 2 Timothy 1:10

¹⁵⁶ In addition to the texts quoted, other of many examples, include: John 10:28; 17:2; 1 John 2:25; 5:11; Jude 21

¹⁵⁷ John 10:10

¹⁵⁸ 1 John 4:9

¹⁵⁹ John 5:40

¹⁶⁰ John 3:16

¹⁶¹ Romans 6:23

¹⁶² Titus 3:7

immortality.¹⁶³ This is the strongest proof that human beings do not possess immortality at present.

Chapter 5 [A] The Judgment

The traditional view of judgment runs something like this. On a certain day, known sometimes as 'The Last Day', God will bring every human being to individual account - that heaven will be emptied, and hell emptied, of their countless myriads of souls, which will be reunited with their former bodies (resurrected to receive them) and added to earth's living population and brought to judgment. It does not seem to strike those who hold such a view that there should be another judgment after the one that they believe took place when the body died. Whilst some would reserve the matter of judgment for those who have professed a Christian belief, others believe that everybody irrespective of their belief system, will be brought to account on this 'last day'. This idea is completely without foundation in the Bible, and, although this subject has been introduced previously, it is now time to study the topic more fully.

Let us reflect on the message of one of Psalms:

"Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me – those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No one can redeem the life of another or give God a ransom for them – the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough – so that they should live on for ever and not see decay. For all can see that the wise die, that the foolish and senseless also perish, leaving their wealth to others. Their tombs will remain their houses for ever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves. People, despite their wealth, do not endure; they are like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers who approve their sayings. They are like sheep and are destined to die; death will be their shepherd (but the upright will prevail over them in the morning). But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead; he will surely take me to himself. Do not be overawed when others grow rich, when the splendour of their houses increases; for they will take nothing with them when they die, their splendour will not descend with them. Though while they live they count themselves blessed – and people praise you when you prosper – they will join those who have gone before them, who will never again see the light of life."¹⁶⁴

This is reasonable. It would be unreasonable to bring everyone to individual account. Judgment has its basis in responsibility, and responsibility is a question of circumstances and capacity. Human beings who happen to have lived 'primitive' tribal lives may have the latent capacity to be responsible; but this does not make them responsible for the simple reason that the capacity is latent. The actual condition of mind which gives the ground of responsibility does not exist. This is the case with children. They possess reason and moral capacity in an embryonic stage, but because these qualities are not developed, by universal law they are held not responsible in human matters. Is God less just than man?

Human responsibility to the Deity primarily arises from human capacity to discern good and evil, and power to act upon discernment. Beasts are not accountable either to man or God, because they are destitute of the power to discriminate or choose and act under the power of blind impulse.

The nature and extent of human responsibility to a future judgement can only be understood in view of the relationships that we are able to recognise between God and man, as disclosed in the history

¹⁶³ Romans 2:7

¹⁶⁴ Psalm 49:5-20

presented to us in the Scriptures. Apart from this, all is speculation, theory, and uncertainty. Philosophy fails because it disregards the record. Accept the record, and all is simple and intelligible.

Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were responsible to God in terms of judgment. As has been shown earlier, they chose the path of disobedience and they, and all who followed were destined to die. Had God intended no further dealings with humanity, responsibility would have ended here. The grave-penalty would have closed the account; and human life, if indeed it had continued on the face of the earth in the absence of divine intervention, would have been the unredeemed sorrowful story, which it is in the experience of all who are “without hope and without God in the world.”¹⁶⁵ The ‘burden’ of responsibility would not have rested with humans but also the glorious hope of the gospel would not have alleviated the darkened world. But, in His great mercy, Yahweh had planned great kindness which He is working out in His own wise way. His kindness was to develop a path of redemption which would involve both “glory to God in the highest heaven” and “peace to those on whom his favour rests.”¹⁶⁶

God has worked throughout the ages with different men and women in different ways. Had God not re-opened a relationship with human beings and brought them into the sphere of his salvation, all would have perished. It is a divine principle that responsibility rests upon those who are within the actual sphere of his saving work. Consider the significance of these texts which help illustrate the point:

- “And where there is no law there is no transgression.”¹⁶⁷
- “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin.”¹⁶⁸
- “In the past God overlooked such ignorance.”¹⁶⁹
- “People who have wealth but lack understanding are like the beasts that perish.”¹⁷⁰
- “This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light.”¹⁷¹

Hence, in the absence of light - that is, when people are in a state of ignorance - they are not responsible to judgment. God overlooks their ignorance. However, there are those who have received ‘much’ - and from such, the Lord teaches, ‘much’ is required.¹⁷² It follows then that from anyone to whom nothing is given, nothing shall be required, and from anyone to whom little is given, little is required in all the area over which the judgment operates. This principle of absolute fairness in the matter of responsibility is exemplified in the words of Jesus: “The servant who knows the master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.”¹⁷³

The operation of these principles is illustrated in the history of human experience. From Adam to Noah, there was just a little light. The promise of a seed, descended from the woman, to crush out the serpent principle of disobedience and its results, was almost the only star that shone in the darkness of that time. Prophetic glimpses of the coming of divine intervention in its ultimate shape, such as those vouchsafed to Enoch¹⁷⁴, added a little to the light of these times, but, apparently, not more than was sufficient to confer

¹⁶⁵ Ephesians 2:12

¹⁶⁶ Luke 2:14

¹⁶⁷ Romans 4:15

¹⁶⁸ John 9:41

¹⁶⁹ Acts 17:30

¹⁷⁰ Psalm 49:20

¹⁷¹ John 3:19

¹⁷² Luke 12:48

¹⁷³ Luke 12:47

¹⁷⁴ Jude 14

a title of resurrection on those who laid hold on it by faith. So far as we have any information, few became responsible to a resurrection to condemnation in times before the Great Flood. Human wickedness, culminating in universal corruption, was visited with the almost total destruction of life by a flood, which may be regarded as having been a winding-up of all judicial questions arising out of the preceding period, so far as condemnation is concerned, and, therefore, as precluding from resurrection to judgment those who were the subjects of it.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to be totally dogmatic about these issues. It seems probable that, at the time of judgment, there will be present a number of those who belonged to that era, the time before the Great Flood. Judgment will presumably result in the faithful of that age being received into the glory of the Kingdom whilst those who were unfaithful are condemned. A lack of specific information must leave this matter an open question.

The principle itself, that responsibility to God, is only created by contact with divine law in a tangible and authorised form, holds good in every form of human relation to the Almighty. Noah's immediate family were within the sphere of the divine interaction, and responsibility in reference to another life may arise out of that; but their descendants wandered far out of the way of righteousness and understanding, sinking below moral responsibility and establishing that "ignorance" throughout the world which, according to Paul, God "overlooked."

In the call of Abraham, a member of an idolatrous family, but one who possessed the latent disposition to be faithful, God sought to avoid the creation sliding into the corruption that had encompassed the earth before the time of the flood. A more direct responsibility towards God was placed upon Abraham and his descendants. They were the people of his choosing with whom he chose to expand his saving work. This God did by making promises to Abraham that ultimately would offer salvation to humanity. Abraham, an individual of great privilege was also Abraham, a man of responsibility. Abram, the idolater, was his own person – and like the beasts, he, in this state would have lived, died and disappeared for ever. Abraham, the called of God, was no longer his own, but bought with the price of God's promise. He entered into a higher relationship and was exalted to a higher destiny, and had imposed upon him obligations to God, unknown to his former condition. Success or failure in the way he lived his life was of much greater significance than before. Faith and obedience would confer on him the position of 'heir of the world', and the subject of resurrection to immortality: unbelief would make him unacceptable to God who had called him and subject to condemnation.

In this respect, true Christians are the children of Abraham by faith. This means that they walk in the steps of the faith which Abraham had ¹⁷⁵ and, who, being Christ's, are Abraham's seed¹⁷⁶ through believing the gospel, and being baptised into Christ. By nature children of wrath, even as others, they were in the days of their ignorance "without hope and without God in the world"¹⁷⁷ and "foreigners to the covenants of promise"¹⁷⁸, "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance ,"¹⁷⁹ living without law, and destined, as the result of that condition, to perish without law in Adam; inheriting death without resurrection - death without remedy; having neither the, privileges nor the responsibilities of a divine relationship.

¹⁷⁵ Romans 4:12

¹⁷⁶ Galatians 3:29

¹⁷⁷ Ephesians 2:12

¹⁷⁸ Ephesians 2:q12

¹⁷⁹ Ephesians 4:18

When called from darkness to light by the preaching of the gospel, whether they submit to that gospel or not, they are then within the sphere of God's action. They neither live nor die to themselves as formerly. They have passed into a special relationship with God, in which their lives, good or evil, come under divine supervision, and form the basis of a future accountability, God having overlooked their previous ignorance.¹⁸⁰

The call to faith that Abraham received was extended with time throughout his family and his descendants and ultimately all who acquired Abraham's faith came under Abraham's responsibilities. Doubtless, many entered this position in the course of the Mosaic ages. The Mosaic Law was added because of transgression¹⁸¹ and its mission was to teach *the first lessons* of Yahweh's supremacy and holiness. It was not designed as a system through which men and women might acquire deliverance from ultimate death, the consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve. In a sense it did assist men and women of that time to offer lives to God that pleased him since it assisted in the development of faithful living, and ultimate salvation has always rested upon God's willingness to forgive and to justify those who lived faithfully before him.

Paul's comments on the Law of Moses in the following way: "If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law."¹⁸² It was impossible life could come by a law which required moral infallibility on the part of human nature. For this reason, the law, though "holy, righteous and good,"¹⁸³ was ineffective in this respect as a result of the weakness of the flesh and, although the Law was intended to bring life it actually brought death.¹⁸⁴

The consequence was, that "all the world stood guilty before God"; and in terms of their moral relationship with God, they were prevented from boasting, that is to say, prevented from attaining to eternal life on a principle which would have left it open to them to think, and to say, that their life was their own by right rather than the compassionate gift of a loving God. In this we see the splendour of divine wisdom as, if humans had been able to attain to immortality without God, the perfect harmony that will exist between a supreme God and human beings would have been disturbed – for humans are saved by God's love alone.

The law of righteousness by faith is the principle on which men are saved - that is, saving righteousness is recognised by God where He is honoured by faith in that which He has promised. This principle so clearly in operation in God's dealings with Abraham actually had its origin in Eden, for we read that it was by faith (confidence in what we hope for) that Abel offered an acceptable sacrifice.¹⁸⁵ The prediction of the woman's serpent-destroying seed formed a pivot on which faith could work even then, and doubtless was the subject-matter of the faith which saved Abel, Enoch, and Noah; but the full and official initiation of the principle of faith, as the rule of salvation, occurred in the history of Abraham. This principle forms the basis of responsibility before God at the 'last day' when the resurrection will occur.

Throughout God's dealings with Israel in Old Testament times it seems that resurrectional responsibility was limited to those who were related to the word of Yahweh, God of Israel. The principle of resurrectional responsibility operates much more vividly in our own times, and demands particular attention

¹⁸⁰ The specific details about who God will call to judgment are a matter about which we cannot be dogmatic. The suggestion here is that those who have heard will be called, but others consider that judgment is rather more limited, typically to those who have responded to the call of the gospel.

¹⁸¹ Galatians 3:9

¹⁸² Galatians 3:21

¹⁸³ Romans 7:12

¹⁸⁴ Romans 7:10

¹⁸⁵ Hebrews 11:4

Jesus proclaimed himself the “Resurrection and the Life” and it is to his words that we must look to appreciate the relevance of judgment for each one of us. Consistent with the teaching of the Old Testament it is clear that “God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked”.¹⁸⁶ Jesus tells us that he is appointed as the judge of all: “Moreover the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.”¹⁸⁷ This teaching is also consistent with the teaching of the apostles. Peter, speaking in Caesarea, says, “He (Jesus) commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.”¹⁸⁸ Paul refers equally to the fact that Jesus has been appointed judge: “This will take place on the day when God judges people’s secrets through Jesus Christ.”¹⁸⁹

New Testament references to judgment abound and it is only possible to look at examples:

- “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.”¹⁹⁰
- “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead.”¹⁹¹
- “Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”¹⁹²
- “The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets.”¹⁹³

The Bible teaching that judgment is one of the exclusive rights and functions of the Messiah stands upon a very broad Scriptural foundation. God has sent out an invitation to all people on earth calling them to become his servants in response to the gospel message that they may be heirs of the kingdom which God has promised to those who love him. Through the divine shaping processes that God brings to bear upon us in this life, and through his gracious acceptance of us in the ultimate Day of judgment, God will have purified “for himself a people that are his very own”.¹⁹⁴ The redeemed will praise and worship him and do his will throughout eternity.

Throughout the last two millennia the gospel message has spread far and wide and the number of people who have responded to the call has been considerable. Not all who have been called are ultimately chosen¹⁹⁵ as they have not been influenced sufficiently by it to “offer their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”¹⁹⁶ Such a picture is painted in the parable of the net of the kingdom¹⁹⁷ which contains both bad and good fish. The spread of the gospel message brings both faithful and unfaithful servants in its wake. In addition to this, there are different degrees of merit among those who are faithful. In the parable of the Sower, some seed produced thirty times that which was sown, some sixty times and some a hundred times.¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁶ Ecclesiastes 3:17

¹⁸⁷ John 5:22

¹⁸⁸ Acts 10:42

¹⁸⁹ Romans 2:16

¹⁹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:10

¹⁹¹ 2 Timothy 4:1

¹⁹² Hebrews 9:27

¹⁹³ Revelation 11:18

¹⁹⁴ Titus 2:14

¹⁹⁵ Matthew 22:14

¹⁹⁶ Romans 12:1

¹⁹⁷ Matthew 13:47

¹⁹⁸ Mark 4; Luke 8

It is not possible for anyone to judge another. On occasions people are prone to do so but the principle of Scripture in this respect is clearly set out: "People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."¹⁹⁹ Jesus tells us, therefore, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged."²⁰⁰

On occasions we are left to wonder about why God may have allowed some to be saved and later condemned. For example, he brought faithless Israel out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses but later condemned them. He allowed Korah, Dathan and Abiram to remain in the camp for a while and to lead a rebellion against Moses and Aaron before condemning them. However, God allowed such things and so did not appear either unreasonable or unfair. All people have freewill but also they have to accept the consequence of their own decision making. Further examples could be considered.

Why did Yahweh put up with the Jews in their obstinacy, as He knew of their ultimate rejection of all His messengers and His own Son? Why did Jesus tolerate Judas until he convicted himself by betraying his master? Why did the Spirit permit Ananias and Sapphira to come into the presence of the apostles, and go through the formality of hearing their own condemnation, before their untruthfulness was punished by death? In fact, why do things happen at all as they do? Why did Yahweh not simply set everything in motion on such a basis that obedience and not disobedience should have been the rule? The whole history of divine procedure, in relation to human affairs, shows that divine omniscience is never allowed for a moment to forestall or displace the natural order of events, but rather sets up and enforces the rule by which everything has its full and logical course, before the inevitable consequence is reached.

The fact that God knows who is righteous and who is wicked does not mean that He will not bring each to the formality of judgment. Such an idea runs counter to that which God has placed on record. It is true God knows; but it is also necessary that the righteous and the wicked themselves should know. How will the righteous know themselves approved, and the wicked condemned, and God be justified in the eyes of both, without the declaration of what He knows?

Therefore, we should be glad to know that the judgment lies between the corrupt things of this present age and the perfection of the one to come. It is comforting to know that, at that time, wrongful suffering will be avenged, secret faithfulness will be openly acknowledged, unappreciated worth recognised, and, unpunished, unsuspected, and unknown evil doing, will be condemned. Judgment then is based on deeds which, if positive, are evidence of faith. The following texts help to focus our minds on some of the issues involved:

- "Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord," ... Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evil-doers."²⁰¹
- "But I tell you everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken."²⁰²
- "For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done."²⁰³
- "So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God."²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ 1Samuel 16:7

²⁰⁰ Matthew 7:1

²⁰¹ Matthew 7:22-23

²⁰² Matthew 12:36

²⁰³ Matthew 16:27

²⁰⁴ Romans 14:12

- “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.”²⁰⁵²⁰⁶

The parables of Christ frequently illustrate the relationship between Jesus and his servants in connection with his departure from the earth. In all of these, he presents the fact that at his return he will “take account” of them, and deal with them as they deserve. In the parable of the Nobleman (Ten Minas)²⁰⁷ we read “Then he (the nobleman) sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained with it.” Three particular servants are identified who probably represent groups making up those who profess Christianity. The first gives a satisfactory account of himself, having increased five minas to ten, and is placed in charge over ten cities. The second has made two minas into four and is placed in charge of four cities. The third, who, though less privileged, might have stood equally well, had he turned his single mina into two, justifies his laziness on the plea that he dreaded a service where more was expected than was given in the first instance. This man, who stands for the unfaithful, is rejected. The order is given, “Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas ... Throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness.”²⁰⁸

Another parable with a theme related to judgment is that of the Wedding Banquet.²⁰⁹ A king issued invitations to his son's marriage, but those invited made various excuses for not coming. The king then sent his servants into the streets to invite anyone they came across. His servants did just that and gathered “the bad as well as the good.” The king then came in to see the guests, and “noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes” whom he ordered to be tied up “hand and foot” and thrown into the darkness. This shows that the judgment to be carried out by Jesus at the time of resurrection has the practical effect of sorting out the righteous from the wicked.

Other parables such as the Parable of the Fishing Net²¹⁰, the parable of the Man on a Journey²¹¹, the Master who was to return from a Wedding Banquet²¹² and the parable of the Ten Virgins²¹³ present a consistent picture – some are accepted and others rejected.

This is in harmony with the specific teaching of the Bible which records that although many are called, only a few are chosen. The present age is not a time for dividing the wicked from the righteous. Both go to the grave, and “descend together into the dust”²¹⁴ and their merits and demerits would sleep for ever with them in the silence of the tomb, were it not for the waking voice that calls the just and unjust, at the appointed time, from the oblivion of *hades*, to give an account before the “judgment-seat of Christ.”

Now is not the time for Jesus to execute judgment. He is a priest over his own house. The matter of ‘giving account’ is left until he returns. Jesus will “judge the living and the dead” when he returns to the earth. He will open the book of God's remembrance, in which the thoughts and actions of all who will come to

²⁰⁵ Revelation 22:12

²⁰⁶ In addition to these New Testament quotations, other Scriptures on this theme include: Job 34:11; Psalms 62:12; Proverbs 24:12; Jeremiah 17:10

²⁰⁷ Luke 19:11-26

²⁰⁸ Matthew 28:25-30

²⁰⁹ Matthew 22:1-14

²¹⁰ Matthew 13:47-48

²¹¹ Mark 13:34-36

²¹² Luke 12:35-46

²¹³ Matthew 25:1-13

²¹⁴ Job 17:16

judgment are indelibly recorded. This is the time when all will see the “distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.”²¹⁵

The scriptures indicate that those who have responded to the gospel message (having believed and been baptised) will be present at the judgment and the Lord himself will decide who is worthy of the honour of entering into his kingdom.

Jesus has declared that he will confess or deny men in the presence of the angels at his coming, according to the position taken by them in his absence. Daniel says that at that time “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”²¹⁶ Such teaching is that of the early apostles.²¹⁷ Thus we are given to believe that each will be raised in the flesh and made to stand again in the presence of Jesus. Equally those who are responsible to judgment and who are alive at the time of Jesus’ return will also stand in his presence. Jesus will then grant eternal life to those whom he accepts, and those whom he rejects will not enter his kingdom.²¹⁸

Increasingly complex are arguments that try to establish the precise details of that which is meant by two resurrections. The Bible teaches: “Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”²¹⁹ The scriptures indicate that those who are raised at the resurrection when Jesus returns to the earth and who are found faithful will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. This period of time is frequently referred to as ‘The Millennial Reign of Christ’. Having been granted everlasting life they are unaffected by what is termed - ‘the second death’.²²⁰

Some sections of the New Testament appear confusing and it is necessary to harmonise them with other texts that refer to this topic.

In a discussion on marriage in the resurrection, Jesus talks of those who are “considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection of the dead.”²²¹ This is in response to a question by the Sadducees who had mistaken views about the resurrection. Jesus explains that marriage is not a part of the age to come and his answer refers to both resurrection and to ‘worthiness’. Seen as part of the clear teaching of scripture, those who are resurrected will fall into one of two categories – ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy’. There was no point in discussing the married stage of the unworthy since they would not be there anyway.

In a well known chapter on the resurrection Paul writes:

²¹⁵ Malachi 3:18

²¹⁶ Daniel 12:2

²¹⁷ For further examples, refer to Romans 2:8,9,16; I Corinthians 4:5

²¹⁸ A number of people have proposed that the dead rise in a state of immortality. Such a teaching is incompatible with Bible teaching as it practically sets aside the New Testament teaching on judgment. It also implies either that the wicked have a conscious existence for all eternity before them – or that only the righteous are raised to judgment which has been shown to be incompatible with Bible teaching.

²¹⁹ Revelation 20:6

²²⁰ Precise and dogmatic statements about such a complex matter are unwise. The concept of a second resurrection (Revelation 20:5) may be taken to refer to those of the mortal population who die in the millennial period. However judgment is viewed, it remains clear that some who have professed Christianity will ultimately receive the eternal inheritance and others will not. [Ed]

²²¹ Luke 20:35

- “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown (buried) is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”²²²
- “For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”²²³

If these words are restricted to the mere act of emergence from the ground, they naturally seem to be a definite affirmation, that the body is incorruptible, spiritual, and immortal from the first moment of its restoration; and that, therefore, judgment is anticipated and superseded by this silent proclamation of acceptance, and that nothing lies between those rising incorruptible and perfected salvation, except for a joyous reunion with the Lord.

The mistake in understanding occurs when Paul's words are construed too narrowly - reading them as if he were dealing with the dramatic incidents of the resurrection, instead of the state of existence to which the act of resurrection leads. Paul is not discussing the scientific aspect of the subject. He is not defining the process by which a dead man ascends from the depths of corruption to the nature of the angels; the literal details are foreign to the subject that occupies his mind. He is dealing with the broad question that had been asked – first – how are the dead raised? – and second – what sort of body will they have?

Coincidentally and speaking ‘in the round’, “the dead will be raised imperishable” and “we will all be changed”²²⁴ but this teaching cannot contradict the teaching of Paul in the second of his letters to the brothers and sisters in the church at Corinth where he says: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done in the body, whether good or bad.”²²⁵ A general statement of truth cannot exclude the involved particulars, though it may appear to do so. The course of true wisdom is, not to set one part of the Word against another part, but to harmonise apparent conflict, by giving attention to all details, and finding a place for these in all general forms of the same truth. The outcome of resurrection and judgment will be an imperishable nature, glory, power, and pure spirituality for those found ‘worthy’. The judgment will settle everything, separating the chaff from the wheat, and determining who are the saints and who are the unprofitable servants, (those who have had a reputation to live but who are, in fact, dead.)²²⁶

It is essential, therefore, that we give serious consideration to the sobering fact that a day has been declared when God will judge the world with justice by the man whom he has appointed²²⁷, Jesus, who will justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. Let those who have received the gospel message pursue their discipleship with renewed encouragement, strength and vigour. Let any who have set aside their calling in favour of the things of the present age renew their former dedication and thereby exchange exposure, shame, condemnation and death for praise, recognition, promotion and life. For as the proverb says, “The wise inherit honour, but fools get only shame.”²²⁸

²²² 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

²²³ 1 Corinthians 15:52-53

²²⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:51

²²⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:10

²²⁶ Revelation 3:2

²²⁷ Acts 17:30

²²⁸ Proverbs 3:35

Chapter 6 [A] God

This particular section of the book is approached with special reverence but it must, of necessity, be discussed as mainstream Christian teaching is inconsistent with the teaching of the Bible. Knowing God and obeying the gospel of our Lord Jesus are essential to salvation.²²⁹ Knowledge of God is the basis of becoming His children, His sons and daughters. [So as to allow for fluency in reading, the term ‘sons’ will be used to refer to both male and females.] How can we love and serve a being whom we do not know? Knowledge of God is the rock upon which everlasting life itself is built. “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”²³⁰

Although nature tells us something of God²³¹, we can only find out about His being, His character, His purpose and His will with respect of humans within His revealed word, the Bible. Any other speculation is valueless.

That a revelation of God Himself has come from the Creator of all things will excite the highest admiration and gratitude in every mind that is able to realise what this stupendous privilege means. Peace now and everlasting life for the endless ages coming is easily spoken of: but who can measure the wealth of well-being involved in the words? This wealth comes through the knowledge God has given us: and the knowledge he has given us comes to us through the Bible, and through no other medium in our day.

But we are in a peculiar position with respect to this knowledge. It no longer shines before us in its pristine simplicity and glory. Along with almost every other item of divine truth, it has been covered up in the most dangerous way by deviation from the original truth. A number of popular misconceptions from other cultures and belief systems began to prevent the message from the Bible gaining ascendancy in mainstream thinking very early in the Christian era.

Such deviation does not professedly deny the God revealed in the Bible. On the contrary, it makes a definite profession of belief in the God of Israel and declares the Bible to be the source of its faith. In this way, the impression is made universally that the God of mainstream Christian thinking is the God of the Bible. Had the theology of the Dark Ages not suggested that the development of their religious thinking was derived from the Bible, those who sought to establish its true message would have found the task easier because popular beliefs would have been independent of the message contained in the Bible. As it is, people are misled, and find the greatest difficulty in sorting out the difference between the God of mainstream Christian thinking and the Bible Deity, and the importance of knowing the difference.

Mainstream teaching says that God is three eternal elements, all equally having an existence from eternity and self-sustaining, and all equally powerful, each equally personal and distinct from the other, and yet all forming a complete single personal unity. There is, say they, “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit,” each “very God,” each without a beginning, each omnipotent and separate from the other, and yet all ONE.

If we ask why one of these elements should be called the Father, not having preceded or given existence to the others; and why another should be called the Son, not having been brought into existence by the Father, but co-eternal with Him; and why the third should be called the Holy Spirit, since both “God the Father,” and “God the Son” are holy and spiritual, we do not receive an explanation. Popular theology is

²²⁹ 2 Thessalonians 1:18

²³⁰ John 17:3

²³¹ Nature shows us God’s perfect intelligence, design and skill in creation.

content with saying that this is simply the truth - that there are ‘three in one’ and ‘one in three’ – and that this is a great mystery.

Mystery indeed! There are plenty of mysteries in creation – things that are beyond human intellect, but Trinitarianism propounds a contradiction – not a mystery but an impossibility. It professes to convey an idea, and no sooner expresses it than it withdraws it, and contradicts it. It says there is one God, yet not one but three, and that the three are not three but one. It is a mere juggle of words, a source of bewilderment and confusion to the mind, all the more dangerous, because the theory employs in some measure the language of the Bible, which talks to us of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Biblical representation of the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” agrees with a rational understanding. Such enlightenment satisfies the heart, agrees with experience, and also reveals something beyond actual observation. It informs us about the very First Cause of all things which so many people seem desirous of investigating.

To begin with “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”²³² as God is described, was made known to Israel by the angels, revealed through the prophets, and embodied in Jesus. The first thing revealed about Him is His absolute unity. He is declared to be ONE. This is one of the most conspicuous features of what is revealed on the subject.

Consider these passages which all declare God to be a unity:

- “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one.”²³³
- “Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live.”²³⁴
- “One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all.”²³⁵
- “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”²³⁶

The Almighty's declarations of Himself agree with these scriptures as shown in the following examples:

- “I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.”²³⁷
- “I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God.”²³⁸
- “This is what the LORD says, Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and the last; apart from me there is no God ... Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.”²³⁹

The only statement in the New Testament that gives plain support to the Trinitarian view, is unanimously regarded by Bible critics as a spurious interpolation of the original text. On this ground it has been omitted altogether from modern translations, the marginal comment in the New International Version (2011)

²³² 2 Corinthians 1:3

²³³ Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29 (The direct words of Jesus)

²³⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:6

²³⁵ Ephesians 4:6

²³⁶ 1 Timothy 2:5

²³⁷ Isaiah 46:9-10

²³⁸ Isaiah 45:5

²³⁹ Isaiah 44:6,8

stating that the text is not to be found in documents that existed before the 14th century.²⁴⁰ It is in the 7th verse of the 5th chapter of I John: "For there are three that testify in heaven: (the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth,) the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement."²⁴¹

The revelation of the Deity's unity, as shown above, agrees with the observations of science. Nature is seen to be under *one law and one control* throughout its numerous fields. There is no jar, no conflict; the power that constitutes, sustains, and regulates all is seen to be ONE. Cold freezes and heat dissolves in all countries alike. The light that discloses the face of the earth, irradiates the moon and illuminates the distant planets.

The power that draws the moon in circular journey round the earth, impels the earth around the sun, and drags even that stupendous and glorious body, with all its attendant planets, in a vast cycle, with the rest of starry creation, around AN UNKNOWN CENTRE; that is, a centre distinctly indicated in the motion of the stellar universe, but whose locality cannot even approximately be determined on account of the vastness of the motion, and the impossibility of obtaining data for calculation in the compass of a human lifetime.

The suggestion that this Unknown Centre is the source of all power is in significant harmony with what the Scriptures reveal concerning God. There is a source--there must be a source--and this source must be a centre, because all power is manifested at centres. The earth draws every object on it to its centre, and pulls the moon round it as well. The earth in its turn is attracted towards the sun and drawn around it; and the sun itself with the whole framework of creation is drawn round A CENTRE. These are facts in the organisation of things, and they are therefore divine facts, because the organisation of things is the handiwork of God.

The testimonies quoted say that all things are from the Father. But where is "The Father"? Does His name not imply that He is THE SOURCE? And, being the Source, is He not the Centre of creation? Some shrink from the suggestion that Deity has a located existence. Why should they? The Scriptures clearly teach the located existence of Deity. Paul says that God lives in "unapproachable light, whom no one has seen nor can see."²⁴² Here is a localisation of the person of the Creator. If God were on earth in the same sense in which He lives in "unapproachable light", what could Paul mean by saying that man cannot approach? If God lives in "unapproachable light" He must have an existence there, which is not manifested in this earthly sphere.²⁴³ This is borne out by Solomon's words "God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few."²⁴⁴ Jesus promotes the same view in the prayer which he taught his disciples: "Our Father in heaven"²⁴⁵ The Psalmist also pursues this theme and examples are given in the footnote.²⁴⁶ Solomon in the

²⁴⁰ It is not cited by any of the Greek ecclesiastical writers, not by any of the earlier Latin fathers, even when the subjects upon which they treat would naturally have led them to appeal to its authority. They do not appear in Biblical translations until the fourteenth century but are first to be found in a treatise of the fourth century ascribed to a Spanish Christian, Priscillian.

²⁴¹²⁴² N Smart, in his commentary on the Epistles of John gives this explanation of the original text: "John is insisting that Jesus is in the fullest sense Christ, as truly so in his death (that is, 'by blood') as in his baptism, and indeed in his very nature. (It is probable here that we are dealing with terms of a theological controversy with which John and his readers were thoroughly familiar, but the full significance of which is lost to us.) When he adds that 'it is the Spirit that bears witness, because the Spirit is truth' he is reaffirming what he has said twice before in his Letter: that the Spirit of God, which is the Spirit of truth, bears witness to the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh." Smart N. The Epistles of John (1980) p.121/2

²⁴² 1 Timothy 6:16

²⁴³ The question of the location of God is perhaps somewhat speculative but the author is clear to identify the real existence of the Being of God. More recent authors may consider that God lives in unapproachable light in the sense that he lives in a heavenly dimension that humans cannot comprehend. [Ed]

²⁴⁴ Ecclesiastes 5:2

²⁴⁵ Matthew 6:9

prayer by which he dedicated the temple to God made frequent use of this expression, "Hear from heaven, your dwelling place"²⁴⁷ It is impossible to mistake the tenor of these texts which indicate that the Father of all is a Being who exists in the central "HEAVEN OF HEAVENS" as He exists nowhere else. By His Spirit in immensely-filling diffusion, He is everywhere present in the sense of holding and knowing, and being conscious of creation to its utmost bounds; but in His proper person, all-glorious, beyond human power to conceive, He dwells in heaven.

Consider the ascension of our Lord and note that it is supportive of this line of reasoning:

- "While he (Jesus) was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven"²⁴⁸
- "He (Jesus) was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God."²⁴⁹

These statements also indicate that the Deity has a personal manifested existence in "the heavens" even though we are not able to establish, and do not need to know, the precise location.

Many people tend to feel that this evidently Scriptural and reasonable and beautiful view is unjustified. They prefer to conceive of God as a Spirit-Being without a bodily existence and do not necessarily feel that he lives in at one localised point. Philosophy may be the reason for such a view but Paul warns against the danger of being harmed by philosophical concepts. The Scriptures seem to suggest that the Father is a tangible person or being in whom all the powers of the universe converge.²⁵⁰

There are many pointers to start as thinking about this topic within the Bible record but it must be remembered that when the Deity is recorded as having a very close interaction with human beings, that the Deity is manifest in angelic form or through Jesus himself who was a manifestation of the Deity. As a stimulus to thought the following examples are included at this point.

Moses is described as faithful. God says of Moses: "With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD."²⁵¹ Although it was through angelic ministration²⁵² it is suggested that the reality of the Deity must be higher and greater and more real than those in or through whom he is manifest. The presence of the LORD at Sinai is also recorded when the LORD came in a dense cloud.²⁵³

It is also recorded that Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel ascended Sinai and saw the God of Israel. The Glory of the Lord settled on the top of Mount Sinai for six days and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites afar off the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁶ Psalm 102:19-20; Psalm 116:16 are examples

²⁴⁷ 1 Kings 8:30

²⁴⁸ Luke 24:51

²⁴⁹ Mark 16:19

²⁵⁰ In the 21st century most Christians tend to feel that the Deity is more likely to be in spirit-form and that He has styled himself as a Father so as to help us to be able to relate to him in a way that we can understand. The nature of God's 'substance' remains, as most agree, something about which we know so very little. [Ed]

²⁵¹ Numbers 12:8

²⁵² As confirmed in Acts 7:38,53 and in Hebrews 2:2

²⁵³ Exodus 19:9; Exodus 34:5

²⁵⁴ Exodus 24:9-18

The subsequent reference to these things indicates a clear relationship with the presence of a real person albeit that the Deity was represented most frequently, if not always, be his angelic host.²⁵⁵

The greatness of the LORD is to be seen throughout the Scriptures. Here are some helpful examples:

- “Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, or with the breadth of His hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? Who can fathom the Spirit of the LORD, or instruct the LORD as his counsellor? Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten Him, and who taught Him the right way? Who was it that taught Him knowledge, or showed Him the path of understanding? ... Before Him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by Him as worthless and less than nothing. With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken Him?”²⁵⁶
- “Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?”²⁵⁷
- “How great is God – beyond our understanding!”²⁵⁸

The evidence of the Scriptures has been examined and it is clear that God is the only un-derived and self-sustaining existence in the universe. All other forms of life are from Him. “For in Him we live and move and have our being.”²⁵⁹

Many people have thought that God made all things “out of nothing” and this has resulted in unnecessary clashes between scientific and Biblical teaching. In fact, the Bible teaches that all things have been made out of God and that He, as the antecedent, eternal power of the universe, has elaborated all things out Himself. *“Spirit,”* irradiating from Him, has, under the command of His will, been embodied in the vast material creation which we behold and now sustains it.²⁶⁰

All things are “in God,” because His Spirit fills all space, and constitutes the basis of all existence. In this way God is omnipresent and, though located in the heavens, the Creator, by His universal Spirit, knows everything. His consciousness is *en rapport* with all creation by reason of the universal prevalence of His Spirit and His infinite capacity of mind enables Him to deal perfectly with every aspect of His will and purpose and design.

²⁵⁵ Other references would include Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10

²⁵⁶ Isaiah 40:12-14; 17-18

²⁵⁷ Job 11:7

²⁵⁸ Job 36:28 [The author has reverently explored the nature of God but Job sums up the difficulties all humans have in this respect. [Ed]

²⁵⁹ Acts 17:28

²⁶⁰ This view, offered at the time by Roberts, is not necessarily representative of Christadelphian views. [Ed]

[6B] The Spirit

The Spirit is frequently referred to throughout Scripture appearing both in the first chapter of Genesis and in the last chapter of Revelation. In John we read that “God is spirit”²⁶¹ from which we understand that the Father is “spirit” in His personal substance. That the spirit belongs to God can be seen in texts such as “My Spirit will not contend with humans”²⁶² and “By your Spirit you warned them”²⁶³.

The Father and the Spirit are one. Yet there is a distinction between the Father and the Spirit as to the form in which they are presented to us for our understanding. Of the former, as we have seen, the Bible states that He lives in heaven in “unapproachable light” – and as such the Father has a location whereas by His Spirit he is present everywhere. Consider the following text:

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make the bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.”²⁶⁴

Not only is the Spirit the means by which God is able to be present everywhere – it is also the means by which the Father carries out His work and accomplishes those things which he has purposed. Consider the following texts:

- “When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.”²⁶⁵
- “By his breath (Spirit) the skies became fair.”²⁶⁶
- “The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”²⁶⁷
- “The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”²⁶⁸
- “The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him (Samson).”²⁶⁹
- “By your Spirit you warned them through the prophets.”²⁷⁰
- “I (Micah) am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD.”²⁷¹
- “Prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”²⁷²

The last of these texts introduces the “Holy Spirit”. It would appear that when the “Spirit” is operating directly under the Almighty’s will, it becomes the Holy Spirit. The term “Spirit” on its own would appear to act freely and with spontaneity.²⁷³

²⁶¹ John 4:24

²⁶² Genesis 6:3

²⁶³ Nehemiah 9:30

²⁶⁴ Psalm 139:7-12

²⁶⁵ Psalm 104:30

²⁶⁶ Job 26:13 (The word breath is the same Hebrew word as for ‘Spirit’ and, in older translations, has been translated as ‘spirit’. The question of whether to use an upper or lower case letter for the word has been left to the judgment of the translators. Ed]

²⁶⁷ Job 33:4

²⁶⁸ Genesis 1:2

²⁶⁹ Judges 15:14

²⁷⁰ Nehemiah 9:30

²⁷¹ Micah 3:8

²⁷² 2 Peter 1:21

God upholds everything through his Spirit but only a few men and women have experienced the Holy Spirit in their lives in the sense that they have received power from God to perform a task or tasks in specific accordance with the divine will. It appears that, in the present age, the specific gift of the Holy Spirit is not given to those who are His children. However, instances abound in the New Testament record.

The apostles received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Its power was real and felt. Its arrival was accompanied with the sound of a violent wind, that shook the fabric of the building in which they were assembled. Its results were clearly seen, God's hand was upon the apostles, and they were endowed with powers far above those which they naturally had. They were enabled by the Spirit to speak fluently in languages they had never learnt; not in unknown tongues, but words which were identified by the god-fearing Jewish onlookers as the current languages of the time. "Utterly amazed, they asked, "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our own native language."²⁷⁴

By the same power, the apostles were instructed in things they did not know naturally, according to the promise of Christ. "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."²⁷⁵ It also endowed them with miraculous powers, as seen in the instantaneous cure of disease, the raising of the dead, and other wonderful works. The Spirit was the medium or power by which these things were done. It was a reality, a tangible presence, something pervading the persons of the apostles. We read, for example, that "God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to those who were ill, and their illness were cured and the evil spirits left them."²⁷⁶ The healing Spirit-power in Paul was also seen at work in Peter. The shadow of Peter crossing the sick was effective to cure.²⁷⁷ The same ability is apparent in the case of Jesus, to whom the Spirit was given without measure.²⁷⁸ When an ill woman in a crowd came stealthily behind him and touched the hem of his garment, that she might receive benefit, Jesus said, "I know that power has gone out from me."²⁷⁹

These miraculous powers were necessary to qualify the apostles for the performance of the work they had to do. That work was to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ²⁸⁰ as the basis of the truth built upon that fact. How could they have done this with any effect if their testimony had not been miraculously confirmed? How could they have obtained credence to the naturally incredible announcement that a man publicly executed by the Romans had been secretly raised from the dead, unless their words had been confirmed by the power alleged to be on their side? It is true the apostles were witnesses, in a natural sense, of the fact that Christ was alive, and would have steadily maintained their testimony to the fact, even if God had not worked with them, but how could the work of getting many to believe their testimony have been accomplished? The earnest protestation of belief on the part of the apostles, though it might have influenced a few, could not have produced that wide-spread conviction which was necessary to the creation of the Body of Christ.

²⁷³ [There may be a useful analogy if we consider humans for each is in the image of God. Those things that we use our energy for are sometimes things about which we take no specific thought (e.g. breathing; balancing) and on other occasions we direct our energy specifically to a particular task or purpose (e.g. pointing, hammering a nail) Ed.]

²⁷⁴ Acts 2:7-8 (details are given in verses 9-11)

²⁷⁵ John 16:13

²⁷⁶ Acts 19:11-12

²⁷⁷ Acts 5:15

²⁷⁸ John 3:34

²⁷⁹ Luke 8:46; Matthew 14:35-36

²⁸⁰ Acts 1:22

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit did this. Showing forth supernatural powers, it bore witness to the truth of what the apostles declared. It is said, "Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."²⁸¹ The writer to the Hebrews describes the situation in similar terms: "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his will."²⁸²

In this sense, the Holy Spirit is a witness of Christ's resurrection; "We are witnesses of these things (the death and resurrection of Christ), and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given those who obey him."²⁸³ This links in beautifully with what Christ had said: "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father- the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father – he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning."²⁸⁴

The power granted to the apostles for the confirmation of their testimony was deposited in them as heavenly treasure in an earthen vessel, and they had the power of imparting it to others. This is evident if we consider Philip, the evangelist, who went down to Samaria, and so proclaimed the truth (which was accompanied by miraculous signs that he performed by the Holy Spirit).²⁸⁵ Many believed and were baptized; but these did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at the time. They were, however, to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit shortly afterwards. The record continues:

"When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon (the sorcerer) saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone I lay my hands on may receive the Holy Spirit."²⁸⁶

This power of bestowing the Spirit was exercised where the truth was received. In almost every case recorded, the reception of the Spirit followed the reception of the truth. It was, indeed, a matter of promise that this should be so. On the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call."²⁸⁷ This promise was realised in the experience of the churches founded in the days of the apostles. The Spirit distributed to believers its supernatural powers in different forms and to differing extents. Paul says: "There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different

²⁸¹ Mark 16:20

²⁸² Hebrews 2:3-4

²⁸³ Acts 5:(30-31) 32

²⁸⁴ John 15:26-27

²⁸⁵ Acts 8: 4-8

²⁸⁶ Acts 8: 14-19

²⁸⁷ Acts 2: 38-39

kinds of tongues, and still to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one just as he determines.”²⁸⁸

The object of this general outpouring of spiritual power in the first century is explained by Paul:

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.”²⁸⁹

This is perfectly understandable: if the early churches, consisting of men and women who were recent converts from heathenism and without the authoritative standard of the completed Scripture which now exists, had been left to the mere power of apostolic tradition as they had received it, they could not have held together. The winds of doctrine, blowing about through the activity of “people of corrupt mind”²⁹⁰, would have broken them from their moorings, and they would have been tossed to and fro in the billows of uncertain and conflicting report and opinion, and finally stranded in hopeless shipwreck. This catastrophe was prevented by the gifts of the spirit. Properly qualified men were made the repositories of these gifts, and empowered to “encourage and rebuke with all authority.”²⁹¹

They “directed the affairs of the church”²⁹² over which they were placed, feeding the flock of God over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers. Speaking of them, Peter records, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing ... not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”²⁹³

The work of the apostles in the first century established the church. Two millennia later things are very different. The church having been established, there appears to be no manifestation of the Spirit in these days to give credence to the work of preaching.²⁹⁴ The Spirit today works through the written word, the Bible. The message of the Bible takes hold of individuals and creates within them new ideas and new affections which lead to the development of the “new person” in Christ.

The word of God, faithfully received by good and honest hearts, will make those who are attentive to it “spiritually minded” - and the mind which is “governed by the Spirit is life and peace.”²⁹⁵

²⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 12: 6-11

²⁸⁹ Ephesians 4: 11-14

²⁹⁰ 1 Timothy 6:5

²⁹¹ Titus 2:15

²⁹² 1 Timothy 5:17

²⁹³ 1 Peter 5:2-3

²⁹⁴ This does not deny the fact that God and Jesus, in response to prayer, may effect a response through the Spirit. [Ed]

²⁹⁵ Romans 8:6

Chapter 6 [C] Angels

Jesus says, "No one has ever seen God"²⁹⁶ but in Genesis, Jacob says, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."²⁹⁷ There are other places in scripture in which God is said to have appeared, and to have been seen and talked to, which seemingly contradicts the statement of Jesus, and requires explanation.

The explanation introduces the subject of "angels". The difficulty has been created by the improper translation of terms employed in connection with God's angelic manifestations. God's manifestations have chiefly been through the medium of angels. This will be evident to the ordinary New Testament reader from Paul's description of the law given to Moses as "the message spoken through angels"²⁹⁸ and Stephen's remark that God, who spoke to Moses in Sinai, was "the angel who spoke to him".²⁹⁹ This feature will be found to recur throughout Scripture.

The names by which these angelic beings are designated are appropriate to them as the subordinate agents of the Deity. But this fact is concealed in the English version of the Scriptures by the translation of all divine names uniformly by the terms "Lord" and "God." Dr. John Thomas, in his book *Phanerosis*³⁰⁰ says,

"The names of God which occur in the Bible are not arbitrary sounds; and one of the chief imperfections of the English authorised translation, or rather version, is the slovenly manner in which all the names by which God has been pleased to make Himself known to His people, have been rendered after as in the Septuagint, by the two words, 'Lord' and 'God'. These words do not convey the ideas of the spirit in its use of terms. 'Lord' is of Saxon origin, and signifies monarch, ruler, governor, something supreme or distinguished..."

"It fails to represent the meaning of Ail, Eloah, Elohim, Shaddai, and Yahweh; for all of which it is often, or rather, most frequently, and almost generally used. The word Adon [another of the names of God employed in the original] is properly enough rendered by 'Lord', but not the other words, for which it should never be used. The common use of God in the English language is as little justifiable as that of the word Lord. God, in Saxon, signifies 'good', a meaning which cannot possibly be extracted from any of the names recited above; God is indeed good, but that word is not a translation of any of the words before us, and when used in their stead, leaves the mind in the dark concerning the things which they were intended to convey."

He then goes on to give a definition of each of the various words referred to:

- **Ail**, signifying strength, might, or power
- **Eloah**, having the same meaning
- **Yahweh**, literally "He who will be"

are all names appropriated to *the uncreated Deity*; but *Shaddai* and *Elohim* are plural names otherwise applied:

- **Shaddai** signifies mighty or powerful ones, from Shaddad, to be strong or powerful

²⁹⁶ John 1:18

²⁹⁷ Genesis 32:30

²⁹⁸ Hebrews 2:2

²⁹⁹ Acts 7:38

³⁰⁰ Thomas, J., *Phanerosis* 1869. (The text has been updated slightly but the meaning preserved.)

- **Elohim** is the plural of Eloah, and means gods or powerful ones

Now these plural names are very frequently employed in the record of God's transactions with men; and it will be found they are descriptive of the angels.

The writer in Hebrews quotes a statement from the Psalms in which the word "Elohim" occurs. In the Psalm it is translated "gods"- "Worship him, all you gods"³⁰¹; in Hebrews, it is translated as "God's angels" – "Let all God's angels worship him."³⁰² The writer clearly shows that *Elohim* represented angels.

Another example is to be found in the account of the unconsumed burning bush³⁰³, which God used as a means of communicating with Moses. It is stated that Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at *God*³⁰⁴, who announced Himself from the bush as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob"; yet earlier in the chapter we read that "*the angel of the Lord*"³⁰⁵ appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush; so God was represented by the angel that came in His name.

Again, in the instance already cited, Jacob says that he had "seen God face to face"; while from Hosea we find that it was not the *Most High God* that Jacob saw, but one of the Elohim, or angels. The prophet Hosea, referring to the incident, says, "He (Jacob) struggled with the angel and overcame him."³⁰⁶

These instances prove that "Lord" and "God," as employed in the English version, do not always refer to Yahweh, but sometimes, in fact almost generally, to those glorious beings who act and speak in His name and with His authority. Keeping this in view, many seeming difficulties entirely disappear.

The angels are referred to by David in these words: "Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word."³⁰⁷ Who are these angels? The nature of angels is frequently misrepresented by those who have 'traditional' images in their minds. They are regarded sometimes as baby cherubs with wings or as females with wings. Their nature is frequently characterised by the same mysticism and misconception which we have seen to pertain to other doctrines.

The angels of the Bible are as real as ourselves, though of a much more exalted order of being and are distinguished by all the maturity and dignity which belong to perfect intelligence. Three of them appeared to Abraham:³⁰⁸

"Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them. He said, "If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way" ... "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." ... He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree."³⁰⁹

³⁰¹ Psalm 97:7

³⁰² Hebrews 1:6

³⁰³ Exodus 3

³⁰⁴ Exodus 3:6

³⁰⁵ Exodus 3:2

³⁰⁶ Hosea 12:4

³⁰⁷ Psalm 103:20

³⁰⁸ Genesis 18:1-5

³⁰⁹ Genesis 18:2-8

Abraham thought they were ordinary people on a journey and desired to extend his hospitality towards them. The New Testament writer, referring to the circumstances says: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it."³¹⁰

The Genesis record continues with another account involving angels:

"The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate."³¹¹

Lot, also, like Abraham, assumed his angelic visitors were ordinary men, and was among the number of those who showed "hospitality to angels without knowing it." He was only brought to a knowledge of their true character when they said :

"Do you have anyone else here? ... Get them out of here because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that He has sent us to destroy it."³¹²

Manoah, the father of Samson, fell into a similar mistake.³¹³ He pressed an angel-visitor to accept hospitality; and the text continues, "Manoah did not realise that it was the angel of the LORD."

These narratives prove that the angels of God appear as we do and are not 'simply' ethereal beings. Eating and having their feet washed takes them out of such category. They are as real and substantial as mortal humans, but of a higher nature. Like the glorified righteous of the future age, they are incorruptible in substance, and, therefore, immortal, and luminous in appearance when that quality is not restrained. We read in the account of Christ's resurrection that "the angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat upon it. *His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow*"³¹⁴; and Cornelius, when describing the vision of an angel which he had seen, says, "Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me."³¹⁵

The angels, in form and feature, resemble human beings. They eat and drink, and walk and talk, and carry themselves in general like ourselves; but unlike us, they are incorruptible, deathless, perfect, and strong in the might with which God has given to them to carry out the things He wants them to do. They have power to travel through space; but it does not require wings to do this (just as the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven without the help of wings). It is only necessary to possess power to counteract the influence of physical gravitation, and the ability to command it at will. This power resides in the angels and in the Lord Jesus Christ, and seems generally to be the characteristic of spirit-bodies. In the angels we see an exemplification of what the saints will be after the resurrection. Jesus says:

³¹⁰ Hebrews 13:2

³¹¹ Genesis 19:1-3

³¹² Genesis 19:12-13

³¹³ Judges 13:15-16

³¹⁴ Matthew 28:2-3

³¹⁵ Acts 10:30

"But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection of the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection."³¹⁶

At present, the righteous are "a *little lower than the angels*"³¹⁷ then, they will be on the same level. This confirms Bible teaching regarding the state of the righteous after they have attained to immortality. It is a state in which they will be real, substantial, human-like in form, of flesh and bone, yet incorruptible, glorious, powerful, never-dying, perfect in happiness, unwearied as they fulfil the wishes of the Deity in their exalted condition.

Chapter 6 [D] The Nature of Christ

If mainstream Christian teaching has failed to understand Biblical teaching about the Father and the Holy Spirit, it is to be expected that it misrepresents the teaching of Scripture with respect to the Lord Jesus Christ – who is the manifestation of the Father by the Spirit.

Mainstream teaching suggests that Christ is the incarnation of one of three distinct essences, or personalities, which are supposed to constitute the God-head; and that clothed in human form, he was God in the absolute sense of being the Creator.

These teachings are based on the concept of God as a trinity. There are others, however, who teach that Christ was a mere man, the son of Mary and Joseph in the natural way, but a man who was distinguished above his fellows by a pre-eminent endowment of the "virtues" of human nature, which fitted him to be an example to mankind. This (the Unitarian) view regards him as a teacher sent from God, and is in some sense the Son of God; but denies the essential divinity of his nature. Both these views will be found equally removed from the truth. The truth lies between them.

The testimonies which teach the indivisible unity of the Deity, as the One Father, from whom all things have proceeded, and who is supreme above all, even above Christ³¹⁸, are inconsistent with the Trinitarian representation of God. The supremacy and unity of the Father would not be possible if there were three co-equal personalities in His One personality - a teaching which presents us with a contradiction in terms as well as in sense. Jesus emphasises the distinction between himself and the Father, in the following statements:

- "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."³¹⁹
- "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me."³²⁰
- "I am the one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father who sent me."³²¹
- "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."³²²

³¹⁶ Luke 20:35-36

³¹⁷ Hebrews 2:7

³¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:3

³¹⁹ John 5:30

³²⁰ John 7:16

³²¹ John 8:18

³²² John 17:3

The marked distinction recognised by, and confirmed in, these statements is incompatible with the teaching that regards the Son as an essential constituent of the one “triune” God. There are “the Father,” “the Son,” and “the Holy Spirit.” The question is, what is the relationship between the three, as taught in the Scriptures?

Clearly, they are not three co-equal powers in one, but powers of which one is the head and source of the others. The Father is eternal and un-derived; the Son is the manifestation of the Father in a man begotten by the Spirit; the Holy Spirit is the focalisation of the Father's power, by means of His “free spirit,” which fills heaven and earth. There are, therefore, three entities to consider, and a certain unity exists between them, but only in so far as both Son and Spirit are manifestations of the one Father. The Trinitarian conception of the subject is excluded.

The Unitarian view³²³ is also excluded. Joseph was not the father of Jesus. He himself repudiated his paternity, and was about to put away Mary, his betrothed, when an angel came to him with this message:

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit”³²⁴

This had been previously intimated to Mary by the angel Gabriel, as recorded:

“The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”³²⁵

The Unitarian evades these texts by denying the authenticity of the first two chapters of Matthew and Luke. The reasons for this denial are flimsy and totally inadequate. The evidence to support the genuineness of the chapters in question is both decisive and irresistible. There is the united evidence of all the accessible ancient manuscripts and versions, supported by the recognition of the very earliest Christian writers, confirmed by the internal character of the chapters and the necessity for the event which they narrate, to explain the character and mission of Jesus of Nazareth. Against this, there is the merely negative fact that the disputed chapters are absent from the Ebionite gospel, which at the time of its production was pronounced a corruption; and from the Evangelium of Marcion, a gospel which he wrote to suit his own rather heathen notions, and from which he recklessly omitted, not only the disputed chapters, but everything that interfered with his own ideas.³²⁶

The divine fatherhood of Jesus would remain an unassailable truth, even if the records of Matthew and Luke had no existence. These records are, however, invaluable. They are the circumstantial illustrations of a truth which we could not have understood so clearly and satisfactorily without them. They explain the appearance and character of Christ, and enable us to understand the divine method, from its incipiency onwards, in the most wondrous work of God among men.

That Christ was an example in the sense of being “holy, blameless, pure”³²⁷ is beyond doubt; but it is also true that he was a great deal more. The unique nature of his mission is so plainly stated as to leave no room for the Unitarian teaching of moral example. “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the

³²³ The number of adherents to this faith is not known but worldwide may be as many as 600,000 (2012) [Ed]

³²⁴ Matthew 1:20

³²⁵ Luke 1:35

³²⁶ Robert Roberts details reasons for not accepting the Unitarian view in greater detail in the original lectures upon which this edition is based but, given that so few accept this view, the detail has been omitted from this edition. [Ed]

³²⁷ Hebrews 7:26

world!"³²⁸ said John the Baptist, on seeing Jesus. How did he take it away? The answer is in the words of the writer to the Hebrews: He "was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many."³²⁹ Jesus himself had said, "I lay down my life for the sheep."³³⁰ Paul also says to Timothy: "Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immorality to light through the gospel."³³¹ This is stated by Christ himself in this form, "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."³³² Further, Peter says, "There is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."³³³ Salvation is directly connected with the first appearing of Christ, and with what he accomplished then; not on the principle of the moral stimulus supplied to mankind, but through his death and resurrection.

Leaving both Trinitarianism and Unitarianism, we may find the truth in the Scriptures for ourselves. Simply calling Jesus, "Son," as applied to Christ, is sufficient to prove that his existence is derived, and not eternal. The phrase, "Son of God," implies that the one God, the eternal Father, preceded the Son, and that the Son had his origin in or "from" the Father to whom he must therefore be subordinate in a sense inconsistent with Trinitarian representation. "You are my son; today I have become your father."³³⁴ is the language of Scripture, clearly pointing to a commencement at a definite point in time.

This view is confirmed by the statement of Christ: "For as the Father has life in himself, so he granted the Son also to have life in himself."³³⁵ "As the Father hath life in himself, so *hath he given to* the Son to have life in himself" (John v, 26).

Christ, therefore, though now possessed of inherent life, had been invested with it; as such it is not 'un-derived.' It is only the Great Uncreate, the Father, who can say, "I am the LORD, and there is no other"³³⁶ Yet, though Christ's is not an un-derived existence, his existence is more directly divine than the human. A man is an embodiment of his father's mortal life-energy. Jesus was not born of the will of the flesh, but of God. He was begotten of Mary through the power of the spirit. This was the origin of his title, "the Son of God." Recall the angel's words to Mary: "So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."³³⁷

However, although he is Son of God, he was flesh and blood. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity ... For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way."³³⁸ "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us."³³⁹ As he was in character sinless, this could only apply to his bodily constitution, which, through Mary, was the sin-nature of Adam. As Paul says elsewhere that God sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh"³⁴⁰ "God sent his Son, born of a woman"³⁴¹, "who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David."³⁴² Jesus was " a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did

³²⁸ John 1:29

³²⁹ Hebrews 9:26

³³⁰ John 10:15

³³¹ 2 Timothy 1:10

³³² John 3:17

³³³ Acts 4:12

³³⁴ Psalm 2:7; Hebrews 1:5

³³⁵ John 5:26

³³⁶ Isaiah 45:5

³³⁷ Luke 1:35

³³⁸ Hebrews 2:14-17

³³⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:21

³⁴⁰ Romans 8:3

³⁴¹ Galatians 4:4

³⁴² Romans 1:3

among you through him (after his thirty years of preparation) as you yourselves know.”³⁴³ This is Peter’s description of him. Paul speaks of him as “the man Christ Jesus.”³⁴⁴ He was tried and disciplined as Adam was, but succeeded where Adam failed. “Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.”³⁴⁵ This precludes the idea of his being “very God.” He was the Son of God, the manifestation of God by spirit-power, but not God himself. “The life appeared,” says John, “we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.”³⁴⁶

Again, in his gospel narrative he says: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”³⁴⁷ It is evident that Christ was a divine manifestation - an embodiment of Deity in flesh -Emmanuel, God with us. “God gives the Spirit without measure,”³⁴⁸ says the same apostle. The spirit descended upon him in bodily shape at his baptism in the Jordan, and took possession of him. This was the anointing which constituted him *Christ* (or the anointed), and which gave him the superhuman powers of which he showed himself possessed.

This is clear from the words of Peter, in his address to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”³⁴⁹

This statement alone is sufficient to disprove the mainstream view of Christ’s essential Godhead. If he were “very God” in his character as Son, why was it necessary he should be “anointed” with spirit and power? He did no miracles before his anointing. He had no power of himself. This is his own declaration: “By myself I can do nothing”.³⁵⁰ “Rather, it is the Father living in me, who is doing His work.”³⁵¹ On Calvary, left to the utter helplessness of his own humanity, he felt the anguish of the hour and cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”³⁵² Before his anointing, he was simply the “body prepared”³⁵³ for the divine manifestation that was to take place through him. The preparation of this body commenced with the Spirit’s action on Mary, and concluded when Jesus, being thirty years of age, stood approved in the perfection of a sinless and mature character. After the Spirit’s descent upon him, he was the full manifestation of God in the flesh. The Father, by the Spirit, lived in Christ among men. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them,”³⁵⁴ says Paul.

When raised from the dead and glorified, he was exalted and could say, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”³⁵⁵ His human nature was swallowed up in the divine; the flesh changed to spirit. Therefore, as he now exists, “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form”³⁵⁶ He is now the tangible life-spirit as it exists in the Deity. But this change from what he was “during the days of (his)

³⁴³ Acts 2:22

³⁴⁴ 1 Timothy 2:5

³⁴⁵ Hebrews 5:8

³⁴⁶ 1 John 1:2

³⁴⁷ John 1:14

³⁴⁸ John 3:34

³⁴⁹ Acts 10:38

³⁵⁰ John 5:30

³⁵¹ John 14:10

³⁵² Matthew 27:46

³⁵³ Hebrews 10:5

³⁵⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:19

³⁵⁵ Matthew 28:18

³⁵⁶ Colossians 2:9

life on earth"³⁵⁷ has not obliterated any of his human memory. This is evident from Paul's words in reference to his priestly function: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses"³⁵⁸ This can only be on the basis that Jesus retains a memory of the infirmity with which he himself was encompassed in the day of his flesh upon earth.

When Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,"³⁵⁹ he did not contradict the statement that "No one has ever seen God"³⁶⁰ but simply expressed the truth contained in the following words of Paul: "The Son is the image of the invisible God"³⁶¹ - "the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of His being."³⁶² Those who looked upon the anointed Jesus, saw a representation of the Deity.

Jesus declares things of himself which are claimed to sanction the idea that he existed as a person before his birth to Mary. This includes phrases such as "For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world"³⁶³ and "I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me."³⁶⁴ Other examples include: "I came from the Father and entered the world"³⁶⁵ and "I have authority to lay it (my life) down and authority to take it up again."³⁶⁶ Further examples include: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began"³⁶⁷ and "you (the Father) loved me before the foundation of the world."³⁶⁸

It is evident, however, that we must understand these expressions in the light of the *undoubted* facts of Christ's life and mission. These literal facts are that he was begotten of the Holy Spirit, and born a baby at Bethlehem,³⁶⁹ grew up to be a man, increasing in wisdom with years, stature, and experience³⁷⁰, remained the private and undistinguished putative son of Joseph the carpenter, until the power of the Spirit was placed upon him at his baptism³⁷¹, after which he did the works and spoke the words recorded of him, that he was crucified in weakness³⁷², was separated from the Father when suspended on the cross, and that he was afterwards raised from the dead by the Father.³⁷³

With these facts in view, we are able to attach the proper sense to statements which, in a naked and detached form, would appear to teach a personal pre-existence. For instance, when Jesus said to the Pharisees that he came down from heaven, he could not mean that the person standing in front of them had descended bodily from the clouds, as his words, literally understood, would have taught, and as the Pharisees appeared to have understood; he meaning was that his origin was from heaven. The "Holy Spirit" that came upon Mary - the "Power of the Highest" that overshadowed her, came down from heaven; consequently, the resultant man could, without extravagance, say he came down from heaven. The sense was literal as applied to *the Power of the Highest* that produced "the man Christ Jesus"; both at the stage

³⁵⁷ Hebrews 5:7

³⁵⁸ Hebrews 4:15

³⁵⁹ John 14:9

³⁶⁰ John 1:18

³⁶¹ Colossians 1:15

³⁶² Hebrews 1:3

³⁶³ John 6:33

³⁶⁴ John 8:42

³⁶⁵ John 16:28

³⁶⁶ John 10:18

³⁶⁷ John 17:5

³⁶⁸ John 17:24

³⁶⁹ Luke 1:33; 2:5-7

³⁷⁰ Luke 2:52

³⁷¹ Luke 3:21-23

³⁷² 2 Corinthians 13:4

³⁷³ Acts 2:24,32; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30,37 and so on

of his conception and the stage of his anointing on the banks of the Jordan, when the Spirit descended in bodily form and rested on him. The statements about his pre-existence should not literally be applied to the man Christ Jesus.

When he said he came from God, it was meant in this sense. He could not mean that as a person he had come from the very presence of the Almighty, but that the Father had sent him as disclosed in the record of his birth and baptism. John the Baptist is described as “a man sent from God,”³⁷⁴ without meaning that John existed before he was born and sent.

When Jesus said he had authority to take up his life after it should be laid down, he expressed the confidence that God would raise him. It was not ‘power’ as older translations say, in the dynamic sense - but authority. He immediately adds, “This command I received from my Father”³⁷⁵ - that is, the taking up of his life would result from the Father’s power and authority, exercised in accordance with the pledge given by the Father. Literally, Jesus did not take up his life; the Father raised him³⁷⁶ but because it was the Father’s purpose, and because the Father spoke through Jesus.³⁷⁷ Jesus could appropriately say that he had authority to raise himself up. An example of this style of language, in which a person has a relationship to the divine purpose, and is considered as under his control and referable to his power, occurs at the start of the prophecy of Jeremiah:

“See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”³⁷⁸

Literally, the prophet did none of these things, yet the things he predicted came to pass. This is taken as sufficient basis for the highly-wrought language quoted above, which seems to imply that the results of the predictions made by Jeremiah would be worked out by him personally. In fact, Jeremiah was the vehicle by which the spirit prophesied, and that same spirit would be the power by which the prophecy was brought to its fulfilment.

Christ’s statement that he had glory with the Father before the world began, must be understood in the same way - in harmony with the elementary facts of the testimony. The glorification of Jesus was a purpose of the Father from the beginning: *and, in this sense, he had glory with the Father before the world began.* This may appear a strained explanation; but giving attention to scriptural expressions will justify *it*, in view of the testified facts of the case.

Returning to the prophecy of Jeremiah we read:

“The word of the LORD came to be, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.””³⁷⁹

Jeremiah did not exist before his conception. Yet these words would seem to teach that he did. Similarly language of this genre is used of Christ but the words do not give credence to the concept of Christ’s pre-existence. Jeremiah existed in prospect; his person was as clearly present to the divine mind as if he had

³⁷⁴ John 1:6

³⁷⁵ John 10:18

³⁷⁶ See reference 371

³⁷⁷ John 14:10

³⁷⁸ Jeremiah 1:10

³⁷⁹ Jeremiah 1:4-5

stood before Him in actual fact. This is the explanation of words, which, rigidly construed, would imply Jeremiah's pre-existence.

Look again at the words spoken of Cyrus, the Persian ruler, more than a hundred years before he was born:

"I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour, though you do not acknowledge me"³⁸⁰

The same remark applies here: Cyrus was present to the divine contemplation as really as if he existed. Hence a style of language is used which would seem to assume his existence before he was born.

In the same way, when God intends to raise somebody from the dead, the scripture record assumes his continued existence and ignores his death. Therefore, Jesus deduces the concept of resurrection from the fact that God presented himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, at a time when these men were dead. The Sadducees saw the force of the argument, and were silenced.³⁸¹ The principle of the argument is expressed in the words of Paul: "God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not."³⁸²

The words spoken of Jesus follow this pattern. When he said in prayer to the Father, "because you loved me before the creation of the world"³⁸³ he did not teach that he existed from "before the creation of the world," but that the Father regarded him with love from the beginning, and that, therefore, to the Father's mind, he was present. In the words of Peter, "He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."³⁸⁴

The same style of language is used with reference to Christ's people: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world."³⁸⁵ Literally, this would prove the existence of believers before the world began, for properly, a thing must exist to be the object of choice; actually, it only proves divine foresight. The glory which Jesus *had* before the world began, was the glory which God intended for him from the beginning. He did not have the glory referred to before the world began in a literal sense. What was the nature of that glory - the glory Jesus received in answer to this prayer? He - the bodily Jesus - the body prepared - that which developed from the substance of Mary and made the subject of the anointing - was made incorruptible in substance, and the spirit outpoured upon that substance so abundantly, that it made him more luminous than the sun³⁸⁶ and gave him power to bestow the spirit, and control providence in heaven and earth. Did Jesus already have *this* glory before he was born? Was he a body anointed with the spirit before he was the body prepared? Was he a real resurrected Jesus before Jesus of Nazareth was born in Bethlehem? No, this was the glory he had with the Father before the world began. It was a glory he had in the Father's purpose, but in no other sense.

In the same way we understand the words, "Before Abraham was born, I am!"³⁸⁷ This was Christ's answer to the incredulity stirred up by his statement, rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.³⁸⁸ The Jews thought he meant to insinuate that he was contemporary with Abraham, whereas he

³⁸⁰ Isaiah 45:4

³⁸¹ Matthew 22:31-34

³⁸² Romans 4:17

³⁸³ John 17:24

³⁸⁴ 1 Peter 1:20

³⁸⁵ Ephesians 1:4

³⁸⁶ Acts 26:13

³⁸⁷ John 8:58

³⁸⁸ John 8:56

only intended to express the fact stated by the New Testament writer in the following words: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them from a distance and welcomed them."³⁸⁹ It was this seeing of the promise of Christ "from a distance" that made Abraham rejoice. It was the day presented in the promises that he saw, but, as they almost always did, the Jews mistook Jesus, and, as he was prone to do, he deepened their bewilderment by using another form of speech, which still more obscured his meaning, on the principle indicated in Matthew 13:11-15: a form of speech which in one phrase expressed two aspects of the truth concerning himself, namely, that he was intended before Abraham existed, and that the Father, of whom he was then the manifestation, existed before all.

Jesus said, "I and the Father are one."³⁹⁰ He could not mean, in view of the complete teaching of the scriptures, what Trinitarians understand him to mean, that he and the Father were identically the same person ("the same in substance, equal in power and glory "), but that they were one in spirit-connection and design of operations. This is apparent from his prayer for his disciples, "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."³⁹¹ The unity is not about being one as a person, but it is a oneness of nature and state of mind. This is the unity that exists between the Father and the Son, and the unity that will be ultimately established between the Father and His whole family, of whom Christ is the elder brother. When this unity is established, Christ will take a more subordinate position than he now occupies, in relation to the race of Adam. Paul says, "When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."³⁹²

6 [E] The Crucifixion

This was Christ's great act of obedience; but why was such an act of obedience necessary? Nothing has more staggered thoughtful minds than this question; and yet nothing is simpler when the Scriptural elements of the case are all placed together. It is a theological habit to represent the death of Christ as an act on his part to appease the wrath of the Father towards sinners. The Scriptures, on the contrary, always speak of it as an expression of God's *love* towards fallen humanity. We read:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."³⁹³

Consider these scriptures:

- "This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him...And we have seen and testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world"³⁹⁴
- "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."³⁹⁵
- "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them."³⁹⁶

³⁸⁹ Hebrews 11:13

³⁹⁰ John 10:30

³⁹¹ John 17:21

³⁹² 1 Corinthians 15:28

³⁹³ John 3:16

³⁹⁴ 1 John 4:9,14

³⁹⁵ Romans 5:8

³⁹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:19

But the question arises: How was God's love manifested *in the death of Christ*? Could not divine love have been manifested without so tragic an event? Evidently not; for on the very eve of crucifixion, Christ prayed to the Father in these agonising terms – “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”³⁹⁷ The cup did not pass; therefore, it was not possible. He drank it deeply, pouring out his soul unto death. Why was the death of Christ indispensable? What did it accomplish? A consideration of the scriptures will guide us to an answer which, having already discarded the teaching of natural immortality, we are better prepared to understand.

First let us consider the following New Testament allusions to the purpose of the crucifixion:

- “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”³⁹⁸
- “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”³⁹⁹
- “He has appeared once for all ...to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.”⁴⁰⁰
- “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”⁴⁰¹
- “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all”⁴⁰²
- “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”⁴⁰³
- “In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”⁴⁰⁴
- “By making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”⁴⁰⁵
- “But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body.”⁴⁰⁶
- “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.”⁴⁰⁷
- “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁴⁰⁸
- “The man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.”⁴⁰⁹
- “Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness.”⁴¹⁰
- “the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.”⁴¹¹
- “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”⁴¹²
- “You were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.”⁴¹³

These statements confirm a connection between the death of Christ and the restoration of sinful man to divine favour and life. There may not, at first, appear to be a logical connection between the two things; but a consideration of all the facts of the case will reveal the deepest philosophy in the whole arrangement

³⁹⁷ Matthew 26:39

³⁹⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:3

³⁹⁹ Isaiah 53:5

⁴⁰⁰ Hebrews 9:26

⁴⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 5:7

⁴⁰² Romans 8:32

⁴⁰³ Romans 5:8

⁴⁰⁴ Colossians 1:14

⁴⁰⁵ Colossians 1:20

⁴⁰⁶ Colossians 1:22

⁴⁰⁷ 1 Peter 2:24

⁴⁰⁸ Mark 10:45

⁴⁰⁹ 1 Timothy 2:5-6

⁴¹⁰ Titus 2:13-14

⁴¹¹ Galatians 1:3-4

⁴¹² Matthew 26:28

⁴¹³ Revelation 5:9

- using the term philosophy in its true sense, in the conviction that absolute wisdom characterises everything with which the mind of Deity has to do - the principles involved in the death of Christ are simple and easily understood. Unfortunately mainstream Christian thought has focused on the historical incident at the expense of the principles that are enshrined in it. It is of the first importance to get rid of this obscurity. It is not the mere fact of Christ's crucifixion on the cross by the Romans,⁷ that constitutes the saving and enlightening truth of the matter; it is *the principles involved in the tragedy* that constitute the truth which all believers should understand.

These principles have been divinely revealed. The first is, that "the wages of sin is death."⁴¹⁴ Paul says, "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin."⁴¹⁵ The meaning of this text is clear. Adam disobeyed a command given to him, and, *in consequence of disobedience*, was condemned to return to the ground from where he had been taken. "Sin" is simply disobedience. In fact, Paul makes this clear in the chapter in which he describes Adam's act as "sin." He says, "For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners."⁴¹⁶ If it is used in any secondary sense (as when Paul speaks of "sin that lives in me"), that secondary sense is covered by, or included in, the major sense of disobedience. Sin being disobedience or transgression agrees also with John's definition: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact sin is lawlessness."⁴¹⁷

Death is not a "state of the soul," or "peril of eternal damnation in the flames of hell"; both of which are unknown to Scripture, either in word or idea, being pagan corruptions of the true Bible teaching. The death resulting from Adam's transgression is a dissolution of being in the grave. Therefore, Paul puts resurrection by Christ in antithesis to death by Adam: "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man."⁴¹⁸ This being the nature of death, we are enabled to understand the law which makes it the result of sin. Sin is the transgression of, or disobedience to, the divine law. The perpetrator of it is no longer within with the law of well-being and consequently he cannot have joy in himself, he cannot give happiness to others, and he cannot give pleasure to his Creator. Misery is the result of such a state; and it is one of the compassionate decrees of God that perpetual existence is impossible under such circumstances - that death (extinction of being) will follow as a result of sin and wipe its evil results from the face of the earth. He will not allow evil to become permanent.

This is the first principle that must be appreciated before the crucifixion can be understood. Adam, the father of the race, disobeying in face of the declared penalty of death, brought upon himself the threatened sentence, and his posterity are involved in the same condemnation, for the simple reason that they are simply propagations of his own being in all its qualities and relationships, and also because they are themselves, sinners by actual transgression, and, therefore, on their own account, subject to death.

The crux of our understanding revolves around the answer to this question: How is condemned human nature to be made free from the law of sin and death, in harmony with the righteousness that has brought that law into force? If humanity were left to itself, it would inevitably perish; because it is not only incapable of a perfect righteousness, but it cannot set aside the condemnation in which it already exists. God's plan in Christ has given us a scheme by which human salvation is achieved without the violation of any of His laws, which are necessary to maintain His supremacy in the universe. Christ meets every need. The first necessity was that the law, both Edenic and Mosaic, should be upheld. The law required the death of the transgressing nature, that is, human nature. Christ had this nature, and he died:

⁴¹⁴ Romans 6:23

⁴¹⁵ Romans 5:12

⁴¹⁶ Romans 5:19

⁴¹⁷ 1 John 3:4

⁴¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:21

- “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death.”⁴¹⁹
- “God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.”⁴²⁰

But it was also necessary that such a sufferer should be sinless, because sin would have prevented resurrection to immortal life. This necessity for sinlessness in “the Lamb of God” was constantly prefigured under the law by the perfection of the animals offered in sacrifice. Christ as the great antitype fulfilled this condition: “Such a high priest (Jesus) truly meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners.”⁴²¹ He could triumphantly ask his persecutors, “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?”⁴²² If Christ had been merely a son of Adam, he would have been a sinner, and, therefore, unfit for sacrificial purposes. On the other hand, if he had been clothed with angelic or immaculate nature, he would have been equally disqualified, inasmuch as it was necessary that the sinful nature should suffer in him. The combination of condemned human nature with personal sinlessness was made possible through the divine power that conceived a son from Mary's substance. A “Lamb of God,” was thus produced, pure from his paternity, and yet inheriting the human sin-nature of his mother.

But “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins,”⁴²³ for the reasons outlined. The law would not allow any substitute, but required that a full and fitting sacrifice for sin be made. Christ, then, “being found in appearance as a man,”⁴²⁴ and yet being sinless, was a perfect sacrifice; because as representative of human nature he could meet all the claims of God's law upon that nature, and yet triumph over its operation by resurrection to immortal life. The Lamb being provided, the sacrifice followed. The Messiah was “cut off.”⁴²⁵ “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; ... the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all”⁴²⁶

God dealt with him representatively. There is a great difference between a *representative* and a *substitute*. A representative is not disconnected from those represented. On the contrary, those represented go through with him all that he goes through. But in the case of a substitute, it is completely different. He does his part *instead of* those for whom he is the substitute, and these are dissociated from the transgression.

Christ suffering as the representative of his people, is one with them, and they are one with him. What he went through, they went through. Therefore, Paul says believers were crucified with Christ, and baptised into his death. In this death, God intended “to demonstrate his righteousness,” which God required as the basis of the work of reconciliation and forgiveness.⁴²⁷

After Christ died, God raised him from the dead to a glorious existence, to equality with Himself. This was the essential point of God's plan as Paul records: “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ... But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead.”⁴²⁸ Having been raised, Peter explains the significance in the following words: “Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other

⁴¹⁹ Hebrews 2:14

⁴²⁰ Romans 8:3

⁴²¹ Hebrews 7:26

⁴²² John 8:46

⁴²³ Hebrews 10:4

⁴²⁴ Philippians 2:8

⁴²⁵ Isaiah 53:8

⁴²⁶ Isaiah 53:5,6

⁴²⁷ Romans 3:24-46

⁴²⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:17,20

name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”⁴²⁹ If Christ had been a personal transgressor, the law of sin would have kept him in the grave, and the plan of salvation would have miscarried at its vital point. The way of salvation could not have been opened through him; a dead Saviour would have been no ark of refuge - no life-giver to the mortal descendants of Adam.

But Christ, after suffering the natural penalty of disobedience in human nature, having been raised from the dead to immortality, is Saviour of those who place their trust in him. He is able to give life in his own right. “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”⁴³⁰ Life is entrusted to him and it is for us to accept on the basis that we ally ourselves with him. In fact we become part of him and enter into his spiritual body. Paul says of those who are ‘in Christ’ that they are “members of his body”⁴³¹ and, in total they make up the ‘Bride of Christ’, “his body, the church.”⁴³²

Divine wisdom, which is foolishness as far as most of humanity is concerned, has provided a means whereby we get the benefit of the result achieved by Christ. Baptism in water is the ceremony by which believing men and women are united to Christ, and by which they become heirs of the everlasting life which he possesses in his own right. This is referred to in more detail in a later chapter.

Meanwhile, we quote Paul's words: “For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”⁴³³ Entering into Christ, we are made *one* with him, and become heirs to the privileges of the position which he himself has established. This can be seen in the analogy of a woman who, at her engagement, obtains a prospective title to that which belongs to the man to whom she is engaged. *In the first Adam*, we inherit death without the possibility of retrieving our misfortune, as long as we remain connected with him. *In the last Adam* (who, however, it must always be borne in mind, ascended to the last Adam position from the first Adam state), we obtain a title to eternal life. Hence the words of the apostle Paul: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”⁴³⁴ that is, the “all” of whom he is speaking, namely, believers of the truth, as may be seen by the context and only those who are found worthy in the Day of Judgement.

By nature we are in Adam. By the gospel and baptism we become “in Christ.” This is God's way; and we cannot be saved unless we come to Him in the way he has appointed.

Natural virtue will be utterly valueless, because, *in itself*, it is related only to the present, and establishes no right in respect of future existence. Those who trust to it, are building their house upon a foundation of sand. “There is no other name given under heaven to mankind by which we must be saved.”⁴³⁵ If we refuse to put on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thus reject him “who has become for us wisdom from God – that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption”⁴³⁶, there remains nothing for us but the utter worthlessness of our own mortality, which without redemption will perish for ever under the just

⁴²⁹ Acts 4:12

⁴³⁰ 1 John 5:11-12

⁴³¹ Ephesians 5:30

⁴³² Colossians 1:24

⁴³³ Galatians 3:27

⁴³⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:22-23

⁴³⁵ Acts 4:12

⁴³⁶ 1 Corinthians 1:30

condemnation of our Lord who said: "Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them."⁴³⁷

The invitation is open. Consider it deeply and allow yourself to be delivered from the bondage of mortality and to enter into eternal life. No longer remain "of Adam" but become "of Christ".

Chapter 7 [A] The Devil – An Introduction

We have looked at Bible teaching concerning God. It is appropriate now to consider what it teaches about the devil. In mainstream Christian teaching the 'Devil' occupies a place of some prominence and is frequently seen as the 'god of evil'. Thus while God himself is upheld in worship as the source and embodiment of all good, the Devil is held up for detestation and dread and the instigator and promoter of all evil. This chapter will seek to establish the Biblical teaching on this topic and in doing so, a completely different understanding will emerge.

In the past many groups of people were polytheistic having gods for those things which they considered 'good' and those things they considered to be 'bad'. Each was attributed to the control of a separate being. Instead of having a god for war, a god for love, a god for thunder, a god for fire, a god for water, and so on, down the whole list of nature's phenomena, much modern Christian teaching confines the ruling powers of the universe to two agencies, with whom respectively it leaves the contest of good and evil - God and the Devil - a contest in which they measure strength in what would appear to be a somewhat equal encounter.

The Devil in the darker ages of mainstream theology was seen as a fearsome being, as a great enemy who was keen to claim the immortal souls of men and women for eternity. He was seen as an object of dread and terror and as the tempter of the human race. He was known for subtlety, for malice, for cunning, for unrelenting strength and as a being with other evil beings under his control. He was painted as one who sought to entrap, ensnare and to destroy those who sought to live Godly lives. In a word he has been painted and personified as an enemy of God and of humanity, as one who spares no effort in his desire to rob God of his glory and men of their souls. He is regarded as omniscient and the outcome of his work is considered more successful than that of God as, according to tradition, more souls end up in the fires of hell than in the celestial city above.

Having considered the nature of man, and the nature of God already, it is clear that the teaching of the Bible is very different to that which has been described in the preceding paragraph.

Consider the following texts:

- "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."⁴³⁸
- "Since the children have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil."⁴³⁹

Immediately we read such texts we recognise that God intended that Jesus would destroy all that "the devil" appears set to achieve. As this idea is fundamental to the purpose of Christ it is far from being an unimportant matter. The topic is not particularly difficult to understand and the fact that some may

⁴³⁷ Matthew 13:12

⁴³⁸ 1 John 3:8

⁴³⁹ Hebrews 2:14

traditionally have considered it to have been problematic is mainly due to obscurity arising from tradition and to imperfect translation of the Scriptures.

At this point we assert that mainstream thinking does not represent Scriptural teaching and that the concept of the ‘devil’ as a personal being has no valid foundation in Biblical teaching.

It has been inherited as an idea from the mythology of past ages. Even though the language used in the Bible appears to countenance such an idea, closer examination will show that the language used is almost always in the form of ‘personification’ of the carnal and deceitful human nature that draws us away from God.

There are certain general principles which exclude the possibility of the devil's existence. Consider these texts:

- “The wages of sin is death.”⁴⁴⁰
- “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin.”⁴⁴¹
- “God ... alone is immortal.”⁴⁴²

These texts show us that sin and death are inseparable. God alone has immortality and he gives it to those to whom he chooses to give it— on the basis of obedience, of faithfulness. Disobedience (sin) is repaid by God with death. This is evident from Eden onwards. Adam was sentenced to return to the ground⁴⁴³; Moses was prohibited from entering the promised land, and condemned to die⁴⁴⁴; Uzzah was killed for harmlessly (humanly speaking) saving the ark from a fall⁴⁴⁵; “a man of God” was killed by a lion for turning back to eat bread with another prophet, in disobedience to a divine command, under the sincere impression that in so doing he was obeying the commands of the Almighty⁴⁴⁶.

An immortal rebel is simply not possible. With God is the fountain of life⁴⁴⁷. No one can ‘get one up’ on God so as to retain life and power in rebellion. “In his (God’s) hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.”⁴⁴⁸ God consigns all disobedience and sin to death. Is it likely, therefore, that God has made an exception in the case of the devil? The devil of the Bible is a sinner⁴⁴⁹ and cannot, therefore, be immortal.

God shows no favouritism in relation to either humans or angels and he is utterly consistent with himself. He is the same for ever and in all places. He does not act one way on the earth, and on another principle in other parts of his dominion; His ways are wise, uniform, and unvarying. Therefore the operation of His law, which links death with sin, would destroy the devil if he were a person; “because the devil has been sinning from the beginning.”⁴⁵⁰ The devil, therefore, must have been mortal from the beginning.

⁴⁴⁰ Romans 6:23

⁴⁴¹ Romans 5:12

⁴⁴² 1 Timothy 6:15-16

⁴⁴³ Genesis 3:19

⁴⁴⁴ Deuteronomy 32:48,52

⁴⁴⁵ 2 Samuel 6:6-7

⁴⁴⁶ 1 Kings 13:1,25

⁴⁴⁷ Psalm 36:9

⁴⁴⁸ Job 12:10

⁴⁴⁹ 1 John 3:8

⁴⁵⁰ 1 John 3:8 (as above)

There are people who are willing to accept the mortal nature of the devil and who maintain that it has a personal existence until the time of its ultimate death. The line of argument is that the existence of the devil is contemporaneous with that of the human race, and that his career will only end with the triumph of the Son of God on earth. But this is, if possible, more absurd and untenable than the ordinary view.

The theory of an immortal, supernatural devil, who was once an angel, has an air of plausibility and consistency about it, when not studied too closely; but the idea of a mortal devil - who never was anything but a sinner himself - entrusted 'with a general jurisdiction over other sinners (for it is said he has the power of death and disease), for the purpose, not of dispensing the divine law, but of antagonising the Deity in His dealings with the human race - doing all he can to afflict and damn those whom Deity is represented as striving to save, is something that is extremely difficult to understand. If this is the Bible devil, why was it necessary that Jesus should die to bring about his destruction? "He shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is the devil."⁴⁵¹ Why through death? If the devil is a being separate from mankind, what did the sacrifice at Calvary have to do with the process of his destruction? If the devil really is the strong, personal, active power of evil, it needed strength, and not weakness, to put him down. It wanted "the nature of angels," and not "the seed of Abraham," to enter into a successful encounter with "the personal power of darkness." But Jesus, came in the flesh and submitted to death and broke the devil's power. Victory crowned his efforts, and the devil's power was destroyed; in what sense, we shall see.

The words "devil" and "Satan" occur repeatedly in the Scriptures, and are used in a personal sense; but there is no affirmation of the teaching commonly associated with the words. This is remarkable; for if the teaching about the devil is true, it would be reasonable to expect that it would be formally explained in the same way as other points of truth are explained. The teaching about God's existence; about His creative power; about His relationship with His universe, is not only implied in the names He appropriates to Himself, but expressly propounded. ""I am God, and there is no other."⁴⁵² "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. "Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: who created these?"⁴⁵³ "Where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths you are there."⁴⁵⁴

These and many similar declarations confirm the reality of God's glorious existence, His attributes, and power; but there is no such information in the case of the devil.

The accounts that are offered by those who maintain that there is a personal, supernatural devil and which account for his origin and for his relationship against God and humanity are definite enough. In addition, there are some things in the Scriptures that are supposed to bear out the theory. The writings of Milton in 'Paradise Lost' have done much to give shape and body to the tradition of the devil. His poetry has woven together a number of Scriptural ideas which have really no connection one with another, but which work admirably into a consistent whole when the parts are not too closely scrutinised. The narrative of the temptation in the Garden of Eden is one of those parts. In Milton, and in the general conception of the subject, the supernatural devil took the shape of a snake, and became the tempter of Eve. There is absolutely nothing in the Bible narrative to warrant this view. The narrative exhibits the natural snake, "more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made"⁴⁵⁵, as the tempter. The creature was endowed with the gift of speech (no doubt, especially with a view to the part it had to perform in putting

⁴⁵¹ Hebrews 2:14

⁴⁵² Isaiah 46:9

⁴⁵³ Isaiah 40:25-26

⁴⁵⁴ Psalm 139:7-8

⁴⁵⁵ Genesis 3:1

our first parents to the test). Possessing this power, it contemplated the prohibition which God had put upon “the tree in the middle of the garden,” and coming to the conclusion, from all it saw and heard, that death would not be the result of eating, it said, “You will not certainly die ...For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁴⁵⁶

To say that a supernatural personal devil put this into the snake's head is to go beyond the record. It is to put something into it that is not there. The narrative credits the serpent as a natural agent with the part it took in the transaction, and the punishment that afterwards passed upon the serpent, rests upon the same basis: “Because **you** have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.”⁴⁵⁷ If the serpent had been a passive and irresponsible tool in the hands of Antagonistic Power, it is difficult to see the appropriateness or justice of a decree which heaps all the blame and visits all the consequences upon it, instead of upon the Being supposed to have instigated its iniquity. To suggest that the snake was Satan in reptile form is again to go beyond the record, and enters a region where one guess or one assertion is as good as another. The idea is forbidden by the sentence which condemns the serpent to eat dust *all the days of its life*. Paul evidently recognised nothing beyond the serpent in the transaction. “But I’m afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the snake’s cunning ...”⁴⁵⁸

Some people make much about the serpent speaking; but surely there is as much difficulty about a serpent speaking under satanic inspiration as in one speaking by a faculty divinely given for a purpose? If a donkey was able to rebuke Balaam for wrongdoing – “an animal without speech – who spoke with a human voice”⁴⁵⁹ – why should a snake not be given the power of speech at a time when it was necessary to test the faithfulness of Adam and Eve? How otherwise could they be tested? It would never occur to their childlike and inexperienced minds to disobey. The suggestion had to come from an external source, and could only emanate from some of the living forms by which they were surrounded. If it be asked why temptation was necessary at all, it has to be answered that the obligation to obey is never so readily perceived by the consciousness, as when a temptation to the contrary is presented. Obedience that cannot stand the shock of temptation is weak and ready to die. Trial strengthens and makes faithfulness evident. This explains the difficult situations that the present age often presents to believers.

Some religious groups⁴⁶⁰ and many mainstream Christian people suggest that the devil was once a powerful arch-angel, and that he was driven out of heaven on account of his pride; after which, he applied his angelic energies to oppose God in all His plans and works, and do as much evil as he could in the universe, being assisted in this by a host of angelic sympathisers, who were driven down to hell along with him. This view is supposed to have a certain degree of support in the Bible. Let us look at all the places where it is suggested that support for the theory of ‘fallen angels’ is found:

- “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell (Gk Tartarus), putting them in chains of darkness (or gloomy dungeons) to be held for judgement”⁴⁶¹
- “And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgement on the great Day”⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁶ Genesis 3:5

⁴⁵⁷ Genesis 3:14

⁴⁵⁸ 2 Corinthians 11:3

⁴⁵⁹ 2 Peter 2:16

⁴⁶⁰ The Jehovah’s Witness Community is a case in point

⁴⁶¹ 2 Peter 2:4

⁴⁶² Jude :6

This is all the information we have on the subject. It is scanty and obscure, but, such as it is, it points in a very different direction and to a very different occurrence from that indicated in popular tradition. It does not tell of angels being expelled from heaven to engage in marauding expeditions against human interests and divine authority, wherever their whim might lead them; but of disobedient angels, not necessarily in heaven, being degraded from their position, and confined in the grave until a time of judgment. It speaks of them as in custody, "in chains of darkness" - a metaphor highly expressive of the bondage of death - in which they are held and from which they will emerge, to be judged, at a time when the saints shall sit in judgment.⁴⁶³ The time and locality of their fall are matters of speculation. The matter may have related to pre-Adamic times but we are not in any real position to come to a conclusion.⁴⁶⁴

Nevertheless, it will be seen that the Scripture allusions to fallen angels offer no support whatever to the idea that there was "a rebellion in heaven" under the leadership of "Satan," resulting in the expulsion of the rebels, and the establishment in the universe of a great antagonism to God, having its centre and headquarters in hell. Those who have a superficial knowledge of the Scriptures may seek to quote Revelation in support of their position:

"Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient snake called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him."⁴⁶⁵

Surely those who quote this to prove a rebellion in heaven before Adam, must stagger a little, when it is pointed out to them that it describes something that was to happen *after the days of John*. The things seen by John in "Revelation" were representative of *events future to his time*. This is the clear testimony of the record:

"Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."⁴⁶⁶

How absurd to quote any of John's descriptions as applicable to an event *alleged to have occurred before the creation of the world!*

Secondly, what John saw were not real things, but signs or symbols that represented real things. This is clear from the whole tenor of the Book. The seven churches of Asia were represented by *seven candlesticks*, and Christ by a *seven-horned lamb*; the total number of the redeemed by *four beasts full of eyes*; an imperial city by *a woman*, etc. This being so, it is inadmissible to read the above-quoted account of "war in heaven" literally, which must be done before the common view can be maintained. The very nature of the scene described precludes the possibility of a literal construction. Only read the chapter and realise it.

Other Scriptural references that are used to support the concept of a personal devil⁴⁶⁷ have even less to do with the subject than the one quoted from Revelation. The person addressed is, in fact, an earthly ruler – in one case the King of Babylon and in the other, the Prince of Tyre.

⁴⁶³ 1 Corinthians 6:3

⁴⁶⁴ The term angel is also used of one who ministers and as such it is a supposition that the angels referred to in these passages were angels in the sense of Elohim. [Ed]

⁴⁶⁵ Revelation 12:7

⁴⁶⁶ Revelation 4:1

⁴⁶⁷ Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28: 11-15

It is worthy of note that in the divine dealings with the Jewish nation, as exhibited in Biblical history or in the writings of the prophets, there is an absence of anything giving support to the idea of a personal devil. In all God's dealings with His people, the appeal is to themselves. There is no recognition of diabolical agency or occult influence. If Satanic influence, of the type recognised by tradition, were a fact, it would surely be recognised in proceedings intended to remedy its evil working. Would it be righteous to lay the responsibility of devilish suggestion upon poor persecuted human nature? Devil-influence must detract from human accountability in the ratio of its power. No account of the existence of such an influence is taken in God's extensive relationship with His chosen nation. This is one of the strongest evidences that it is a fiction.

If then, there is no personal being – the devil – it is important that we ask what are we to understand by "the devil" that is so frequently referred to in the Bible, and, spoken of in the "third personal pronoun, singular, masculine gender"? This is the question that now demands an answer, and the explanation will once again show the impossibility of the existence of the devil of popular superstition.

We first look at the original words, *devil and Satan*, as these (with very slight modification) are the original words. *Devil* is Greek; *Satan* is Hebrew, and Greek only by adoption. *Devil*, in the singular number, only occurs in the New Testament; *Satan* is found in both Old and New. It is no use referring to an English dictionary to find out the exact meaning of the terms as used in the original language. The English language was unknown at the time the words were written. As an English dictionary only gives the meaning of current words as *currently understood*, it would, no doubt, favour the popular view, by defining the devil as "a fallen angel, the enemy of God and man," but this is of no more value than any comment on the subject one might hear in society. The whole question is whether the received (and, therefore, the dictionary) doctrine of the devil is true. This we can only settle by going to the original sources of information.

[7B] Satan

"Satan" is a Hebrew word, and *transferred to the English Bible untranslated from the original language*. Cruden (himself a believer in the popular devil) defines it as follows: "Satan, Sathan, Sathanas: *this is a mere Hebrew word, and signifies an adversary, an enemy, an accuser.*" If Satan is "a mere Hebrew word, signifying adversary," etc., then it is obvious that it does not *in itself* import the evil being of popular conception.

This conclusion is borne out by its uses in the Hebrew Bible. The first place where it occurs is Numbers:

"But God was very angry when he (Balaam) went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the way to oppose him [Literally – as an adversary against him – 'Satan']"⁴⁶⁸

It occurs next in the same chapter:

"The angel of the LORD asked him, "Why have you beaten your donkey these three times?" I have come here to oppose you." [Literally – to be an adversary to you – a 'Satan']

In this case, Satan was a holy angel. Understanding "Satan" to mean adversary in its simple and general sense, we can comprehend the meaning; but, to understand it as the evil being of popular belief, would be a different matter. The following are other cases in which the word is used:

⁴⁶⁸ Numbers 22:22

- “He (David) must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting.”⁴⁶⁹
[Literally: in the battle he is a ‘Satan’ (or adversary) to us]
- “What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? What right do you have to interfere?”⁴⁷⁰
[Literally: what right do you have to be adversaries – ‘Satans’ to me?]
- “But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary [‘Satan’] or disaster.”⁴⁷¹
- “The the LORD raised up against Solomon an adversary [‘Satan’], Hadad the Edomite.”⁴⁷²
- “And God raised up against Solomon another adversary [‘Satan’], Rezon son of Eliada.”⁴⁷³
- “Rezon was Israel’s adversary [‘Satan’] as long as Solomon lived.”⁴⁷⁴

In these cases, the translators have *translated the word*, and by this means have removed the idea of a supernatural being having any part in the meaning. The text makes it quite clear to whom the term ‘Satan’ is being applied.

The term ‘Satan’ is used widely in the narrative of Job’s trials. The task must be to identify ‘to whom’ or ‘of what’ the term applies. It would be jumping to an irrational conclusion, given the evidence so far, to assume that it refers to that imaginary monster with horns, hoofs, tail, bloodshot eyes, and fiery sceptre, every time it is encountered!

Who then was the adversary that proved such a terror to Job, against whom he exerted such power? In fact, there is no information as to who he was. His title would show that he was an enemy of Job, and probably of the sons of God in general - a wicked, overbearing lord, whose envy and malice were only equal to the dominion he seems to have exercised. It is impossible to be more specific than this, in saying who he was. The probability is he was a powerful magnate of the time - a professed fellow of the sons of God - an envious and spiteful enemy, who looked on Job with evil intent, and sought to bring about his ruin.⁴⁷⁵

In considering the calamities of storm and disease that befell Job, it is worth noting that the responsibility was the LORD’s. The LORD invited ‘Satan’ to consider Job! He did what he did at the LORD’s “inciting.”⁴⁷⁶

This is Job’s understanding too: “Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me.”⁴⁷⁷ And the narrator, in concluding the book, says: “They comforted and consoled him (Job) over all the trouble the LORD had brought on him.”⁴⁷⁸ But even supposing the adversary had actually wielded the power that affected Job, that would no more prove him a supernatural agent, than the miracles achieved by Moses prove him to have been no man. God can delegate miraculous power to mortal human beings.

The two other cases in which Satan is *untranslated* are the following:

⁴⁶⁹ 1 Samuel 29:4

⁴⁷⁰ 2 Samuel 19:22

⁴⁷¹ 1 Kings 5:4

⁴⁷² 1 Kings 11:14

⁴⁷³ 1 Kings 11:23

⁴⁷⁴ 1 Kings 11:25

⁴⁷⁵ The term “Sons of God” probably relates to the faithful of the age. [Ed]

⁴⁷⁶ Job 2:3

⁴⁷⁷ Job 19:21

⁴⁷⁸ Job 42:11

- “Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”⁴⁷⁹
- “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?”⁴⁸⁰

With regard to the first, the adversary seems to have been God; for we read in a parallel account, “Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.”⁴⁸¹ The angel of God was a Satan to Balaam, as we have seen, and, in this case, God proved a Satan to Israel. Moved, doubtless, by the general perversity of the people, He impelled David to a course which resulted in calamity to the nation.

In the second example, the case of Joshua, the high priest, the transaction in which “Satan” appeared against him was so highly symbolical (as anyone may see by reading the first four chapters of Zechariah), that we cannot suppose Satan, the adversary, stood for an individual, but rather as the representative of those against whom Joshua had to contend. Ezra records the opposition that Joshua faced at the time of the rebuilding of the temple.⁴⁸² The individual adversary seen by Zechariah, side by side with Joshua, represented this group opposition to the work in which Joshua was engaged. Those who insist upon the popular Satan as the subject of these two verses, have to prove the existence of such a being first, before the passage from Zechariah can help them; for “Satan” only means adversary, and in itself lends no more support to their theory than the word “enemy.”

The Hebrew word “Satan” was adopted into the Greek language – and so, although the language of the New Testament is Greek, the term itself is contained within it. Those who have a supernatural devil in mind tend to believe that the New Testament will furnish them with the evidence that the Old Testament seems to lack. A critical consideration of the matter, however, will show that in this, they are entirely mistaken. Satan, in the New Testament, no more means the arch-fiend of popular superstition, than Satan in the Old. The unprejudiced mind will recognise this quite easily.

In the first place, if Satan is the popular devil, we are faced with a curious fact when we turn to the words of Jesus to the church in Pergamum:

“I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city – where Satan lives.”⁴⁸³

According to this, in the days of John, the apostle, Satan's headquarters were at Pergamum, in Asia Minor. The fact is, the *enemies of the truth* were notably numerous, energetic, and powerful in that city, and indulged in relentless and successful persecution of those professing the name of Christ. This earned for the place the fearful distinction of being styled by Jesus “Satan's (the adversary's) throne” and “where Satan lives”. This is intelligible: but if the popular devil is in reality Satan, we are invited to contemplate the idea that the devil had forsaken hell in those days, and pitched his tent for a while in the salubrious city of Pergamum, from where he would despatch his busy emissaries all over the globe!

⁴⁷⁹ 1 Chronicles 21:1

⁴⁸⁰ Zechariah 3:1-2

⁴⁸¹ 2 Samuel 24:1

⁴⁸² Ezra 3:2-3; Ezra 4: 1-5 could be studied for further detail.

⁴⁸³ Revelation 2:13

Jesus, on a certain occasion, styled Peter "Satan":

"Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."⁴⁸⁴

Understanding "Satan" to mean adversary, we can comprehend this incident. Peter protested against the sacrifice of Christ. In doing so, he took the attitude of an enemy, as, had Jesus not died, the purpose of his appearing would have been frustrated: the Scriptures falsified, God dishonoured, and salvation prevented. In opposing the death of Christ, Peter was, therefore Satan, *in the Biblical sense*. Christ actually defines the sense of the term: "You (Peter) do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." To be on the side of men against God is to be Satan. Peter was, for the moment, in this position. He made himself part of the great adversary - the carnal mind - as collectively exemplified in that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one."⁴⁸⁵ "Friendship of the world means enmity against God"⁴⁸⁶ – and is, effectively, 'Satan'. Jesus, therefore, commands Peter to depart from his presence.

Clearly this incident highlights once again that the traditional picture of the devil cannot be true. Peter was a man who became Christ's leading apostle. Therefore, to suggest that Peter was a manifestation of the personal devil is a mistaken and ridiculous construction, from which we shake ourselves free, in recognition of the fact that Peter, at that moment was a Bible Satan, from which he afterwards changed and had sufficient faith to strengthen others.⁴⁸⁷

In another incident to which Paul refers, he speaks about some who have rejected the faith and says, "Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to SATAN to be taught not to blaspheme."⁴⁸⁸ This also shows that the New Testament Satan is not the popular Satan: for no one ever hears of the popular Satan being employed by Christian teachers to correct the blasphemous propensities of reprobates. It is presumable that Satan's influence would have an entirely contrary effect; and accordingly the efforts of the clergy are generally directed with a view to rid sinners of his presence.

The process of "handing over to Satan," according to apostolic practice may be gathered from Paul's comments in Corinthians: "for my part, even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. As one who is present with you in this way, I have already passed judgement in the name of our Lord Jesus on the one who has been doing this. So when you are assembled and I am with you in spirit, and the power of the Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord."⁴⁸⁹

The meaning of this is, simply, the expulsion of the offender from the community of the believers. This is evident from the verse immediately preceding those we have quoted: "And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and put out of your fellowship one who has been doing this?" - and also the concluding sentence, "Expel the wicked person from among you."⁴⁹⁰ the apostolic recommendation in all cases when members were stubborn and unwilling to repent.

⁴⁸⁴ Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33; Luke 4:8

⁴⁸⁵ 1 John 5:19 [evil / evil one – translation optional Ed. Biblos.com]

⁴⁸⁶ James 4:4

⁴⁸⁷ Luke 22:32

⁴⁸⁸ 1 Timothy 1:20

⁴⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 5:3-5

⁴⁹⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:13

"Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them."⁴⁹¹

"In the name of the Lord Jesus, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and who does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ... Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer."⁴⁹²

"I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them."⁴⁹³

To keep away from believers, or to refrain from associating with them, was to hand such a person over to the adversary, or 'Satan', because it was putting the believer back into the world, which is the great enemy or adversary of God. The purpose of this was to retrieve the believer for the Lord, as the quotation above shows (489). When Paul disassociated himself from Hymenaeus and from Alexander⁴⁹⁴ he hoped that they would reflect on their blasphemous characters and that they would repent and turn again to the Lord. It would seem very strange if Satan 'in person' would agree to encourage Hymenaeus and Alexander the faithfulness that the Lord requires.

The purpose, then of excluding a brother or sister, of handing one 'over to Satan' is explained by Paul who says that it is "for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord."⁴⁹⁵ Paul explains the reasoning more fully: "Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch – as you really are. ... Expel the wicked person from among you."⁴⁹⁶ This would, then, seek to preserve the faith and purity of the ecclesia and would not lead others away from the salvation they possessed in Jesus. Yet again, we note that the devil or 'Satan' is called to play a positive part in the process of salvation - completely contrary to the way such a being would behave if he really were the devil of traditional, popular imagination.

Let us now consider another quotation which concerns Paul's desire to travel to the church at Thessalonica: "For we wanted to come to you – certainly I, Paul, did, again and again – but Satan blocked our way."⁴⁹⁷ Can we really believe that 'Satan' stood there in person? Paul's journeying was prevented by those who opposed him and the gospel he was teaching. Although 'Satan,' or the adversary, was the general name for all of them, Paul mentions particular names: "Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message."⁴⁹⁸ "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth."⁴⁹⁹ "Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymanaeus and Philetus who have departed from the truth."⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹¹ Titus 3:10

⁴⁹² 2 Thessalonians 3:4,16

⁴⁹³ Romans 16:17

⁴⁹⁴ 1 Timothy 1:20

⁴⁹⁵ 1 Corinthians 5:5

⁴⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:6-7, 16

⁴⁹⁷ 1 Thessalonians 2:18

⁴⁹⁸ 2 Timothy 4:14

⁴⁹⁹ 2 Timothy 3: 8

⁵⁰⁰ 2 Timothy 2:17

Let us examine another useful text which is linked to the Last Supper. We read: "As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered him."⁵⁰¹ The text states that Judas's adverse or Satanic intentions with respect to Jesus, developed immediately after Jesus handed him a piece of bread, dipped, after oriental custom, in the bowl on the table. Why? Because the handing of the bread to him marked him as the man who was to be traitor. Jesus had said, "One of you is going to betray me."⁵⁰² This comment stirred up a painful and eager curiosity among the disciples, who began to ask to whom it was that Jesus referred. In answer to John's whispered enquiry as to who it was to be, Jesus said, "It is the one to whom I shall give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish. Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. ... As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out."⁵⁰³ It was not surprising that Judas, having been openly identified, should no longer think over his own evil purpose. His treacherous inclinations resulted in his taking a fatal decision. This was, in New Testament language, 'Satan entered to him,' that is the adversary rising within him. If the Satan in the case was the popular Satan, a hard question would present itself: Why was Judas punished for the devil's sin? "It would be better for him (Judas) if he had not been born,"⁵⁰⁴ showing that the sin of Christ's betrayal was clearly the responsibility of the man, Judas.

There is another case where the sinful action of the human heart is described as the inspiration of "Satan."⁵⁰⁵ Ananias and Sapphira came into the presence of the apostles with a lie on their lips; Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?" The meaning of Satan filling his heart, is explained clearly soon after: "What made you think of doing such a thing?"⁵⁰⁶ Later, when Paul confronts Sapphira, we read: "How could you conspire to test the spirit of the Lord?"⁵⁰⁷ The action of Satan in this case was the voluntary agreement between husband and wife. But supposing we had not been informed that the lie of Ananias was due to an agreement privately made with his wife, from selfish motives, to misrepresent the extent of their property, we should have had no difficulty in understanding that Satan filling the heart was the spirit of the flesh, which is the great Satan or adversary, moving him to the particular course of action that evoked Peter's rebuke. James defines the process of sin as follows: "Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desires and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."⁵⁰⁸ Therefore, the action of desire or lust in the mind is the action of the New Testament Satan, or adversary. All sin proceeds from the desires of the flesh. This is declared in various forms of speech in the Scriptures, and agrees with the experience of every one. The following are illustrations:

- "For out of the heart come evil thoughts - murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."⁵⁰⁹
- "The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰¹ John 13:27

⁵⁰² John 13:21

⁵⁰³ John 13:26-27, 30

⁵⁰⁴ Matthew 26:24

⁵⁰⁵ Acts 5:3

⁵⁰⁶ Acts 5:4 The KJV, YLT and other translations follow a more literal and helpful translation – "Why did you conceive such a thing in your heart?" The sense is not altered by a freer translation but the more literal translation aids understanding. [Ed]

⁵⁰⁷ Acts 5:9

⁵⁰⁸ James 1:14-15

⁵⁰⁹ Matthew 15:19

⁵¹⁰ Romans 8:7

The great Satan, or adversary, then, which every person has to fear, and which always seeks to entice humans on courses opposed to wisdom and godliness, is the tendency of our natural instincts to act on their own account. This tendency is the spirit or inclination of the flesh, which requires vigilant repression so as to keep out of the way of evil. Only the truth, which is the voice and power of the Spirit, will enable a person to do this. Those who surrender to the flesh walk in the way of death. "For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live."⁵¹¹

The purpose of the gospel being preached to the Gentiles by Paul, was to "open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."⁵¹² Ignorance, or darkness, is the great power of the adversary within us; for where a person is ignorant of God's will, the flesh has a controlling power. The Gentiles are separated from the life of God, "because of the ignorance that it in them."⁵¹³ Enlightenment, through the hearing of the gospel message, creates a new person within, who, in process of time, kills the old person, as Paul explains: "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."⁵¹⁴

This general explanation with the examples that have been considered will enable us to understand how the New Testament uses the word 'Satan'. The solution is to read 'Satan' as the adversary and to pay attention to the context and circumstance when the word is used.

Sometimes 'Satan' will be found to be a person, or the authorities, or the flesh; in fact, whatever performs the part of an adversary is, scripturally speaking, 'Satan.' 'Satan' is never to be understood as a superhuman evil power or a personal devil.

7 [C] The Devil – An Explanation

We must now consider the word "devil." This is the word which is mainly associated with the tradition of a supernatural evil being. A simple starting point is to note that "devil," in many instances is used interchangeably with 'Satan' and, therefore, the two stand or fall together. Nevertheless, as this term occurs on numerous occasions in the New Testament, a fuller exploration of the word and its use is presented.

Speaking of the word 'devil,' Cruden states: "This word comes from the Greek *diabolos*, which signifies an accuser."⁵¹⁵ Parkhurst⁵¹⁶ defines *diabolos* as a meaning "an accuser, a slanderer," which he illustrates by referring to New Testament quotations⁵¹⁷ in all of which its application is to human beings.

It is clear, then, that the word "devil," when properly understood, is a general term, and not a proper name. It is a word that is, and may be, applied in any case where slander, accusation, or falsehood is exemplified. As Jesus applied "Satan" to Peter, so he applied "devil" to Judas: "Have I not chosen you the

⁵¹¹ Romans 8:13

⁵¹² Acts 26:18

⁵¹³ Ephesians 4:18

⁵¹⁴ Ephesians 4:22-24

⁵¹⁵ Cruden's exact phrase "signifies a calumniator or accuser"

⁵¹⁶ Parkhurst says, "The original word *diabolos* comes from *diabebola*, the perfect tense, middle voice of *diaballo*, which is compounded of *dia*, through; and *ballo*, to cast; therefore meaning to *dart* or *strike through*; whence, in a figurative sense, it signifies to *strike or stab with an accusation or evil report*."

⁵¹⁷ 1 Timothy 3:11; 2 Timothy 3:3; Titus 2:3

Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!”⁵¹⁸ Judas proved himself a liar, a betrayer, a false accuser, and, therefore, a devil. Paul tells the wives of deacons not to be devils.⁵¹⁹ His exhortation, it is true, does not appear in this form in the English version. The words, as translated, are “In the same way the wives are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers (*diabolous*).” This is the plural of the word translated devil, and ought to be rendered uniformly with its occurrence elsewhere. Either this ought to be ‘devils,’ or *devil* elsewhere ought to be *false accuser*. This also applies in the following texts:

- “People will be ... without love, unforgiving, slanderous (*diaboloī*)”⁵²⁰
- “Likewise, teach the older women ... not to be slanderers (*diabolous*)”⁵²¹

Jesus applied the term to the persecuting authorities of the Roman State. He said in his letter, through John, to the church at Smyrna, “The *devil* will put some of you in prison.”⁵²² The pagan authorities were the accusers and hunters of the early Christians, intent on ‘accusing’ and wiping out the whole sect. In the same book, the power of the world which would lead so many astray is described as “that ancient snake called the devil, or Satan.”⁵²³ These examples all clearly show the meaning and general use of the term ‘devil’ and exclude the concept of a superhuman ‘god’ of evil.

There is, however, a wider use of the term ‘devil’ in the New Testament, which, while superficially supporting the traditional view, is more directly destructive of that view than even the limited cases cited. It is that which personifies the great principle which lies at the bottom of the rupture at present existing between God and man, as pre-eminently the accuser of God and the destroyer of mankind. This personification is demonstrated in Hebrews.

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he (Jesus) too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil.”⁵²⁴

If it is suggested that the ‘devil’ referred to in this text is the devil of traditional belief, four absurdities immediately come to light:

1. In the first place, to take on the weakness of humanity was a strange way of preparing to fight a powerful, superhuman, devil.
2. It is particularly strange that the process of destroying the devil should be submission to death by Jesus himself! A superhuman power would surely need to be overcome by a stronger power.
3. The power of the devil ought now to be broken – and yet the so-called devil appears to be as active and busy as ever as, according to mainstream theology, he seeks to ensnare immortal souls and claim them as his own.
4. Finally, it is extraordinary to note that the popular devil has the “power of death!” This contradicts basic Bible teaching. Who made Adam mortal? Who is responsible for the punishment of sin? It is God, who sentenced humanity consequent upon disobedience in Eden and God who says, “I put to death and I bring life.”⁵²⁵

⁵¹⁸ John 6:70

⁵¹⁹ 1 Timothy 3:11 as quoted

⁵²⁰ 2 Timothy 3:2-3

⁵²¹ Titus 2:3

⁵²² Revelation 2:10

⁵²³ Revelation 12:9

⁵²⁴ Hebrews 2:14

⁵²⁵ Deuteronomy 32:39

God dispenses retribution, and enforces His own law; not a hostile archangel, presumed to be at eternal enmity with Him.

John says, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."⁵²⁶ The devil whom Christ came to destroy is sin. If anyone doubts this, let them reconsider Paul's words quoted above. What did Christ accomplish in his death? Let the following testimonies provide an answer:

- "He (Jesus) has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself."⁵²⁷
- "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."⁵²⁸
- "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities."⁵²⁹
- "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross."⁵³⁰
- "He appeared so that he might take away our sins."⁵³¹

Christ, through death, destroyed, or took out of the way, "the sin of the world." In this, he destroyed the Biblical devil. He certainly did not destroy the popular devil in his death, for that devil is supposed to be still at large, but in his own person, as a representative man, he extinguished the power of sin by surrendering to its full consequences, and then escaping by resurrection, through the power of his own holiness, to live for evermore. This is described as "God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh."⁵³² Sin in the flesh, then, is the devil destroyed by Jesus in his death. This is the devil *having the power of death*, for it is sin, and nothing else but sin that causes death in humans. Does anyone doubt this? Consider the following testimonies:

- "Therefore, just a sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin..."⁵³³
- "For since death came through a man"⁵³⁴
- "The wages of sin is death"⁵³⁵
- "Just as sin reigned in death"⁵³⁶
- "Sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."⁵³⁷
- "The sting of death is sin"⁵³⁸

Paying attention to the fact that death was divinely decreed in the Garden of Eden, *in consequence of Adam's transgression*, it is easy to understand the language which recognises and personifies transgression, or sin, as the power or cause of death. The foregoing statements express the literal truth metaphorically. Actually, death, as the consequence of sin, is produced, caused or inflicted by God, but since sin or transgression is the fact or principle that *moves God to inflict it*, sin is appropriately put forward as *the first cause* in the matter. There is no place for him for a supernatural power of evil.

⁵²⁶ 1 John 3:8

⁵²⁷ Hebrews 9:26

⁵²⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:3

⁵²⁹ Isaiah 53:5

⁵³⁰ 1 Peter 2:24

⁵³¹ 1 John 3:5

⁵³² Romans 8:3

⁵³³ Romans 8:12

⁵³⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:21

⁵³⁵ Romans 6:23

⁵³⁶ Romans 5:21

⁵³⁷ James 1:15

⁵³⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:56

To maintain a traditional mainstream position the result changes the moral situation, alters the scheme of salvation, and produces confusion: for if the power of death lies with a personal power of evil, separate from and independent of man, and not in man's own sinfulness, then the operations of Christ are transferred from the arena of moral conflict to that of physical warfare, and the whole scheme of divine interposition through him is degraded to a level equal to that of Pagan mythologies, in which gods, good and bad, are represented to be in murderous physical-force hostility for the accomplishment of their own ends. God is brought down from His position of supremacy, and placed on a footing with the forces of His own creation.

Others who cling to the traditional mainstream view admit that sin is the cause of death, but ask who prompts sin? Isn't this the 'devil' at work? Nothing can be more directly met by a Bible answer

"Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."⁵³⁹

This agrees with our personal experience. Sin originates in untrained natural inclinations. These, in the aggregate, Paul terms "another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind."⁵⁴⁰ Everyone is conscious of the existence of this law, whose impulse, uncontrolled, would drive them beyond the restraints of wisdom. The world obeys this law and the evidence is clear for all to see. It has no experience of the other law, which is implanted by the truth. "for everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world."⁵⁴¹

When people become enlightened in the truth, and are made aware of God's will with respect to the state of their minds and the nature of their actions, a new law is introduced. This is called "the Spirit," because the ideas upon which it is based have been brought about by the Spirit, through inspired writers. "The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life,"⁵⁴² said Jesus. Therefore, the warfare established in a person's nature by the introduction of the truth is warfare between the two principles - the desires of the flesh and the commands of the Spirit. This is described by Paul in the following words: "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh."⁵⁴³ "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."⁵⁴⁴ He says in another place, "Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires."⁵⁴⁵ These principles are brought to a focus in the following extract from his letter to the church in Rome:

"Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit. ... Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh to live according to it. For if you live

⁵³⁹ James 1:14-15

⁵⁴⁰ Romans 7:23

⁵⁴¹ 1 John 2:16

⁵⁴² John 6:63

⁵⁴³ Galatians 5:17

⁵⁴⁴ Galatians 5:16

⁵⁴⁵ Romans 6:12

according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”⁵⁴⁶

The Scripture speaks plainly and the suggestion that the personal devil's work is to suggest sin is untrue. Sin is the result of our own ‘natural’ desires which are frequently at odds with that which God desires. This is the origin of sin, and sin is the cause of death.

But why should such a plain matter be obscured by personification? No other answer can be given than that it is one of the Bible's peculiarities to deal in imagery where the principles involved are too subtle for ready literal expression. The world, which is only an aggregation of persons, is personified: “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own.”⁵⁴⁷

Money is personified:

- “No-one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve both God and money.”⁵⁴⁸

Sin is personified:

- “Just as sin reigned in death.”⁵⁴⁹
- “Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness.”⁵⁵⁰

The Spirit is personified:

- “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own...”⁵⁵¹

Wisdom is personified:

- “Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you can desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour.”⁵⁵²
- “Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars.”⁵⁵³

The Nation of Israel is personified:

- “I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt.”⁵⁵⁴

The people of Christ are personified:

⁵⁴⁶ Romans 8:5-9;12-14

⁵⁴⁷ John 15:19

⁵⁴⁸ Matthew 6:24

⁵⁴⁹ Romans 5:21

⁵⁵⁰ Romans 6:16 (and verse 18 extends the personification)

⁵⁵¹ John 16:13

⁵⁵² Proverbs 3:13-16

⁵⁵³ Proverbs 9:1

⁵⁵⁴ Jeremiah 31:4

- “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”⁵⁵⁵
- “I promised you (the church) to one husband, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.”⁵⁵⁶
- “For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.”⁵⁵⁷

The natural disposition to evil which a believer forsakes on becoming Christ’s – and also the new state of mind that the believer develops are personified:

- “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self ... and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”⁵⁵⁸
- “For we know that our old self was crucified with him”⁵⁵⁹

These examples of personification provide an answer to the question why sin ‘in the abstract’ should be personified. They show, first, that principles and things *are* personified in the Bible; and, second, that this is done to great advantage. A metaphorical approach to abstract ideas gives a distinction to them in discourse, which they would lack if stated in precise and literal language. There is warmth in such a style of speech, which is lacking in expressions that conform to the strict rules of grammar and fact. This warmth and expressiveness are characteristically found in all parts of the Bible and belong to oriental languages generally. Of course metaphoric language and personification are open to abuse but their effectiveness is beyond question. The subject of sin is an illustration. Sin is the great slanderer of God in virtually denying His supremacy, wisdom, and goodness. It is most appropriate, then, to call it ‘the accuser’, ‘the slanderer’ or the ‘liar’. Personification of sin is achieved by the use in Greek of the word ‘devil’. This word has not been translated but simply transliterated – that is, used as it stands in an anglicised form. It gives, therefore, the appearance of a title and, the reader of the English Bible, who may have traditional theological prejudice, finds it difficult to recognise it for what it actually represents.

There is an historical aspect to the question, which greatly tends to make the matter more understandable.

We refer to the incidents connected with the introduction of sin into the world, in the contemplation of which, we shall see a peculiar fitness in the personification of sin in the word *devil*.

Adam's sin was not spontaneous. It was suggested by his wife; but neither on her part was the disobedience self-suggested. She acted at the instigation of a third party, the snake. We read, “Now the snake was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made.”⁵⁶⁰ The natural snake, more observant than other animals, and gifted at the time with the power of expressing its thoughts, contemplated the prohibition which God had put upon “the tree in the middle of the garden;” and concluded from all it saw and heard, that death would not be the result of eating. The snake said, “You will certainly not die. ... For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:27

⁵⁵⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:2

⁵⁵⁷ Revelation 19:7

⁵⁵⁸ Ephesians 4:22-24

⁵⁵⁹ Romans 6:6 [both this reference and 555 (above) have greater personification in the sense that “old man” rather than “old self” are used in the KJV which was the version used in the original work.]

⁵⁶⁰ Genesis 3:1

⁵⁶¹ Genesis 3:4-5

Thus the snake was a slanderer of God for the snake affirmed that what God had said was not true. Thus he became a devil, and not only a devil, but *the* devil, insomuch as he originated the slander, under the belief of which our first parents disobeyed the divine command, and introduced sin and death to the world. He was, therefore, the natural symbol of all that resulted from his lie. "That ancient snake, who is the devil, or Satan,"⁵⁶² is the symbolic description of the world in its political totality at the time when Christ turns it into "the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."⁵⁶³ The snake being the originator of the lie which led to disobedience, the fruits of that disobedience might well be said to be "his works."

The individual snake itself has long since passed away in the course of nature, but the fruits remain, and the principle lives. The idea instilled by it into the minds of our first parents has germinated to the production of generations of human snakes. Mankind has proved but an embodiment of the snake idea; so that they are all slanderers of God in disbelieving His promises, and disobeying His commandments. Therefore, Jesus could say to the Pharisees, "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"⁵⁶⁴ and again, "You belong to your father, the devil (slanderer, snake), and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning (he brought death upon mankind by inciting Adam and Eve to disobedience), not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."⁵⁶⁵ All who are in the first Adam, are "the children of the devil," because they are the progeny of a snake-devil contaminated paternity. Their mortality is evidence of this, whatever their moral qualities, because mortality is the fruit of the snake-devil conceit operating in Adam and which resulted in disobedience. But for those who have a true belief in the promises of God, and who have been introduced into "the second Adam" (who in his death destroyed the power of the devil in taking away sin), are freed from the family of the devil, and become children of God.

Progeny is according to paternity; like produces like; "Children of the devil" must be devil; and hence it is that the world of human nature as a whole is regarded as the devil, because it is the embodiment of the devil principle. That principle originated in a personal agent; and for that reason, the principle retains the personality of the originator in common discourse, for the sake of convenience; and thus by a very natural process, the abstract principle which lies at the bottom of human misery and mortality is personified. Therefore, when we read that Jesus destroyed the devil and his works, we understand that this refers to Jesus in his taking away the sin of the world, which will ultimately result in the complete abolition of human nature on the Adam or serpent basis, and the swallowing up of death in victory. It will be the suppression of the current order of things, and the establishment of a new one, in which righteousness and peace will reign triumphantly, and the knowledge of God will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

The temptation of Jesus is usually cited in opposition to these conclusions. It is suggested by some, that this incontestably proves the personality and power of the Bible devil. The great feature of the narrative relied upon, is the application of the word "devil" to the tempter; but this proves nothing. If Judas could be a devil and yet be a man⁵⁶⁶, why may the tempter of Jesus not have been a man? His being called "devil" proves nothing. But some suggest that it takes something more than human power to carry a man through the air to the top of the temple, to its very pinnacle. If this was what happened, it would, doubtless, be a little difficult to explain; but this is not so. The pinnacle of the temple, as we are informed by Josephus, was an elevated court or promenade, which, on one side, overlooked the depths to the valley of Jehoshaphat to a depth of 200 feet, and offered the facility for self-destruction which the tempter asked Jesus to jump

⁵⁶² Revelation 20:2

⁵⁶³ Revelation 11:15

⁵⁶⁴ Matthew 23:33

⁵⁶⁵ John 8:44

⁵⁶⁶ John 6:70

from, on the strength of a promise made in reference to inevitable suffering. To this court, the tempter, doubtless, walked with Jesus, and made the vain proposal suggested by the circumstances.

A further suggestion is made by some who suggest that only the devil could have taken Jesus to the top of such a high mountain from which the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. It is obvious that this must be taken in a limited sense; for the fact of *ascending a mountain, to see what was to be witnessed*, shows that the field of vision was in proportion to the altitude. The tract of country seen would be Judea and neighbouring provinces. The offer of power would therefore relate to these. If it be contended that Christ was absolutely-and miraculously shown "all the kingdoms of the world," what would be suggested as the reason for the tempter ascending an *elevation* to show him them? This would have been no assistance to see "ALL" the countries on earth. If there was anything supernatural in it, there was no necessity for going up a hill at all.

But *who was* the devil who seemingly busied himself to subvert Jesus from the path of obedience? It is impossible to say positively who he was. As in the case of Job's Satan, we can only be positive as to whom he was not. Various probabilities are suggested by the circumstances of the temptation according to the phase in which they are contemplated. Some think the devil in the case was Christ's own inclinations; but this is untenable in view of the statement that "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time"⁵⁶⁷ It is also untenable in view of the harmony that existed between the mind of Christ and the will of the Father.⁵⁶⁸ It has been suggested, from the fact that the tempter had power to allot the provinces of the Roman world, that he was a leading functionary of state, or the Roman emperor himself. Others have contended that, not the Roman emperor, but the angel controlling his position, could say concerning "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them," these "are delivered to me, and to whomsoever I will I give them." A fourth suggestion has been that the temptation took place in vision or trance.

Be these suggestions true or false, the temptation offers no real support to the popular theory which it is brought forward to prove. In fact, there is no *real* support for that theory in any part of the Bible. The support is only apparent; it is all an appearance, the chief power of which lies in the fact that there exists a personal-devil theory of pagan origin built into the fabric of society. Bible words and pagan theories are put together and made to fit; and superficially considered, the result is striking and impressive, and highly demonstrative of a personal devil. It is, however, a deception and one that is very harmful to the spreading of the true gospel message.

[7D] Demons

It would be unwise to conclude the subject without a few words on "*devils*," in which some may see some evidence of a personal supernatural devil. The word is not present in new translations of the Old Testament.⁵⁶⁹

For those seeking evidence of the traditional view of the devil, the New Testament is quoted. However, a study of the texts cited by those of this traditional outlook will make the matter clear.

⁵⁶⁷ Luke 4:13 [In fact, this verse does not seem to make the theory of self-inclination untenable as the strength afforded by the victory might well have carried Jesus along for a period of time. Ed]

⁵⁶⁸ John 8:29 [The fact that Jesus always did that which pleased his Father does not necessarily mean that it was not a personal choice – a principle by which he lived. Ed]

⁵⁶⁹ Its meaning has been clarified by modern translations such as the NIV 2011.

We will start by looking at Paul's use of the word 'demon': "No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons."⁵⁷⁰ The concept of 'demons' is explained by the context which is supplied by the verse that immediately precedes the text quoted. "Do I mean that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything?" Clearly the word 'demon' in this context related to 'idol'.

The word 'demon' is not the same word as 'devil' in the original language⁵⁷¹. The Greek word '*daimon*' is currently translated as 'demon'. *Daimon* was the name given by the Greeks to beings imagined by them to exist in the air, and to have some sort of mediatory role between God and man, for good or evil. Their origin is pagan and, at first, it must seem surprising that the idea of the existence of demons is so largely interwoven with the gospel narratives, receiving apparent sanction both from Christ and his disciples.

This can only be accounted for on one principle; the Grecian theory that mental disability, epileptic disorders and other impairments, were attributable to demoniacal possession, had existed many centuries before the time of Christ, and had circulated far and wide with the Greek language, which, by New Testament times had become nearly universal. The theory necessarily stamped itself upon the common language of the time, and supplied a nomenclature for certain classes of disorders which, without reference to the particular theory in which it originated, would become current and conventional, and used by everyone as a matter of course, without involving an acceptance of the Pagan belief. On the face of it, the nomenclature would carry that belief; but in reality it would only be used as a result of the force of universal custom, without any reference to the superstition from which it originated. We have an illustration of this in the English word 'lunatic,' which originated in the idea that madness was the result of the moon's influence, but which nobody now uses to express that idea. The same principle is exemplified in other words such as 'bewitched' or 'fairy-like.' Words like these are used from time to time but nobody suggests that the person who is using such a word actually believes the fictions originally represented by them.

Christ's use of popular language did not commit him to popular delusions. In one case, he apparently recognises the god of the Philistines: "You claim that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. Now if I drive out demons through Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out?"⁵⁷² Beelzebul refers to the god of flies, a god worshipped by the Philistines of Ekron⁵⁷³, and when Christ used the name he did not seek to explain that Beelzebul was nothing other than a pagan fiction, but seems rather to assume, for the sake of argument, that Beelzebul was a reality; it was a merely an accommodation to the language of his opponents. Yet this might, with as much reason, be taken as a proof of his belief in Beelzebul, as his accommodation to popular speech on the subject of demons is taken to sanction the common idea of 'demons'.

The casting out of demons spoken of in the New Testament was nothing more or less than the curing of epileptic fits and mental disabilities, as distinct from bodily diseases. Consider the following text:

⁵⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:20-21

⁵⁷¹ Older versions of the Bible tend to use the word devil for "diabolos" and for "daimon". The latter term is actually 'demon'. Newer versions, such as the NIV, use the term "demon" rather than "devil" for "daimon".

⁵⁷² Luke 11:18-19

⁵⁷³ 2 Kings 1:6

“Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.” ... Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of the boy, and he was healed at that moment.”⁵⁷⁴

However this passage is viewed, it is clear that the boy had a mental disability which had disastrous consequences. The healing of the disability is referred to as the result of “rebuking the demon.” It was an act of healing which was as effective as others recorded elsewhere that link primarily to physical disabilities:

- “Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him.”⁵⁷⁵
- “Teacher, I brought you my son who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.”⁵⁷⁶

There is no case of demoniacal possession mentioned in the New Testament which does not have its parallel in the medical experience of the present time.

In Luke we read of the transference of demons from a demon-possessed man to pigs that happened to be nearby.⁵⁷⁷ It is only an instance in which Christ upheld the law (which prohibited the keeping of pigs) by ~~in~~ transferring the influence of ‘the demons’ from the one who was to be healed to the swine, causing their destruction. A careful reading of the text and an understanding of the concept of ‘demons’ makes it clear that the utterances and shrieks were attributable to the person who needed healing as, indeed, was the concluding conversation.

When considering demon possession, we must distinguish between critical statements of truth and rough popular forms of speech, which merely embody an aspect, and not the essence, of truth.

Chapter 8 [A] The Kingdom of God

This subject really makes up the backbone of God’s purpose with the earth and its inhabitants. Sadly, this is also a topic which is poorly understood or not understood at all as a result of traditional mainstream teaching that is astray from the clear teaching of the Scriptures. At this point it should be noted that, whatever the ‘Kingdom of God’ is, it was at the heart of the gospel preached by Jesus and the apostles as shown by the following texts:

- “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom...”⁵⁷⁸
- “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom...”⁵⁷⁹
- “After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God ... The Kingdom of God has come near...”⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁴ Matthew 17:15-18

⁵⁷⁵ Matthew 12:22

⁵⁷⁶ Mark 9:17

⁵⁷⁷ Luke 8:26-39

⁵⁷⁸ Matthew 4:23

⁵⁷⁹ Matthew 9:35

⁵⁸⁰ Mark 1:14

- ““But he (Jesus) said, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also...”⁵⁸¹
- “Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God.”⁵⁸²
- “He (Jesus) sent them (the disciples) out to proclaim the kingdom of God.”⁵⁸³
- “He (Jesus) welcomed them (the crowds) and spoke to them about the kingdom of God.”⁵⁸⁴

Although there are some voices within mainstream Christian thinking that are increasingly proclaiming those things that the Bible teaches about the Kingdom of God, it is still predominantly true to say that the majority of ministers and clergy of the present day believe that they preach the gospel in setting before the people the death of Christ. The death of Christ and its importance is undoubtedly a central element in the apostolic testimony of the gospel; but in considering whether this was the whole gospel of first century preaching, we must remember that Christ and his disciples preached the gospel *three years before the crucifixion*. Not only so, but we have evidence that the apostles, while so engaged - while they “went from village to village, proclaiming the good news (gospel)”⁵⁸⁵ - *were not aware that Christ had to suffer*. Christ told his disciples that he must “suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”⁵⁸⁶ However, it is said, “They did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.”⁵⁸⁷ The fact that, while in this state of ignorance concerning the sufferings of Christ, they “preached the gospel,” shows clearly that the gospel, as preached by them, must have been something very different from the gospel of modern times, which consists *exclusively* of the death of Christ on the cross. The difference is seen in the texts quoted above, which tell us they preached “the kingdom of God.”

The following passages prove that the Kingdom of God was also preached by the apostles after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, and that it, therefore, continues to be a valid and essential element of the gospel to this day:

- “But when they (the Samaritans) believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women.”⁵⁸⁸
- “Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.”⁵⁸⁹
- “He (Paul) witnessed to them (Jewish leaders) ... explaining about the kingdom of God.”⁵⁹⁰
- “He (Paul) proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵⁹¹
- “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again.”⁵⁹²

⁵⁸¹ Luke 4:43

⁵⁸² Luke 8:1

⁵⁸³ Luke 9:2

⁵⁸⁴ Luke 9:11

⁵⁸⁵ Luke 9:6

⁵⁸⁶ Luke 9:22

⁵⁸⁷ Luke 9:45

⁵⁸⁸ Acts 8:12

⁵⁸⁹ Acts 19:8

⁵⁹⁰ Acts 28:23

⁵⁹¹ Acts 28:31

⁵⁹² Acts 20:25

Paul was extremely zealous that *the same gospel which he preached*, should continue to be preached throughout the world. He said, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse."⁵⁹³ This is the gospel, of which he said it was the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes⁵⁹⁴ – and surely that belief embraces the teaching of the Kingdom of God, whatever that may be; for he preached it continuously to both Jews and Gentiles.

What, then, is the Kingdom of God? Different answers will be given by different groups of people. Some believe it to consist of the supremacy of God in the hearts of men - a sort of spiritual dominion existing co-extensively with secular life. Others recognise it in the ecclesiastical organisations of the day, styling them, as a whole, Christendom, or the kingdom of Christ, while another group believes it to be universal nature, continuing from generation to generation.

The holders of the first idea find support for their belief in the words of Christ, "The kingdom of God is in your midst."⁵⁹⁵ They overlook the fact that these words were addressed to the Pharisees, of whom Jesus said, "On the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."⁵⁹⁶ This is not the state of mind that exists where the kingdom of God is supposed to have its existence; and the fact that the statement in question was addressed to men of this character, shows that it did not have the significance generally claimed for it. The true translation of the verse says "in your midst" and this alters the significance of the verse. What Christ meant to intimate was his own presence among them as "the King" in answer to the mocking enquiry of the Pharisees.

A further text is also quoted in support of the first idea: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."⁵⁹⁷ This, however, only confirms one truth, without destroying another. It is true the kingdom of God when established, will be characterised by the qualities listed by Paul; but it does not therefore follow that the kingdom of God will not be a real and glorious manifestation of God's power on earth through the personal intervention of His Son from heaven.

The second idea, that the Kingdom of God is to be found in the religious systems of the day, as "the visible church," is without even the semblance of Scriptural foundation. Its existence is traceable to the times following the overthrow of Paganism, in the beginning of the fourth century when Constantine delivered Christianity from its persecutors, and exalted it for the first time to the throne of prosperity and power. In the joy of the great change, the bishops said the Kingdom of God had come in the establishment of the Church. But we must go to the New Testament - not to ecclesiastical historians - for a Scriptural idea of the Church. The Church, we find to be composed of *the heirs of the Kingdom*, waiting by grace for coming exaltation. They are not the Kingdom itself.

The third view, which regards the universe as "the kingdom of God," has more truth in it than the first or second, but still we will find as much of error. Nature is certainly the dominion of the Deity in a very exalted sense; but it is not that which is spoken of as "the kingdom of God" in the Scriptures

⁵⁹³ Galatians 1:8

⁵⁹⁴ Romans 1:16

⁵⁹⁵ Luke 17:21

⁵⁹⁶ Matthew 23:28 – the KJV says "within you" but as the author says, this is an inadequate translation of the text

⁵⁹⁷ Romans 14:17

In endeavouring to ascertain the meaning of the phrase, "The Kingdom of God," we must look at its origin. It is a Bible phrase, and originates there. We find it used in contrast to "the kingdoms on earth," which occurs three times in Daniel.⁵⁹⁸ The "kingdoms on earth" consist of all human governments put together.

The will of man is the cornerstone of every political structure that exists - the foundation of the vast system of nations that covers the face of the earth. Rarely is the legitimacy of human authority in the political world questioned. Those leaders who believe in God tend to confine his jurisdiction to 'spiritual' matters and, even then scant regard is given to his will. For the most part, they acknowledge no higher authority than themselves and assert the right to be their own masters, to dispose of this world's wealth as they think fit, and to make such laws as they please. This spirit is embodied in all the kingdoms of the world. It is the germ from which they have developed; so that in a particular and emphatic sense, human government, irrespective of its constitution, is referred to in the Bible by terms such as "the kingdoms on earth", "the kingdom of the world", or in older translations as "the kingdom of men." Such organisation is permitted by God as, currently, a necessary evil but it should never be forgotten that God oversees it with a view to his own purpose. Daniel records: "the Most High is sovereign over all the kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes."⁵⁹⁹

Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Your kingdom come."⁶⁰⁰ It has not yet come. If it had come, the kingdom of this world would not be in existence, for "the kingdoms of this world"⁶⁰¹ are to cease when the kingdom of God comes. They are to become His; and the prophets show us that when this comes to pass the government of the world will no longer be in the hands of unauthorised, ambitious, erring kings and rulers. When the kingdom of God comes, it will displace and overthrow every power in the world, and visibly establish God's power on the earth, by the hand of Christ and his saints.

For a general view of the subject, we consider a prophecy from Daniel. Daniel is a prophet whose authority rests on no less authority than that of the Lord Jesus himself. Christ quoted from Daniel when speaking to his disciples.⁶⁰² Not only does Christ specifically endorse the divine origin of the book of Daniel in this way, but he treats it as inspired, as he recognises all Scripture as the word of God, which, he said, "cannot be set aside."⁶⁰³ Daniel was a part of this Scripture, and therefore partakes of every confirmation given to the whole

Daniel includes a most important revelation.⁶⁰⁴ It is, in fact, the history of the world condensed in the form of a prophecy into a single chapter. To understand its significance we must transport ourselves into the past by more than 2,500 years, and take our stand, in imagination, with Nebuchadnezzar, the representative of the first great Babylonian dynasty. Taking him as he appears in the chapter, we find the monarch in all his glory. He is thinking of his past achievements; of his brilliant career, and the fame and the dominion which he has established. While reviewing the past, his mind turns to the future. "As your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come," said Daniel.

Would the great empire, which he had founded continue indefinitely or should someone arise after his death, and cause disruption and ruin? What would be the fate of any usurper? Would his power continue? What would the future bring?

⁵⁹⁸ Daniel 4: 17,25,32

⁵⁹⁹ Daniel 4:32

⁶⁰⁰ Matthew 6:10

⁶⁰¹ Revelation 11:15

⁶⁰² Mark 13:14

⁶⁰³ John 10:35

⁶⁰⁴ Daniel Chapter 2

In this frame of mind, the monarch fell asleep; and while he slept a dream became impressed in his memory – a dream which came directly from God. The purpose of the dream was to answer the questions that had arisen in his mind, and consequently future generations are informed of the purpose of God.

The king awoke; the dream imparted was instantly withdrawn. The king only knew that he has had a dream that was unusually impressive, but could recall its faintest outline. He was distressed. The dream has left behind the impression that it was no ordinary dream, but by no effort could he bring it back. In his distress he turned to the magicians of his court, who, according to the traditions of their order, ought to have been able to tell him the dream and the meaning. But the demand was beyond their resources. They confessed their inability to supply information that was beyond everyone's reach. The king became irritated, regarded their inability as evidence of imposture, and issued a decree for their death.

This decree involved Daniel, who was a royal captive at Nebuchadnezzar's court, and who had been assigned an honorary position among the king's wise men, because of his intelligence and culture. When Daniel heard about the decree and the reason for it, he asked for help in the hope of obtaining knowledge of the king's secret from God. That night, he and other fellow prisoners made it the subject of prayer, and that night knowledge of the king's dream and the meaning was communicated to him by God. Daniel was called in to see the king, and the king's difficulty was resolved. Notice Daniel's first statement to the king: "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come."⁶⁰⁵

Daniel described the dream. The royal dreamer saw a towering image of great size and imposing appearance. As he looked, a second independent object appeared. A stone hewn by a mysterious agency from an adjoining mountain came whizzing through the air, struck the great image on the feet with such violence, that the image was overturned, and fell in fragments. The stone growing larger, rolled among these fragments, and ground them to powder, which the wind carried away. Then the stone continued to increase in size until it became a great mountain, filling the whole earth.

Thus the vision consisted of two objects - separate and independent - and one appearing before the other. It is important to realise this. The image is first seen towering in its metallic splendour and then the stone is revealed, not as a passive co-existent, but as a directly antagonistic body. There is no affinity between the two things; the stone does not move softly up to the image, and gradually incorporate itself with its substance. It dashes at it with violence, and at once brings it to the earth in ruins; and *when* the wind has cleared away the powder, the stone grows into a great mountain filling of the whole earth. In doing so, it does not take up any of the substance of the demolished image, as that has all been driven away, but grows by its own inherent force.

Now, the significance of the dream is explained by Daniel.

"Your Majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory ... You are that head of gold. After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron – for iron breaks and smashes everything – and as iron breaks things into pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not

⁶⁰⁵ Daniel 2:28

remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay. In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever. This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands – a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.”⁶⁰⁶ (The same things are revealed in another form elsewhere in Daniel’s prophecy⁶⁰⁷, in a vision seen by Daniel himself, and interpreted for him by angels.)

In both visions, we have a double representation of the same thing. Their great prophetic teaching is, that there were to arise in the earth four successive phases or forms of universal government, and that the whole ruler-ship of man should be superseded at last by an everlasting kingdom, to be established by God. The visions are broad and comprehensive. They take the world as a whole, and present us with a general view of great successive political changes in the world's history, without touching upon the enormity of detail found in much historical writing. They were given to enable everyone to know the ultimate endpoint of history - and the destiny of the human race. The revelation was made about 2,500 years ago and it is our privilege to be able to trace its truthfulness through the course of history, and, on that basis, we should be prepared to look with confidence for its glorious consummation.

The empire established by Nebuchadnezzar was in existence at the time of the visions; we recognise it in the golden head of the image, and in the eagle-winged lion of Daniel's dream, both of which are appropriate symbols of the Babylonian power - the one representing the splendour and magnificence of the empire, the other its supremacy among the nations.

“After you,” said Daniel, “another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours” and, therefore, represented by the inferior metal - silver. This prediction was fulfilled. A rebellion took place under Darius the Mede, in the days of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, which resulted in the complete overthrow of his dynasty, and in the establishment of the Medo-Persian empire. Darius died in two years, without a lineal successor, and the vacant throne was peacefully filled by Cyrus the Persian, the rightful heir. The Persian phase continued 204 years and nine months, so that the Persian phase of the silver empire was of a very much longer duration than the Median phase of the same empire.⁶⁰⁸ This is signified by the bear in the second vision *raising itself up on one of its sides*; and in later, by a ram with two *unequal horns*, of which it is said, “one was longer than the other, and *the longer came up last*”⁶⁰⁹ that is, the Persian phase of the second empire, which was the longer, was last in order.

Darius Codomanus, the last occupant of the Medo-Persian throne, was defeated by Alexander, the Macedonian, otherwise “the Great,” who entirely overthrew the power of the Persian empire. Then came the rule of the brazen-coated Greeks: Alexander became the sole emperor of the world, establishing “the third kingdom of bronze.” His dominion did not remain intact for long.

The fourth kingdom is predicted – “strong as iron – for iron breaks and smashes everything.” In one case, it is represented by the iron legs, feet, and toes of the image, and in the other by a fourth beast with ten horns, which Daniel describes as “most terrifying, with its iron teeth and strong claws – the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left.”⁶¹⁰ Here again, history supplies complete verification of the prophecy. The Roman Empire arose into powerful existence, and

⁶⁰⁶ Daniel 2:37-45

⁶⁰⁷ Daniel 7 [Familiarity with this chapter will help in understanding some of the references in the text]

⁶⁰⁸ The text here follows Robert Robert's wording even though the historical account probably needs major revision in the light of more modern studies about the fall of Babylon.

⁶⁰⁹ Daniel 8:3

⁶¹⁰ Daniel 7:19

vanquishing the power of Greece became mistress of the world, extending her dominion beyond the limits of any former empire, and establishing one of the strongest despotic empires the world has ever seen. Her political qualities corresponded in every respect with the strong figures of speech employed. She was "strong as iron," and "most terrifying." The perception of her rulers, the rigour of her imperial administration, the military skill of her generals, the discipline of her army, the strength of her laws, and the unlimited extent of her resources, combined to make Rome the strongest piece of political machinery the world has ever seen. Her strength, however, though great and prolonged, was not everlasting. The language of the vision required that days of weakness should come. "Partly strong and partly brittle" - this is the prediction, and so the days of universal Roman power passed away.

Then came the "*partly brittle*" state. Strong first, as signified by the *iron legs* of the image, and the corporate strength of the fourth beast of Daniel's vision, she entered in her later stages the phase represented by the clay-sand-iron mixed ten-toed feet of the image, and the antagonistic horns on the head of the fourth beast. Broken at last by the repeated blows of barbaric invaders from the north and east, we see her now in a state of weakness and division. The European nations as we see them today are the latter-day divided phase of Roman power. The old imperial strength has gone. Rome no longer rules the world. She no longer controls the destinies of mankind with her most formidable dictatorial power. She is broken, divided, weakened - a disjointed, system of nations, which hardly holds together: a mixture of iron and clay of brittle cohesion, destined before long to be smashed to powder by the invincible stone from heaven.

Rome has never been superseded. She has been changed by many vicissitudes. She still lingers in weakness. The present political arrangements on the continent of Europe are but a prolongation of her existence in another form, corresponding to the requirements of the vision. They exhibit to us the last stage of the fourth kingdom, and tell us that we approach the time when a change will come over the world - when the fifth kingdom shall be manifested in destructive antagonism to all human power.

This suggests the consummation. The exactness with which this prophetic revelation has been verified in history supplies a clue and inspires entire confidence with respect to the unfulfilled part of the vision. History has brought us to the feet of the image, and the last of the four beasts; that is, to the close of the fourth great dominion, which it was predicted should arise in the earth. But what lies beyond? Nothing less than the visible intervention of divine power in human affairs.

Consider the stone: it is hewn from its bed by miraculous power; it appears on the scene *after* the image has attained complete development; it descends on the feet of the image with violence, and reduces the human-like structure to powder, which is taken away by the wind; and then the stone expands into earth-occupying dimensions. Now, what is the interpretation of all this? We could almost work the problem without help as the significance of the symbolism is so unmistakable. But let the plain language of the Scripture explain:

"In the times of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure for ever."⁶¹¹

Can there be any difference of opinion as to the meaning of this language? It is addressed to us as an interpretation; therefore, it is not enigmatical. It is a plain and literal statement, declaring the purpose of God to set aside the existing arrangement of things on earth, and this not in an unseen, quiet, gradual

⁶¹¹ Daniel 2:44

manner, such as the expected spread of a spiritual millennium; but with the visibility, violent destructiveness, and suddenness of the stone's descent upon the image. The four kingdoms have destroyed each other; but inasmuch as they were of the same (human) stock, they are not represented in the vision of the image as separate conflicting objects, but as part and parcel of the same political system. They violently and completely superseded each other, though no violence is signified in the symbol.

The only violence represented is in connection with the crisis that has not yet arrived. It is used by *the stone* against the image, as representing the entire system of human government. This would lead us to anticipate violence of an unprecedented kind, when the event signified comes to pass; and the reader will see that the wording of the interpretation is strictly corroborative of this legitimate inference. "The God of heaven will . . *crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end.*" This is a prediction of the entire disruption of all systems of human government, the complete and violent suppression of "the powers that be." This is not a "notion" or a "concept" founded upon an ambiguous symbol, but a simple reiteration of the unmistakable language of inspired interpretation. The same purpose is distinctly intimated in other parts of Scripture. For instance, in the Psalms, Christ is addressed in the following language:

- "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."⁶¹²
- "The Lord is at your right hand, he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth."⁶¹³

Isaiah, portraying this same divine interference, says

- "In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon and punished after many days. The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders – with great glory."⁶¹⁴

Hannah, on the occasion of Samuel's birth, uses the following words in her song:

- "Those who oppose the LORD will be broken. The Most High will thunder from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed (or Messiah / Christ).""⁶¹⁵

Haggai says:

- "I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms."⁶¹⁶

There are many other statements of a similar nature throughout the Scriptures but these are sufficient to show that the teaching in the book of Daniel is not isolated or exceptional, but coincides with the general tone of the messages given by the prophets. The message of the prophets destroys any idea of a millennium to be brought about by evangelical enterprise. It precludes the theory of gradual

⁶¹² Psalm 2:8-9

⁶¹³ Psalm 110: 5-6

⁶¹⁴ Isaiah 24:21-23

⁶¹⁵ 1 Samuel 2:10

⁶¹⁶ Haggai 2:21-22

enlightenment and progress at the hands of humans. It shows that all expectations of a day of perfection, resulting from the ultimate triumph of Christianity in the world will come to nothing, destined to adverse judgment at the time when the powers of this world will be overthrown.

Returning to Daniel, we find that there is not only a work of demolition, but a work of up-building and restitution. This is the most glorious feature of the divine purpose: "the God of heaven *will* set up a kingdom that *will never be destroyed*, nor will it be left to another people... but it will itself endure for ever." Let us consider, for a moment, what the setting up of a kingdom means, and we shall understand this statement better. A kingdom is not an abstraction. It is not any single thing; it is an aggregation of the elements which make it up. A 'king' is not a kingdom; neither is a country, or a group of people, or laws. A kingdom requires that they all come together to make a whole unit.

To set up a kingdom these elements must be arranged and combined. To appoint a king is not to set up a kingdom: David was anointed years before he ascended the throne: but the kingdom of David was not established until David actually became king over the realm. To portion out a territory is not to set up a kingdom; a land without a king or inhabitants is no kingdom. To set up a kingdom is to put together with various parts that make one. Now, in the testimony before us, we have it declared that it is the purpose of God to do this very thing - to organise a kingdom of His own in place of those which now occupy the earth, after they shall have been swept out of the way. Therefore, we are led to expect, as the inevitable result of Bible teaching, that when the fourth kingdom (the one in which we live) will have been abolished by God, a new order of things will visibly arise in the earth, in which there will be a God-appointed king (supported by those who minister to him), a God-selected people, a God-chosen land, and God-given laws - altogether constituting the 'kingdom of God' on the earth. Accordingly, we find that each of these elements is separately provided for in the course of prophecy. On the subject of the king, Daniel says:

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man (KJV like the Son of Man), coming with the clouds of heaven ... He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."⁶¹⁷

Here we have an explanation of chapter 2:44. But the main point to be noted is that Daniel supplies us with the first element of the kingdom, the king, called "the Anointed One, the ruler."⁶¹⁸ This is Jesus Christ, spoken of in Revelation as the "King of kings, and Lord of lords."⁶¹⁹

Daniel also supplies us with information about those chosen to minister to the King:

"Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High."⁶²⁰

These are referred to by Peter as "a chosen people, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, God's special possession,"⁶²¹ and in Revelation they are prospectively represented as singing, "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on earth."⁶²² In these, we recognise the

⁶¹⁷ Daniel 7:13-14

⁶¹⁸ Daniel 9:25 Anointed One = Messiah

⁶¹⁹ Revelation 19:16

⁶²⁰ Daniel 7:27

⁶²¹ 1 Peter 2:9

⁶²² Revelation 5:10 (KJV: "kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth")

brothers and sisters of Christ who are faithful to the end, and counted worthy to inherit the kingdom of God.

Writing to such, Paul says that God, “calls (us) into his kingdom and glory”⁶²³ and, again, “Do you not know that the Lord’s people will judge the world?”⁶²⁴ Therefore those who will minister to the King in the future age are men and women of this and all past ages who do the will of God, and hope for His salvation. They are being taken out from among the Gentiles as a people for His name. They are “called to His kingdom and glory,” and their citizenship is, therefore, in heaven. In this world they do not have “an enduring city” but look for “the city that is to come.”⁶²⁵ They are not known or recognised by the world. They walk in obscurity; they are among the humble of the earth; they are without name, standing, or wealth, but they are, nevertheless, the greatest among the children of men. They are destined to be ministers in a perfect, endless age. They are to be ministers of light rather than rulers in this dark world.⁶²⁶ The time will come when God will have “brought down rulers from their thrones” and “lifted up the humble.”⁶²⁷ What a privilege to be among the latter, even if it does mean lack of recognition in this present world!

The subjects of the kingdom are clearly identified with the Jews to whom Moses said:

“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”⁶²⁸

Although the Jews have been gathered in part from their dispersion⁶²⁹, many remain scattered throughout the world. It is the Jewish nation that will make up the subject-people of the Messiah when he returns. This will be referred to later but is mentioned now as to complete the picture of the kingdom of God.

It is necessary to add, In order to prevent misunderstanding, that the subject-inhabitants of the earth in the future age are not restricted to the Jews. They also comprise “all nations and peoples of every language”^{630 631} The Jewish nation, once restored under the ruler-ship of the Messiah, seems to offer a leading role in the things of the age to come:

“In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, “Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.”⁶³²

⁶²³ 1 Thessalonians 2:12

⁶²⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:2

⁶²⁵ Hebrews 13:14

⁶²⁶ Ephesians 6:12

⁶²⁷ Luke 1:52

⁶²⁸ Deuteronomy 7:6

⁶²⁹ After the initial addresses were given in 1862 in which the author spoke of God’s purpose to re-gather Israel as a nation, the Zionist movement of the late 19th century and subsequent political events resulted in the return of the Jews and the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948. After the Six Day War in 1967, the Jews re-established Jerusalem as the capital of the restored Jewish state.

⁶³⁰ Daniel 7:14

⁶³¹ The author, in his original addresses, indicated that the relationship of the Jewish people in the Kingdom Age to the other people who would be within the Kingdom could be compared to the political arrangements of his day – a chief power that administered others in the colonial style. There would appear to be a leadership role for the Jewish state but it is difficult to offer dogmatic statements or predictions about these matters. Zechariah 8:23 seems to indicate a leading role for the Jewish people. [Other people may consider the reference to “Jew” in this passage to refer to those who are of the faith of Abraham in that age – and modern translations such as the NIV indicate ‘one Jew’ in particular – this reference could be to Christ. Ed]

⁶³² Zechariah 8:23 [Our minds turn to the healing brought to the sick lady in the gospel who took hold of the hem of his garment
[Ed]

Micah, in a section entitled, ‘The Lord’s plan’ (NIV) says:

“As for you, watchtower of the flock, stronghold of Daughter Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to Daughter Jerusalem.”⁶³³

The fourth element of the kingdom – the land - is also frequently mentioned in the Scriptures, and often in such a way as to identify it directly with God's future purpose. It is repeatedly spoken of as “my land.”⁶³⁴ Moses says of the land: “It is the land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.”⁶³⁵ This was the Holy Land⁶³⁶, the land promised as a personal everlasting possession to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁶³⁷ The Jews occupied it under divine covenant for many centuries, but were ultimately expelled from it in shame, because they defiled it. For many centuries the land lay desolate and desecrated but, in accordance with the time⁶³⁸ that God had indicated, the time when he will take “vengeance on his enemies” and restore Israel to their own homeland.⁶³⁹ Zechariah says: “The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem.”⁶⁴⁰

The prophet, Ezekiel, speaks of the future age:

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: on the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, “This land that was laid waste has become like the Garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.””⁶⁴¹

The laws by which the future Kingdom will be governed are indicated by Isaiah:

“Many peoples will come and say, “Come let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach as his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The Law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.”⁶⁴²

Here then is a summary of the Scripture teaching, in which the five constituent elements of the kingdom of God are clearly shown. This kingdom is not yet in existence: such a proposition is self-evident. Its existence does not commence until human government is entirely abolished. Not until the great image - now standing upon its ten-toed feet in Europe - is broken to pieces, and blown away “like chaff on a threshing-floor in the summer.”⁶⁴³ Only then will the stone expand to fill the whole earth. That stone has not yet descended; Jesus Christ has not yet returned from the far country to which he has gone (heaven), to have

⁶³³ Micah 4:8

⁶³⁴ Examples include: Isaiah 14:25; Jeremiah 2:7; 16:18; Ezekiel 36:5, 38:16.

⁶³⁵ Deuteronomy 11:12

⁶³⁶ Of which a part is the state of Israel today [Ed]

⁶³⁷ Genesis 13:14; 26:3; 28:13

⁶³⁸ Deuteronomy 32:43

⁶³⁹ At the time of writing this appears to be the case (although there is always the possibility that the partial restoration of the present time may not necessarily be permanent or the last restoration. Ed)

⁶⁴⁰ Zechariah 2:12 [It would see that 1967 when Israel claimed back Jerusalem in totality may be a part of this prophecy. Ed]

⁶⁴¹ Ezekiel 36:33-3 [The current restoration may be a precursor to the complete fulfilment when the Lord returns. Ed]

⁶⁴² Isaiah 2:3-4

⁶⁴³ Daniel 2:35

himself appointed king and then return.⁶⁴⁴ He is waiting for the appointed time. When that arrives, he will be seen clearly and the “stone the builders rejected” will have “become the cornerstone”⁶⁴⁵, “anyone on whom it falls will be crushed”.⁶⁴⁶ At that time he will wage war with true justice⁶⁴⁷ and, having overcome all opposition the prophecy will be fulfilled that said, “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”⁶⁴⁸

A glorious reign, far more wonderful than the most perfect government that has ever been conceived by man will begin. One king at the head will possess unsurpassable wisdom equal to all the demands of universal dominion - his mercy untainted by selfishness and unblemished by weakness, and his power omnipotent for the enforcement of his will. An immortal King will reign before whom joyful, confident people will thank God for his righteous ruler. His government will be firm, direct, and absolute - no vacillation, no doubtfulness and no indecision. “The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD – and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”⁶⁴⁹

Absolute authority, backed by omnipotence, will rule mankind with simplicity and vigour. Righteous law, emanating from its legitimate Source, will be enforced with resistless authority. Innocence will be protected, poverty banished, greed restrained, arrogance brought down, and the rights of all secured in everything. The King's government will be administered by the King's associates, his immortal, incorruptible, perfected brothers and sisters, who having undergone previous moral preparation in circumstances of great trial, will have been changed to be like the glorious body of their Lord and Master. The power will be permanently in their hands, not by democratic right or privilege, but by royal commission of the true type. The power of the people will be a myth in those days. All assertion of political birthright will be suppressed. An iron administration, with superhuman powers at their command, will vigorously put down rebellion in every form, and maintain the only government that will have blessed the world with peace and righteousness in the name of divine right. Then shall the glory of the Lord cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Then shall be fulfilled the words of the angels: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”⁶⁵⁰

⁶⁴⁴ Luke 19:12-27

⁶⁴⁵ Matthew 21:42

⁶⁴⁶ Luke 20:18

⁶⁴⁷ Revelation 19:11

⁶⁴⁸ Revelation 11:15

⁶⁴⁹ Isaiah 11:2-4

⁶⁵⁰ Luke 2:14

8 [B] The Kingdom of God and our Salvation

"Go," said Jesus, "into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved."⁶⁵¹ Belief was made the first condition of salvation, that is, belief in the things set forth in the proclamation of the gospel which was the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The things which comprise the gospel message can be seen from the words of the apostles as they preached that gospel. The following texts show that their preaching was based in and around the Scriptures of that time, namely, the Old Testament.

- "He witnessed to them ... explaining about the Kingdom of God, and from the law of Moses and the Prophets, he tried to persuade them about Jesus."⁶⁵²
- "I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen."⁶⁵³
- "I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors ... I believe everything in accordance with the law and that is written in the Prophets."⁶⁵⁴
- "As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures."⁶⁵⁵

Previous to the death of Christ, the crucifixion formed no part of the Gospel. Subsequently, however, it can be viewed as central to the things concerning the kingdom of God. This appears from the distinction observed in the phrases by which the preaching of the apostles is designated at these two different periods. In the gospel narratives, the proclamation of the gospel is described as simply relating to "the kingdom of God," whereas, in the Acts of the Apostles, the phrase used is: "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ."⁶⁵⁶ The things concerning the name of Christ include the teaching as to how the sons of Adam may put on "the only name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."⁶⁵⁷ This involved the teaching about Christ's sacrifice – as, had he not "been delivered to death for our sins" and "raised to life for our justification,"⁶⁵⁸ it would have been impossible for us to have "put on his name," since his name was provided for this purpose. This element of "mystery from which true godliness springs,"⁶⁵⁹ was added to the things concerning the kingdom of God, in order to make them of practical value. The good news of the kingdom would have been no gospel to us unless a way had been opened up for our personal participation in the glory that is to be revealed.

This way was opened up in the death and resurrection of Christ. The announcement of this fact, with explanation as to how we might enter this "way," naturally became a part of the good news. One part was incomplete without the other. The only difference between the gospel preached by Christ before his death, and that proclaimed after his ascension, was that the latter included teaching concerning the name of Christ, in addition to the subject matter of the other. There was no alteration; there was simply addition. The kingdom was presented for belief and hope; the sacrifice, for faith with a view to the hope. Both went together. They were never disjointed. United, they constituted the one gospel preached to the world by the apostles of Christ, as the means of human salvation.

⁶⁵¹ Mark 16:15-16

⁶⁵² Acts 28:23

⁶⁵³ Acts 26:22

⁶⁵⁴ Acts 24:14

⁶⁵⁵ Acts 17.2 [At that time there were no other scriptures except for the Old Testament]

⁶⁵⁶ Acts 8:12

⁶⁵⁷ Acts 4:12

⁶⁵⁸ Romans 4:25

⁶⁵⁹ 1 Timothy 3:16

It is a remarkable fact that one hears so very little of the first element of the gospel – the coming kingdom of God – among many who adhere to the mainstream view of Christian teaching. There has been a great departure from the original examples of preaching left on record for us in the New Testament. Mainstream Christian teaching still tends to focus on the notion of “heaven-going” at death - as if it were promised by God. Consequently, where Christian lives have focus, many make ‘being good enough’ – by which they frequently mean “not doing anything too awful” their purpose in life. Thus they neglect the teaching of the Bible regarding the Kingdom of God and the gospel of God remains hidden to them.

The practical teaching of the New Testament contains much teaching about the kingdom of God. We begin with the exhortation of Jesus himself – “Seek first his (the Father’s) kingdom and his righteousness.”⁶⁶⁰ Here are plain words – yet words whose meaning is usually misunderstood, and often neglected, by those who proclaim a different gospel. Among mainstream teaching little, if anything is heard about the coming Kingdom of God – as traditional teaching suggests that people spend their lives in preparation for a place in the ‘skies’, in ‘heaven’ so as to avoid, among those who still believe in it, eternity in hell.

Christ not only warned people to “seek first his kingdom,” but he taught his disciples to pray for its coming, saying, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”⁶⁶¹ Again, although the Lord’s Prayer is used as a form of devotional exercise among many mainstream Christians, yet privately few seem inclined to pray for its coming in the sense in which the Bible teaches.

Christ has said, “Truly, I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”⁶⁶² This solemn statement indicates a certain degree of exclusion against all who do not humbly and joyfully believe in the good news about the kingdom of God. The message denies life to the doubter irrespective of any excellence of personal character. It excludes any who are so engrossed in business and pleasures of this life, as to be indifferent to the future, blindly trusting that all will be right if lives are lived with good and honest intent. It excludes the pseudo-liberal man of the world, who, in the supreme wisdom of a scientific age, talks contemptuously about “theology.”

But it equally excludes another group who think they have nothing to fear. It excludes those of mainstream opinion who do not accept the teaching of the kingdom of God as little children. The teaching about the kingdom of God is clear – God will send Jesus back to the earth to set up his kingdom.

Let us remind ourselves of the essential facts about the Kingdom of God:

- Christ will return to the earth again⁶⁶³
- Israel will be restored⁶⁶⁴
- The humble will be elevated, the proud brought low⁶⁶⁵
- Earthly kings will be humbled, the Lord Jesus will reign and all will praise him and the Father⁶⁶⁶
- Christ will be established as universal King in Jerusalem⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁰ Matthew 6:33

⁶⁶¹ Matthew 6:10

⁶⁶² Luke 18:17

⁶⁶³ Acts 3:20

⁶⁶⁴ Amos 9:11-14

⁶⁶⁵ Luke 1:52

⁶⁶⁶ Isaiah 24:21; Psalm 72:8-11; Daniel 7:14; Psalm 2:9

⁶⁶⁷ Isaiah 24:23; Jeremiah 3:17; Micah 4:2-7

- Christ will give power to those whom he accepts and who will serve him and minister to others⁶⁶⁸
- The nation of Israel will be re-gathered⁶⁶⁹
- In the Kingdom Age Israel will be a glorious nation, served and honoured by all⁶⁷⁰

Let us seek to receive the kingdom of God with the meekness and gratitude of a little child, that ultimately, we may hear these words of welcome addressed to us, "Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."⁶⁷¹

In the forty days after his passion, when speaking to the disciples, Jesus spoke "about the kingdom of God."⁶⁷² In this he sets an example for all those who would seek to follow in his footsteps.

Our admission to the kingdom of God requires of us that we do the will of God in our lives. Matthew says, "Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven"⁶⁷³, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."⁶⁷⁴ Belief must be accompanied by an energetic 'doing' of the will of God for "wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God."⁶⁷⁵ "Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."⁶⁷⁶ "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"⁶⁷⁷

James presents another side of the picture: "Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"⁶⁷⁸ Unfortunately wealth does not often come without circumstances which are unfavourable to spiritual perception. For this reason, a rich person has very little prospect of ever becoming an heir of the kingdom of God - not simply as a result of being wealthy but because he becomes subject through them, to many influences of an unfavourable character. It is different with the poor. They may take comfort in the good news of the gospel. It is to the poor that the gospel is pre-eminently preached and it is the poor who find the gospel more attractive as in this life they have little to comfort them. Their days are spent in labour. With difficulty they seek to provide honestly for themselves and for those in their care and remain strangers to the elegances and luxuries by which the rich sweeten their lives. They are usually held in small reputation, have few friends and few pleasures.⁶⁷⁹ To them the gospel is good news indeed: it promises them deliverance from all the imperfections and drawbacks of the present life, and possession of riches and honour in the kingdom of God - far greater and more enduring, and certainly not less real than those which are now inherited by the great of the earth; and in the affectionate belief of this promise, and the moral elevation and spiritual improvement which the

⁶⁶⁸ Revelation 2:26-27; Revelation 5:9-10; Psalm 149:5,9; Daniel 7:27

⁶⁶⁹ Ezekiel 37:21-22 [As previously cited, this process of re-gathering would seem to have started in the establishment of the political state of Israel. Ed]

⁶⁷⁰ Zephaniah 3:19-20; Isaiah 61:5,7; Isaiah 60:10,14

⁶⁷¹ Matthew 25:34

⁶⁷² Acts 1:3

⁶⁷³ The Kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same thing; because God who sets it up is the God of heaven, and the kingdom when established will be a kingdom that will have come from heaven to earth

⁶⁷⁴ Matthew 7:21

⁶⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:9

⁶⁷⁶ Matthew 7:13

⁶⁷⁷ Mark 10:23

⁶⁷⁸ James 2:5

⁶⁷⁹ [These addresses were given in the mid nineteenth century when there were greater divisions between the rich and the poor – yet the principles still maintain validity. Thus in the 21st century we see a marked growth in Christianity in many of the poorer nations on earth – and the appeal remains much as it was in Jesus' day when he asked his disciples to go into the highways and byways to call people to his kingdom. Ed]

contemplation of it induces, they are blessed with the peace of God that exceeds all understanding - a peace that the world does not know - a peace that the world cannot give and cannot take away.

The fact that mainstream Christian teaching has moved away from the clear teaching of the New Testament should not surprise us. Paul, himself, predicted that this would happen:

“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine (teaching). Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”⁶⁸⁰

This prediction has proved itself true as the clear teaching of the Bible has been exchanged for teaching of non-Biblical origins. Let Peter conclude by offering each divine advice: “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”⁶⁸¹

Chapter 9 God’s Promises to the Patriarchs

“For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, so that the promises to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”⁶⁸²

The text above shows that there is a connection between the mission of Christ and that which is referred to as “the promises to the patriarchs”.

If, as Paul says, Christ came to “so that the promises to the patriarchs might be confirmed,” it is obviously important that we know something about these promises, which, Paul incidentally declares, belong to the Jews:

“...those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.”⁶⁸³

More specifically, he says:

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds”, meaning many people, but “and to your seed”, meaning one person, who is Christ. ... If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”⁶⁸⁴

From this, it is clear that, if we wish to find out more about “the promises”, we must refer to the history of Abraham which is recorded for us in the Old Testament. In response to God’s command, Abraham left Chaldea and settled in Canaan. God promised him a large family and that he would make his descendants into a great nation in the country where he was then a stranger. Those who have read the Bible may well know that it was from and through the lineage of Abraham that Christ, the Saviour of the world, should come, and that, in this way, through the preaching of the gospel, all nations should ultimately be blessed. However, many of those who

⁶⁸⁰ 2 Timothy 4:3-4

⁶⁸¹ 2 Peter 1:11

⁶⁸² Romans 15:8-9

⁶⁸³ Romans 9:3-4

⁶⁸⁴ Galatians 3:16,29

read the Bible have no idea that the promises made to Abraham would form the basis of the Christian faith, or the subject-matter of the gospel. Many of those who read the Bible and hold a mainstream Christian outlook admit there were promises but, for the most part, they consider them a thing of the past without relevance for Christians today. They consider the promises as applying only to relatively insignificant events in Jewish history.

Few mainstream Christians have a clear understanding of the relevance of the “promises made to the patriarchs,” in which they can hope to have any personal interest, or from which, indeed, Abraham himself would have any future benefit. They have no idea that they themselves or anyone else might “inherit the promises” made nearly 4,000 years ago to the patriarchs. They regard the promises as relating to the past, a part of the Jewish dispensation⁶⁸⁵ which has vanished away. The thing to be looked for from their point of view, is the thing that, in their opinion, has happened to the fathers themselves and to all righteous men ever since - an event before which all people from all nations are equal, promises or no promises - and that is, going to heaven when death comes, provided they are ‘righteous’.

They now consider the ‘promised land’ to be heaven and suggest that their “souls” have “departed to glory,” when death occurs. They consider that the promises made to them have been fully realised. It is evident that this understanding is incorrect. Paul says:

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth”⁶⁸⁶

This confirms that the patriarchs died without receiving what had been promised - in direct opposition to orthodox Jewish belief which says they died and *thus* received the promises, being once and for all time “safe in the promised land.” Paul repeats the statement at the end of the letter:

“There were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”⁶⁸⁷

What were the promises made to the fathers, the substance of which they did not receive, and which Paul declares they will not receive until the totality of the chosen ones “from every tribe and language and people and nation”⁶⁸⁸ is completed? In answer to this, we assert that they relate to matters forming the very essence and foundation of the salvation offered through Christ. We do so on the strength of the following texts:

⁶⁸⁵ The destruction of the Temple in AD 70 signified the complete end of the Jewish dispensation.

⁶⁸⁶ Hebrews 11:13

⁶⁸⁷ Hebrews 11:39-40

⁶⁸⁸ Revelation 5:9

- “And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I (Paul) am on trial today.”⁶⁸⁹
- “He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants for ever, just as he promised our ancestors.”⁶⁹⁰
- “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago), salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us – to show mercy to our ancestors and to remember his holy covenant, the oath he swore to our father Abraham.”⁶⁹¹
- “You will be faithful to Jacob, and show love to Abraham, as you pledged on oath to our ancestors in days long ago.”⁶⁹²

These passages show that the promises made to the fathers were unfulfilled at the time of writing in the first century - that is, *nearly two thousand years after they were made - and further*, that they have reference to the things to be accomplished, through Christ, instead of having, as so many religious people suppose, been fulfilled in Jewish history.

In order to understand the subject more fully, let us look at the promises themselves. As has been shown, Paul made it clear that the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed and so it is necessary to turn to the Old Testament to establish greater detail.

“The LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed by you.””⁶⁹³

“The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look round from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give it to you and your offspring (seed) for ever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”⁶⁹⁴

“I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed.”⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁸⁹ Acts 26:6

⁶⁹⁰ Luke 1:51-55

⁶⁹¹ Luke 1:68-73

⁶⁹² Micah 7:20

⁶⁹³ Genesis 12:1-3

⁶⁹⁴ Genesis 13:14-17

⁶⁹⁵ Genesis 22:16-18

Paul calls Isaac and Jacob “heirs with him (Abraham) of the same promise”⁶⁹⁶ It will therefore lay the foundation more securely if we quote the promises made to them, which, it will be seen are, as Paul’s words lead us to understand, identical with those made to Abraham:

“The Lord appeared to Isaac and said . . . “Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.”⁶⁹⁷

“May God Almighty bless you (Jacob) and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham.”⁶⁹⁸

“I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you (Jacob) And your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All people on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring (seed).”⁶⁹⁹

Now, in analysing these “promises made to the patriarchs,” it will be found that they consist of several distinct items, which will be listed for the sake of clarity. The consideration of each separately will enable us to see the truth of the proposition that these promises will only be fulfilled when Christ, having returned from heaven, and raised his people from the dead, reigns in Israel as universal ruler, to whom all nations will bow in awesome allegiance.

1) That *Abraham's seed should become a great and mighty nation*.- This has not been fulfilled in the sense of the promise. It is true that Abraham's descendants, according to the flesh, have multiplied and filled a large place in history; but this is not the only event contemplated in the promise, as is evident from Paul's writings⁷⁰⁰. The natural Jews from the day that they complained about Moses and Aaron, in the wilderness, until now, when they reject Jesus (the prophet like unto Moses), have always been a stubborn, disobedient generation, walking in the ways of the unenlightened, persecuting and murdering the servants of God sent to bring them into the right relationship with Yahweh. This is not the “descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky” great nation that was promised to Abraham; it would be no blessing to surround a man with such a race of flesh-born rebels. Paul says, “For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” In other words, it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.”⁷⁰¹

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob pleased God by their faith and obedience: those of their descendants who were not of this disposition, were not really “of Israel”, although they inherited their flesh and blood, and, therefore, were not “counted as the offspring.” They were not counted as part of the great nation promised to Abraham. The great majority of the Jews have been in this group, and are, therefore, rejected. Where, then, does the promised race of children come from? One part will be made up of the Jewish nation after the flesh; for in all their history, there has been a remnant,

⁶⁹⁶ Hebrews 11:9

⁶⁹⁷ Genesis 26:2-3

⁶⁹⁸ Genesis 28:3-4

⁶⁹⁹ Genesis 28:13-14

⁷⁰⁰ Romans 9:6-8

⁷⁰¹ Romans 9:6-8, as in footnote 696

that were truly Abrahamic, not only in blood, but in faith and obedience: these are “the children of the promise,” and will be raised at the coming of Christ. The other part will come from the Gentiles, who, after ages of darkness, were visited in the apostolic era, with an invitation to become adopted into the family of Abraham. This fact is clearly stated in the following texts:

- “God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles”⁷⁰²
- “. . . the mystery made known to me by revelation . . . which was never known to people in other generations . . . that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”⁷⁰³
- “And he (Abraham) received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.”⁷⁰⁴

Therefore those who embrace the faith of Abraham, and become circumcised by putting on Christ in baptism, become the children of Abraham, and heirs of the promises made to him. This is Paul's testimony:

“For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. . . . If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”⁷⁰⁵

Of those who have been baptised and are faithful, Paul says, “Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac are children of promise.”⁷⁰⁶

This group of people is included in the promise made to Abraham but the point of time at which they are inherit the promise is not the present time, when they are a weak and scattered family, and the great bulk of them are in the grave. It is the time referred to in John when Christ will “bring them together and make them one”⁷⁰⁷ and in Thessalonians, Paul speaks of “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him.”⁷⁰⁸ Speaking of this time, Jesus says:

“I say to you that many shall come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.”⁷⁰⁹

When this takes place, Abraham will see for himself the fulfilment of the promise that he should become a great and mighty nation, a people more numerous than the stars in the sky; his children of the royal order, raised from the dead of all ages, will be “a great multitude that no one could count”⁷¹⁰) and his descendants according to the flesh, disciplined and renewed as a nation will be the mightiest people on the globe, righteous, and inheritors of the land⁷¹¹, having “praise and honour in every land where they have suffered shame.”⁷¹² This will all occur when the Kingdom of God is established.

⁷⁰² Acts 15:14

⁷⁰³ Ephesians 3:3-6

⁷⁰⁴ Romans 4:11-12

⁷⁰⁵ Galatians 3:27,29

⁷⁰⁶ Galatians 4:28

⁷⁰⁷ John 11:52

⁷⁰⁸ 2 Thessalonians 2:1

⁷⁰⁹ Matthew 8:11

⁷¹⁰ Revelation 7:9

⁷¹¹ Isaiah 60:21

⁷¹² Zephaniah 3:19

2) *That Abraham and his seed should receive possession of the land indicated in the promise, namely, the whole land of Canaan from the Nile to the Euphrates – the land where he lived as a foreigner.*⁷¹³ That this part of the promise is unfulfilled is clear for all to see. First, Moses records that Abraham had to buy a field from the original possessors of the country, so as to bury his dead, and said to them, “I am a foreigner and a stranger among you.”⁷¹⁴ Secondly, we read in Hebrews, “He made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country.”⁷¹⁵ Thirdly, Stephen says, “He (God) gave him (Abraham) no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants would possess the land.”⁷¹⁶ If Abraham was a foreigner in the land of promise, as in a strange country, and did not receive any inheritance in it, not as much as to be able to set his foot upon, surely, so far as he is concerned, the promise is unfulfilled. If so, it remains to be fulfilled at a future time.

Some suggest that the promise has been fulfilled in Abraham's descendants; the Jews possessed the country for many centuries, and this was the fulfilment of the promise. The answer to this is found in Galatians:

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds’, meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed’, meaning one person who is Christ. What I mean is this; the law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.”⁷¹⁷

Paul, writing in Romans says:

“It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes through faith. For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless.”⁷¹⁸

The Jews occupied the land *under the law of Moses*, which stipulated in the most stringent terms that their occupation should depend upon their conformity to its requirements.⁷¹⁹ Their inheritance of the country was totally “of the law.” The law stated that provided that if they kept its regulations, they would live in the land in prosperity but if they broke it, they should be dispersed among the nations in suffering. History records how continually they failed to keep the regulations of the law, and how repeatedly they were subject to foreign ruler-ship and captivity as a direct consequence of having failed to keep it, and how at last, when hopeless rebellion had established itself in the whole house of Israel, culminating in the rejection of “the prophet like Moses,” the Romans came and “took away their place and nation,” scattering them in the widest dispersion they had known.

It is impossible in the face of these facts to maintain that the Jewish occupation of Palestine (Israel) was a fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham: for Paul says, in the words quoted, that the promise was not to Abraham or his seed *through the law*, but through the righteousness of faith. God gave it to Abraham by free and unconditional promise. Therefore, Paul says, if those who are of the law be heirs, *the promise is worthless.*⁷²⁰ It follows that the promise that Abraham

⁷¹³ Genesis 17:8

⁷¹⁴ Genesis 23:4

⁷¹⁵ Hebrews 11:9

⁷¹⁶ Acts 7:5

⁷¹⁷ Galatians 3:16-18

⁷¹⁸ Romans 4:13-14

⁷¹⁹ Deuteronomy 28:15-68

⁷²⁰ Romans 4:14

and Christ should possess the land of Israel (Canaan) is wholly unfulfilled, but will have its fulfilment when Abraham rises from the dead to enter the kingdom of God. A consideration of the following text will show this:

"By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. . . . All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them at a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had an opportunity to return. Instead they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one."⁷²¹

Abraham, Paul says, was called to go into a country *which he would later receive as his inheritance*. What country was this? In Genesis we are given the answer:

"So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him . . . and they set out for the land of Canaan and arrived there."⁷²²

To further establish this fact, we will quote the words of Stephen:

"Leave your (Abraham) country and your people," God said, "and go to the land I will show you." So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living.⁷²³

The land which Abraham was "later to receive as his inheritance," was the land inhabited by the Jews in the days of the apostles, that area we call "The Holy Land". He lived in it as a stranger, with Isaac and Jacob, to whom the promise of possession was afterwards renewed. The period of time that he lived there was the result of faith. Had this not been the case, and finding as years rolled on that he was not given possession of the land, but left to wander without his inheritance, he would have returned in disgust to his native country, and spent his days with his family. Paul says he and his family "would have had an opportunity to return"; but they did not take the opportunity, steadfastly remaining in the country to which they had been commanded to travel. Paul says the reason for this was, that they "saw them at a distance and welcomed them."⁷²⁴ Even though everything seemed to be against them, they believed that, in time, God would fulfil His words, and give them the promised possession, and believing this, they were able to set aside the natural desire to go back to a country where they would have had both inheritance and friends, but in going back to which, they would have forfeited the promises. They saw that the thing promised was more valuable than "the country from where they had come." They looked for a city that had foundations, and desired a heavenly country. The country from which they came out was without foundation - based upon flesh, which is of earth, earthy. It was ephemeral and passing

⁷²¹ Hebrews 11: 8-16

⁷²² Genesis 12:4-5

⁷²³ Acts 7:3-4

⁷²⁴ Hebrews 11:13

away: as John says: "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives for ever."⁷²⁵

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob believed that the promises were a guarantee of future heavenly order of things. As God was the 'founder' of the promises, the promises had stable "foundations" – foundations that were unchangeable. Consequently, they agreed to live as strangers in a foreign land, waiting in faith for the things promised. They saw that the promises were "far off"; they, therefore, in faith, accepted exile, confessing themselves, for the duration of their lives, strangers and foreigners on the earth. The Scripture says that they did not receive the promises⁷²⁶, and, therefore, they must rise to receive them. When? At the time of judgment as described in Revelation:

"The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets."⁷²⁷

The context of this chapter⁷²⁸ is the time when the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah. It is the time mentioned by Paul in the following words: "Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge . . ."⁷²⁹ When Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob come from their graves to judgment and reward, they will "receive the land for their inheritance," according to the promise. On doing this, they will inherit the kingdom of God, for the kingdom of God is to be established there. Therefore, Jesus says to the Pharisees:

"There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God."⁷³⁰

If anyone doubts that this will be in the very land promised to the fathers, and in which they wandered as strangers, here are further texts from the prophets:

- "The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem."⁷³¹
- "But on Mount Zion will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance. . . . This company of Israelite exiles who are in Canaan will possess the land as far as Zarephath; the exiles from Jerusalem who are in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev. Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's."⁷³²
- ""In that day", declares the LORD, "I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. I will make the lame my remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and for ever. As for you, watchtower of the flock, stronghold of Daughter Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to Daughter Jerusalem."⁷³³

⁷²⁵ 1 John 2:17

⁷²⁶ Hebrews 11:13

⁷²⁷ Revelation 11:18 [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were prophets – as confirmed in Psalm 105:15]

⁷²⁸ Revelation 11 e.g. 11:15

⁷²⁹ 2 Timothy 4:1

⁷³⁰ Luke 13:28-29

⁷³¹ Zechariah 2:12

⁷³² Obadiah 17,20,21

⁷³³ Micah 4:6-8

- “I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.”⁷³⁴
- “Then the LORD was jealous for his land and took pity on his people.”⁷³⁵
- “Do not be afraid, land of Judah; be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things.”⁷³⁶
- “It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually upon it from the beginning of the year to its end.”⁷³⁷
- “The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it. They will say, ‘This land that was laid waste has become like the Garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.’ Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.”⁷³⁸
- “The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her desert places like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.”⁷³⁹
- “No longer will they call you Deserter, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (my delight is in her), and your land Beulah (married); for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married.”⁷⁴⁰
- “Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one travelling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations.”⁷⁴¹

When these things, foretold in the prophetic texts above, pass out of the domain of prophecy into that of accomplished fact, the “city with foundations” and the “heavenly country,” which were the objects of faith to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the subject of promise to them, will be realised. The Scriptural meaning of these phrases will then be exemplified. Those who hold a traditional mainstream view and who seek to make them apply to “heaven above the skies” overlook the fact that the promises related to the land in which the patriarchs sojourned. Israel will be a heavenly country when Christ, having re-established the kingdom of David, rules in it as king over the whole earth: and his kingdom will be “a city with foundations,” as it will stand upon a rock which no further rebellion will be able to shake.

It will be noticed that Abraham's “seed” is joined with Abraham himself in the promises. Paul says that this seed is Christ⁷⁴², and all who are Christ's⁷⁴³. This shows that Christ and the saints are destined, in company with Abraham, to possess and occupy “the land of Israel.” It is the purpose of God to rule humanity by Christ and his people and it is appropriate that they should have a centre of operation somewhere on the earth. Scriptures foresees this as the city of the great King, Jerusalem.

Israel is situated at the meeting point of Europe, Asia and Africa. It is the natural centre of universal government; both for commerce and law-giving. In addition to this, it is the locality that

⁷³⁴ Leviticus 26:42

⁷³⁵ Joel 2:18

⁷³⁶ Joel 2:21

⁷³⁷ Deuteronomy 11:12

⁷³⁸ Ezekiel 36:34-36

⁷³⁹ Isaiah 51:3

⁷⁴⁰ Isaiah 62:4

⁷⁴¹ Isaiah 60:15

⁷⁴² Galatians 3:16

⁷⁴³ Galatians 3:29

has witnessed all God's operations in the past, including the crucifixion of His Son, and the sending forth of the gospel. How fitting then, that it should be the place chosen for the resumption of His great and mighty acts. The scene of Christ's humiliation will, so appropriately, witness his exaltation as king of all the earth? These thoughts, however, are relatively insignificant when compared to the testimony of Scripture:

- “The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”⁷⁴⁴
- “Those the LORD has rescued will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”⁷⁴⁵
- “Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her, all you who mourn over her. For you will be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.”⁷⁴⁶
- “Look on Zion, the city of our festivals; your eyes will see Jerusalem, a peaceful abode, a tent that will not be moved; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its ropes broken. For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our King; it is he who will save us.”⁷⁴⁷
- “On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces . . . In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah”⁷⁴⁸
- “The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent from their sins.”⁷⁴⁹
- “At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD.”⁷⁵⁰
- “When you allot the land as an inheritance, you are to present to the LORD a portion of the land as a sacred district, 25,000 cubits long and 20,000 cubits wide; the entire area will be holy. In the centre of it will be the sanctuary of the LORD.”⁷⁵¹
- “They⁷⁵² marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.”⁷⁵³

These quotations from the Scriptures illustrate the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham with respect to his seed – “Christ and the saints.” They show the obvious sense in which the promise is to be understood, namely, that when the kingdom of God is established, and Abraham inherits the land, his seed, who make up the divine encampment, will be in the land with him, and in the particular part of it that has been allotted to them. Abraham's seed - the bride, the Lamb's wife - the totality of those “called, chosen, and faithful followers,”⁷⁵⁴ are “the firstfruits to God and the Lamb,”⁷⁵⁵ and found worthy of reigning with Christ, will be a numerous seed; but not too numerous

⁷⁴⁴ Micah 4:2

⁷⁴⁵ Isaiah 51:11

⁷⁴⁶ Isaiah 66:10,13

⁷⁴⁷ Isaiah 33:20,22

⁷⁴⁸ Isaiah 25:7-8; 8:1

⁷⁴⁹ Isaiah 59:20

⁷⁵⁰ Jeremiah 3:17

⁷⁵¹ Ezekiel 45:1 (the precise distance is difficult to ascertain but the NIV 2011 margin suggests that 25,000 cubits is approximately 8 miles or 13 kilometres.); Ezekiel 48:10

⁷⁵² RR – the nations at the end of the thousand years

⁷⁵³ Revelation 20:9

⁷⁵⁴ Revelation 17:14

⁷⁵⁵ Revelation 14:4

for the allotted area. “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”⁷⁵⁶ “Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”⁷⁵⁷

When John, in Revelation, looks and sees “a great multitude that no one could count”⁷⁵⁸, some might suggest that the way is not really quite so narrow after all. It is worth noting, however, that this number is most probably made up, not only of the faithful of all ages, but of the faithful in the kingdom age.

3) *That Christ, the seed of Abraham, is to conquer the world.* This is the third feature of the promise made to Abraham. It is expressed in the words “Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies”⁷⁵⁹ This modern translation does not do justice to the literal wording as found in earlier versions where the text reads “possess the gate of his enemies.”⁷⁶⁰ To understand the significance of this statement, it is necessary to remember that in Oriental countries, in ancient times, the gate of a city was the seat of authority. It was the place where consultations were held, decrees issued and registered, and where the rulers appeared to receive the obeisance of the people. For an enemy to possess this place, then, was to give evidence of having conquered and deposed the original holders of power.⁷⁶¹

Clearly, the promise that Christ should possess the gate of his enemies has not been fulfilled. In no sense has Christ displaced his enemies from the seat of honour, glory, and power. Ungodly men rule the world. Instead of Christ possessing the gate of his enemies, worldly ruler-ship may be said to “tread down” Christ in the gate. The Gentiles have lifted themselves up over the land of Judah to scatter it⁷⁶² „, after nearly two thousand years when all seemed waste and desolation, the purpose of God can be seen to be unfolding in the re-birth of the Jewish state and with an ingathering of those previously living beyond its borders. The Lord Jesus will return and when the kingdom of God comes all will be changed:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”⁷⁶³

Those in authority, who refuse his rule, fail to offer him’ obeisance in the gate’ will be punished⁷⁶⁴. He will bring down “rulers from their thrones” and “send the rich away empty.”⁷⁶⁵ He shall then possess the gate of his enemies. All kings shall bow down before him, and all nations shall serve him.⁷⁶⁶ All people, nations, and languages shall serve and obey him; his dominion will be an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that will not be destroyed.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁵⁶ Matthew 22:14

⁷⁵⁷ Matthew 7:13

⁷⁵⁸ Revelation 7:9

⁷⁵⁹ Genesis 22:17

⁷⁶⁰ See King James Version, Young’s literal translation and many others. The NIV translation seems to have been offered in the light of the assumption that the prophecy has been fulfilled already – a point which RR has made clear has not occurred. [Ed]

⁷⁶¹ In this sense, then, the NIV correctly indicates that ultimately the seed would possess the cities since he sits “in the gate” and whoever “sat in the gate” was the one who could claim to possess the city.

⁷⁶² Zechariah 1:21

⁷⁶³ Revelation 11:15

⁷⁶⁴ Isaiah 24:21

⁷⁶⁵ Luke 1:52-53

⁷⁶⁶ Psalm 72:11

⁷⁶⁷ Daniel 7:14

4) That *all nations shall be blessed in Abraham and his seed.* - This is the gospel in a sentence – as Paul tells us in Galatians.⁷⁶⁸ The apostles preached “the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁶⁹ The announcement made to Abraham compressed this into just one sentence, announcing in a general form what the other texts disclose in more detail. It tells of universal blessing in connection with Abraham and Christ. At present the world is not in a state of blessing and therefore it is clear that this promise has not yet been fulfilled. The nations of the world are misruled; many are in a state of enormous poverty and in many nations considerable numbers live in misery. The world is controlled by wickedness.⁷⁷⁰ Abraham and his seed are unknown, except as objects of derision. In most western nations unbelief and unchristian conduct are very evident. Even where there is an external appearance of godliness, there is much ignorance of the true message of the Bible.

Although all nations are *not* yet blessed in Abraham and his seed, this blessing will come to pass:

- “See a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice . . . Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and the ears of those who hear will listen, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear.”⁷⁷¹
- “In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see. Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down.”⁷⁷²
- “Say to those with fearful hearts, ‘Be strong, do not fear; for your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.’”⁷⁷³
- “‘My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations,’ says the LORD Almighty.”⁷⁷⁴
- “The battle-bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River (Euphrates) to the ends of the earth.”⁷⁷⁵
- “And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him.”⁷⁷⁶
- “Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people.”⁷⁷⁷
- “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁶⁸ Galatians 3:8

⁷⁶⁹ Acts 8:12; 28:29-31

⁷⁷⁰ 1 John 5:19

⁷⁷¹ Isaiah 32:1,3

⁷⁷² Isaiah 29:18-20

⁷⁷³ Isaiah 35:4-6

⁷⁷⁴ Malachi 1:11

⁷⁷⁵ Zechariah 9:10

⁷⁷⁶ Zechariah 8:22

⁷⁷⁷ Zechariah 2:11

⁷⁷⁸ Habakkuk 2:14

- “May he endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more . . . For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. . . May his name endure for ever; may it continue long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.⁷⁷⁹

These texts illustrate the blessing guaranteed for “all families of the earth” in the promises made to Abraham: they show what the blessedness consists of in its full development. Such wonderful blessings, however, will not be realised until the kingdom of God comes. They cannot happen before that time as the King (Messiah, Christ) must overthrow the kingdom of this world and take his kingly power and reign. Such a king, even Jesus the Christ, possesses the power, wisdom, and righteousness, and authority to make these things happen. Christ, the seed of Abraham, must take the world’s affairs into his own hands, before there will be “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”⁷⁸⁰

In today’s world, individuals may, by God’s grace, take hold of the promised blessing made to Abraham. In taking hold of the promises by faith they become heirs of future exaltation – through present submission to Christ. The reality of the things covenanted to Abraham, however, will only become reality when Abraham himself inherits the land and his seed (Christ) possesses the gate of his enemies.

In view of the evident conclusion that the promises to Abraham give an unconditional guarantee of “good things to come,” it may be asked, why the law of Moses, and the bitter national experience of the Jews, have been allowed to intervene between them and their fulfilment? Paul anticipates and answers this question:

“Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.”⁷⁸¹

If we wish to know the purpose it served, the information is presented later in the chapter from which the quotation was taken: “So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.”⁷⁸² On account of the almost undisturbed reign of ignorance and sin in the times when the promises were delivered, it was necessary to institute a guardian of the divine mind, which should inculcate those first lessons about God, without which nothing good could be accomplished, since their existence in the human mind is the very basis of that communion between God and man which honours Him and saves them. It was necessary to engrain those first principles on the mind of the chosen nation, to pave the way for the development of things promised to the fathers.

This was done by the establishment of the law of Moses as the basis of Israelite life - a system which, in itself, was an allegory of divine truth, as was appropriate in the training of children⁷⁸³ but which, by its demands, its severity, and its detailed principles, taught those who were under it the estimate of God’s relationship to mankind, which even now prevails in a mild degree wherever

⁷⁷⁹ Psalm 72:5-7;12-14;17

⁷⁸⁰ Luke 2:14

⁷⁸¹ Galatians 3:19

⁷⁸² Galatians 3:24

⁷⁸³ Galatians 4:1,2 [KJV children – NIV heirs under age]

Mosaic tradition continues. The power, supremacy, and holiness of God were revealed by it, even to those who were disobedient; and, in the course of centuries, that conception of God was formed which existed in the days of Jesus, as the foundation on which to promote the gospel through the seed of Abraham (faithful believers) in the first and subsequent centuries.

Without the law, there is no doubt that the knowledge of God would have perished from the earth, and mankind would have been enslaved by foolish and unenlightened speculation, and abandoned to the wickedness which prevailed before the flood. The small amount of light given by the promises would soon have been extinguished, and the world would have sunk back into darkness - ripe for destruction as in the days of Noah. This great catastrophe was prevented by the establishment of a system which, while (superficially considered) it appeared to offer an obstruction to the glorious consummation promised to Abraham, was potently influential in developing the moral situation among mankind which was necessary for the bestowal of the promised blessing.

The promises form the groundwork of what is termed "the Christian dispensation." It was necessary that God should create a title to the blessings of His love, for men and women to lay hold of; because, as sinners, they were without hope, and could not establish a title for themselves. It was necessary He should make the first advance; and He did so, by bestowing an unconditional promise upon Abraham, whom He selected for his faithfulness. By belief, Abraham obtained a right to the things promised, and vested in him and his seed, the sole title. Therefore it is necessary to become Abraham's seed by connection with Christ before a Gentile can have any hope of a future life and inheritance.

Something in addition to the promise was, however, necessary to secure to Abraham the blessings covenanted: this is called the "confirmation" of the promises. The precise meaning of this will be apparent on a review of the facts of the case as they affected Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was promised to them that they should possess the land of Israel for ever. For this promise to be carried out, it is necessary that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob be raised from the dead, and made to live for ever. Therefore, it may be assumed that the promises carry the concept of resurrection with them. God would bring them from the dust of death, and give them eternal life as this is the only way they can inherit the land for ever.

That this was God's intention toward the patriarchs was made clear by Christ's argument with the Sadducees about resurrection. He says: "But about the resurrection of the dead – have you not read what God said to you, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."⁷⁸⁴ Christ argued that the circumstance of God calling himself the God of the patriarchs who had gone to the dust, was proof of His intention to raise them; and the argument overpowered the Sadducees, who were consequently 'silenced'.⁷⁸⁵ Thus, the inference that the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob involved the promise of resurrection and immortality, is established beyond question by Christ. This being so, we have to realise that under the circumstances existing at the time of the promise, it is impossible that the things promised could have been bestowed. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were constitutionally under sentence of death. They were "in Adam" - sinners by descent and individual act, and, therefore, precluded from that resurrection to immortality, implied in the promise. Yet the inheritance was guaranteed by "two unchangeable things" - the promise and the oath - and as "it is impossible for God to lie,"⁷⁸⁶ its bestowal was a matter of necessity. How was the impossibility of

⁷⁸⁴ Matthew 22:31-32

⁷⁸⁵ Matthew 22:34

⁷⁸⁶ Hebrews 6:18

making sinners immortal to be reconciled with the necessity that God's promises should be fulfilled?

We find the answer in the work accomplished by Christ at his first advent. "Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed."⁷⁸⁷ How did he 'confirm' the promises? By making their fulfilment possible. And how did he do this? By "pouring out his blood (which he called "the blood of the (new) - or Abrahamic – covenant") for the forgiveness of sins."⁷⁸⁸ He took away sin by the sacrifice of himself, thereby unsealing the gates of death, and bringing life and immortality to light - opening the way for the fulfilment of all that had been promised beforehand to the patriarchs. Thus the impossibility vanished, and the necessity was placed on the triumphal basis of Christ's accomplished work. This was the great event shadowed in the sacrifices of the law, which were not in themselves of any value, except as a means of connection between God and His nation, typifying a higher and a more enduring connection to be established through the body of the crucified "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."⁷⁸⁹

It will be seen that the things declared in the prophets and preached by the apostles as "the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ," are simply the elaboration of "the promises made by God to the patriarchs." It is important to recognise this fact, so that the position of the saints as "children of Abraham" and "the seed of Abraham" may be clearly understood, and that we may see the harmony and completeness of God's plan, as commenced in the days of Abraham, typified in the law, and gradually unfolded through the prophets, and consummated in the proclamation of Jesus and the apostles.

In view of all these things, we exclaim with Paul:

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? "Who has even given to God that God should repay them?" For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory for ever and ever! Amen."⁷⁹⁰

Chapter 10 The Kingdom of God: Its purpose in God's plan

In everything God does, there is purpose. Everything is planned by God's wisdom in precise detail so that that which he has purposed is brought to pass. God knows everything from beginning to end. Therefore, when we contemplate any aspect of God's declared purpose, we are presented with a subject that is sure to delight the inquisitive mind. Earlier chapters have explained that a time is coming when Christ will rule over the kingdom of God which will be established when he returns to the earth. This chapter seeks to explore the purpose of the kingdom and what the consummation of God's purpose is.

The kingdom of God is itself a means to God's end, another step in the march of God's gracious scheme, another stage in the accomplishment of his purpose to "bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ."⁷⁹¹ It only lasts for a thousand years.⁷⁹² The Scriptures tell us that

⁷⁸⁷ Romans 15:8

⁷⁸⁸ Matthew 26:28

⁷⁸⁹ John 1:29

⁷⁹⁰ Romans 11:33-36

⁷⁹¹ Ephesians 1:10

⁷⁹² Revelation 20:6 [RR assumes that the figure of 1000 years literally expresses the time length of the "Millennial Reign of Christ"]

Christ “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” and that the “last enemy to be destroyed is death.”⁷⁹³

Therefore, the millennial mission of Christ is to subdue “all enemies,” which he will do within the period of a thousand years. The “enemies” spoken of are not necessarily personal enemies, as death is mentioned as the last of them. Death is clearly an event and not a personal adversary. We may then understand Paul’s statement about Jesus’ mission to mean that “Christ must reign until he has subdued all evil.”

In fact, the “enemies” are of various kinds. The first group that will be subjected to the subduing power of the kingdom are the governments of the earth. “It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end.”⁷⁹⁴ This would seem to be the first things to happen as the government of mankind is taken away from mortal powers and given to the King whom God has prepared as the all-wise, all-just, and all-humane ruler over the nations.⁷⁹⁵

The ruler-ship of such a powerful and just King will be wonderful as many of the greatest evils that affect humanity originate in bad government. The Psalmist, in speaking of the salvation that God will bring to the earth prays that God will bring his covenant to mind “because haunts of violence fill the dark places of the land”.⁷⁹⁶ Today, in parts of the world, violence rules, ‘might is right’, and social unrest is common. In other parts of the world tyrannical rule puts self interest above the interest of the population at large, and, in almost all states, justice for the ‘underclass’ comes second to prosperity for the wealthy. Most societies exhibit uneven distribution of wealth and service provision and access to justice and material welfare is based on the ability to pay.

The world of human government is the first enemy which the kingdom of God will subdue as “the kingdom of the world” becomes “the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah”.⁷⁹⁷ One government will take the place of many: God will reign through Christ, instead of mortal man. Zechariah says, “The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.”⁷⁹⁸ Global authority, wielded with wisdom and humanity, will rule the peoples. No challenge will be beyond its reach and the world will know for the first time just how wonderful true government will be. The psalmist describes it like this:

“May he (Christ) defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor. . . In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more. May he rule from sea to sea and from the River (Euphrates) to the ends of the earth. May the desert tribes bow down before him and his enemies lick the dust. . . May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him. For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. . . . May he name endure for ever; may it continue long as the sun.”⁷⁹⁹

But another enemy may survive when those of a political character are destroyed. This enemy is ignorance of the very purpose of God, an agnosticism or professed atheism that seeks to bring about an ever improved world. Some traditional mainstream churches proclaim that the millennial

⁷⁹³ 1 Corinthians 15:25-26

⁷⁹⁴ Daniel 2:44

⁷⁹⁵ Psalm 22:28

⁷⁹⁶ Psalm 74:12,28

⁷⁹⁷ Revelation 11:15

⁷⁹⁸ Zechariah 14:9

⁷⁹⁹ Psalm 72:4,7-9,11-14,17

reign of Christ, the kingdom of God, will be established by the work of the church as those of the world become more spiritually aware through the spreading of the gospel message and fairer to all as social awareness and social responsibility are enhanced as works based on the new found faith. Praiseworthy though many humanitarian projects may be, and irrespective of laudable efforts made by those within ‘Christian’ organisations’, neither source will bring about the period known as the ‘millennial reign’. The “enemy” is ignorance of God’s purpose but when we contemplate the coming of the kingdom of God we learn that:

“The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”⁸⁰⁰

When the earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, the ignorance of the present time will have vanished. This will be achieved when the governments of the earth have been overthrown, and global divine authority has been firmly established.

The scriptures teach that the law of the Lord will spread from Jerusalem (as it was in the first century). “At that time”, Jeremiah says, “they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honour the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts”⁸⁰¹ Isaiah, speaking in more detail about the millennial age says:

“Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The Law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.”⁸⁰²

Jerusalem will again be the centre of divine teaching, this time on a larger and grander scale, and with more glorious results:

“On this mountain (Zion) the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken. In that day they will say, “Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”⁸⁰³

The feast is to be provided in Mount Zion and this is why the nations will gather there to share it. Their gathering, however, will all be at one time. The prophetic testimony shows that there will be pilgrimage from all parts of the earth each year in which all nations will take part:

⁸⁰⁰ Habakkuk 2:14

⁸⁰¹ Jeremiah 3:17

⁸⁰² Isaiah 2:3-4

⁸⁰³ Isaiah 25:6-9

"Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they shall have no rain."⁸⁰⁴

Those who make the pilgrimage⁸⁰⁵ will be refreshed spiritually as they receive instruction from those whom the Lord has chosen as his ministers. The nations will receive annual strengthening in their relationship to the King, a contented allegiance that will bind them to the throne of David, occupied by Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, the King of the Jews. The Psalmist foreshadows the glories of the age in the following text:

"You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favour to her; the appointed time has come. For her stones are dear to your servants; her very dust moves them to pity. The nations will fear the name of the LORD, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory. For the LORD will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea. Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the LORD: The LORD looks down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth, to hear the groans of the prisoners and release those condemned to death. So the name of the LORD will be declared in Zion and his praise in Jerusalem when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD."⁸⁰⁶

The petition, "Your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven"⁸⁰⁷ contained within the Lord's prayer will be fulfilled at this time for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD. Then for the first time the prophetic song of the angels will be fulfilled, offered at the birth of the one who was to bring it about, namely, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests."⁸⁰⁸

"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."⁸⁰⁹ Death will continue during the thousand year (millennial) phase of the kingdom - not among those who minister, namely, Jesus and the saints, (who are immortal) but among the nations who continue as they are now, the death-stricken descendants of the first Adam. "The one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child."⁸¹⁰ Death may happen at a hundred years, but, even then, a man will be considered a child. As for an "old man," the term will never be applied to any one that has not reached exceptional age. "They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will enjoy the work of their hands."⁸¹¹

Those who minister to the King and to the nations will be blessed with immortality⁸¹² and they shall inherit the earth for ever. But, ultimately, death will be abolished throughout the earth. After all those things which are regarded as "enemies" have been subdued, then the greatest "enemy" of all will be removed for ever. How will this take place? We must remember that all the saved of

⁸⁰⁴ Zechariah 14:16-17

⁸⁰⁵ [It is possible, or even probable, that representatives of the peoples will attend, rather than each and every person annually.

Ed]

⁸⁰⁶ Psalm 102:12-22

⁸⁰⁷ Matthew 6:10

⁸⁰⁸ Luke 2:14

⁸⁰⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:26

⁸¹⁰ Isaiah 65:20

⁸¹¹ Isaiah 65:20-22; [Isaiah 65:22 links to the message given through Moses in Deuteronomy 32:30]

⁸¹² Luke 20:36

this and of past dispensations will be given everlasting life at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the ‘kingdom age’ there will be a mortal population and now we seek to explore on what basis the mortal subjects of Messiah’s reign will be dealt with so that they also may participate in the glorious gift of immortality. We quote from Revelation:

“When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – God and Magog – and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”⁸¹³

This text indicates that there will be a rebellion at the close of the millennium, which is allowed to gather strength, and come to a head, and which is then to be suppressed by an outburst of divine judgment at “the city he loves” - Jerusalem. This is followed by a general judgment but not of the saints who have been associated with Christ in government during the previous thousand years, who at the beginning of his reign have been welcomed as “good and faithful servants” into his joy. These have been judged already. They appeared before his judgment-seat at his coming and were welcomed into his joy. The general judgement referred to here is, therefore, of those who have lived during the thousand years. What will be required of those who live a mortal existence in the millennial age is not clear but it will probably require the exercise of faith, even though there is the visible manifestation of divine power among them, as, “without faith it is impossible to please God.”⁸¹⁴ Whatever the exact circumstances might be, the result of their judgment is that many of them are found “written in the book of life,” and receive everlasting life.

The nature of judgment implies that some will not receive everlasting life and the quotation indicates what will happen to them. They were “thrown into the lake of fire.”⁸¹⁵

But what becomes of the remainder? The answer is, “Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” This lake of fire is one of the many symbols used in Revelation. The prophetic facts are portrayed using symbols, and an occasional hint of interpretation is included so that the servants of the Lord can understand the meaning. The hint included in this case is this: “The lake of fire is the second death.”⁸¹⁶ A second reference also confirms this interpretation: “they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.”⁸¹⁷

⁸¹³ Revelation 20:7-15

⁸¹⁴ Hebrews 11:6

⁸¹⁵ Revelation 20:15

⁸¹⁶ Revelation 20:14

⁸¹⁷ Revelation 21:8

In speaking about a “second death” it is clear that there must also have been a “first death”. All “people are destined to die once and after that to face judgement.”⁸¹⁸ In the millennial age, mortals will die in the same way, albeit at a greater age, as do men and women today. Some are raised to life and others are directly inflicted by divine displeasure, the unfaithful being consigned to an oblivion from which there is no way out by resurrection. It is a death that wipes away every vestige of their being from God’s creation. Malachi says “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.”⁸¹⁹ The Psalmist says: “the wicked will perish. Though the LORD’s enemies are like the flowers of the field, they will be consumed. They will go up in smoke.”⁸²⁰

The lake of fire is seen to be an appropriate symbol. We may consider the impact of throwing an animal into a lake of lava within the crater of a volcanic cone: the result, instant annihilation. Not a vestige of the creature’s substance can survive such a destructive force. Complete, immediate, and irretrievable destruction is the idea suggested by the lake of fire.

After this destruction, the removal from the earth of the unfaithful, death will have been destroyed. The earth, now populated by immortal people, is safe from death as death is unable to prey on those who are outside its power.

With these thoughts in mind, the following texts will be fully appreciated:

- “The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth.”⁸²¹
- “Let the wicked be put to shame and be silent in the realm of the dead.”⁸²²
- “For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. A little while and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity.”⁸²³
- “Hope in the LORD and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are destroyed you will see it.”⁸²⁴
- “But may sinners vanish from the earth and the wicked be no more.”⁸²⁵
- “For the upright will live in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the unfaithful will be torn from it.”⁸²⁶
- “When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm for ever.”⁸²⁷
- “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”⁸²⁸

⁸¹⁸ Hebrews 9:27

⁸¹⁹ Malachi 4:1

⁸²⁰ Psalm 37:20

⁸²¹ Psalm 34:16

⁸²² Psalm 31:17

⁸²³ Psalm 37:9-11 [for ‘land’ an alternative rendering is ‘earth’ KJV]

⁸²⁴ Psalm 37:34

⁸²⁵ Psalm 104:35

⁸²⁶ Proverbs 2:21-22

⁸²⁷ Proverbs 10:25

⁸²⁸ Matthew 5:5

An occasional misunderstanding relates to the idea that the faithful in the kingdom age will remain alive until the end of the thousand years and then be given immortal life. This view seems mistaken as it would suggest that the judgment of Revelation 20 (11-15) takes place at the beginning of the millennial age rather than at the end. Two considerations run counter to this idea. First, even if such were the case, it would not take away from the fact that death is something that many would experience in the millennial age. Secondly, this is the final harvest – the first judgement brings in the first-fruits: Christ and his brothers and sisters; the second the harvest itself.

Christ was the “first-fruits”⁸²⁹ of the first ‘harvest’ – of those who come ‘after’; the faithful of the pre-millennial faithful. Christ received eternal life by faith and obedience⁸³⁰ and his brothers and sisters of the present age receive it in the same way through him. They do not “live on until the end” of the times of the Gentiles. They die as all humans do. The principle observed in the process of their development requires this. This principle is faith, which is confidence in the promise of God. If, the moment a person believed in the gospel, his mortal life were guaranteed to continue until the coming of Christ and the change to the incorruptibility, the principle of faith, by which a person honours God would be destroyed: for all the world would “see” that there was advantage in responding to the gospel, and they would flock to the gospel, not because God had promised, but because they perceived an actual present advantage in believing. It is, therefore, an absolute necessity for the exercise of faith that there should not be a present apparent difference between those who serve God and those who do not serve him, but that this difference should only be perceived in the day when the faithful are rewarded.⁸³¹

What is true of the “called” in the time of the Gentiles is true of the “called” of the millennial age. It is necessary that they should not “live on to the end” of their particular dispensation, for faith is just as necessary for them as us, and if they did not die like other humans, there would be no scope for faith and they would not be in the pattern of Abraham and all who have gone before. They would not be of the same harvest. It would be a different crop altogether, raised upon a different principle. Though people will live longer than they do now, death will continue indiscriminately, as the law of faith requires, until the grand final triumph, when the great enemy will be destroyed for ever, and every inhabitant of ransomed earth be able to say, “Where O death, is your victory? Where O death is your sting?”⁸³²

There is this difference between the introduction of death and the introduction of resurrection to life: death became part of human experience at just one time, whereas in resurrection, there is an order of development, marked by three stages. Paul states this order in the following terms:

“But each in his turn; Christ the *first-fruits*; *then*, when he comes, those who belong to him. *Then* the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”⁸³³

Here we have a “*first*,” a “*then*” and another “*then*,” as the “order” of resurrection. The introduction of the word “comes” interrupts the “order.” There is resurrection at “the end,” for the end is introduced deliberately in connection with the order of the resurrection, and not only so, but Paul

⁸²⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:23

⁸³⁰ Philippians 2:9; Hebrews 5:7

⁸³¹ Malachi 3:8

⁸³² 1Corinthians 15:55

⁸³³ 1 Corinthians 15:23-26

says that the reign of Christ will result in the putting down of all enemies, including “death,” which he makes the “last.”

That this destruction of death involves resurrection, is illustrated in the case of “when he comes, those who belong to him.” Death in their case is “swallowed up (or destroyed) in victory,” in their being raised from the dead never again to see corruption. There must be resurrection at the close of the thousand years; as when Christ comes, only those who belong to him are given immortality. And if the rest are not given immortality, they must die in the same way Abraham and all the saints have died, as it is the nature of mortality to die. Having then died in faith, they can only receive the promise on the basis of their personal resurrection which will take place, we believe, as has been suggested, at the end of the millennial age.

God has always worked on the basis that “from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.”⁸³⁴ “To whom much is given, of them is much required.” The first-century believers enjoyed the privilege of the Spirit gifts and the personal company of the Lord; and they were required to prove their faithfulness in confiscation and prison, and in martyrdom. In the present days believers have no open vision or witness of the Spirit in its wonder-working power. We simply have the written and historical evidence of God's work in the past. Having received “less” than our brothers and sisters of old, we are rarely called upon to go to prison or to yield to death for the gospel. For the most part we have times of freedom and peace in which to make our love of the Lord known. In the age to come, privileges such as have never before been experienced by mortal man will be enjoyed by peoples and nations who will rejoice in the rule of Christ and the saints. Instead, therefore, of their position calling for exemption from death, it may be more fitting that their faith and obedience should be developed and tested by its prevalence until the time for its destruction as the “last enemy” – at that time when, the faithful are given immortality in the final resurrection.

The performance of sacrifice in that age⁸³⁵ also leads to the conclusion that death is in operation among those who offer the sacrifices. The existence of priesthood (for the saints are priests as well as rulers) carries with it the same conclusion; for priesthood arises out of the existence of sin, and sin brings death. If there were no death, it would argue the absence of sin - fact which would exclude sin-offerings from the office of priesthood. But death continues until it is destroyed at “the end.”

There is definite recognition of the existence of death in Ezekiel's description of the temple service of the future age. Of priests, it is said, “A priest must not defile himself by going near a dead person”⁸³⁶ Priests also have clear instructions about the choosing of wives and they are prohibited to marry “widows or divorced women” unless the widow was the widow of a priest.⁸³⁷

It cannot be suggested that the dead in these cases die as a result of their stubborn ways as the people will be all righteous.⁸³⁸ In fact, the judgment at the end of the millennial age would seem to be a universal judgment on the basis that divine knowledge is universal. The concept of the two resurrections is clearly indicated by the following text from Revelation:

⁸³⁴ Luke 12:48

⁸³⁵ Zechariah 14:21; Malachi 3:4; Isaiah 60:7; Ezekiel 44:29-30

⁸³⁶ Ezekiel 44:25

⁸³⁷ Ezekiel 44:22

⁸³⁸ Isaiah 60:21

“They (the faithful) came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”⁸³⁹

This post-millennial resurrection is mentioned in connection with the resurrection of the first fruits - those who “came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years,” and who are, therefore, raised at the beginning of that period. John seeing them enthroned after their resurrection, says, “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.

The resurrection that will take place at Christ’s coming will exceed all other resurrections in blessedness. It will introduce those who have part in it to the highest honour in store for mortal men and women - the honour of leading mankind from their present misery to the blessedness promised in Abraham. As Christ will always be the head of his people in the endless ages, so, doubtless, the saints that govern the millennial age will always occupy a position of glory and dignity over the ransomed multitude who, through their ministrations, have been brought to eternal life at the close of the thousand years.⁸⁴⁰

Revelation⁸⁴¹ pictures the post-millennial blessedness on earth, when death is abolished forever. The symbolic language: “No longer any sea” points to this, whether taken symbolically or literally. There will be both literal ocean and “many waters”⁸⁴² of nations during the thousand years. After the thousand years, there will no longer be a sea of nations, as there will then be one nation, and that the immortalised multitudinous Israel of God.

It is wonderful to consider that the message proclaimed by the angels at the birth of Christ, “On earth peace to those on whom his favour rests”⁸⁴³ describes the millennial reign of peace upon the earth.⁸⁴⁴ Evidence has been advanced to suggest that things will not be quite so peaceful throughout the entire millennial age. The wholesale infliction of death on many at its close⁸⁴⁵ precludes the possibility of immediate and lasting peace for all in the millennial age. Peace will come on earth at last through the Deliverer cradled at Bethlehem. But the wording of the glorious verses in question clearly relates to a time when “the former things” of sin and sorrow will have passed away from the face of the earth for ever.

We now consider another change that will take place at the end of the millennial age as indicated in the writings of Paul:

⁸³⁹ Revelation 20:4-6

⁸⁴⁰ [RR would seem to indicate an eternal hierarchy. An alternative view may be taken, in that when Christ hands the kingdom to the Father, all his ransomed of all ages, will be equal before him. Ed]

⁸⁴¹ Revelation 21: 1-4

⁸⁴² Revelation 17:1

⁸⁴³ Luke 2:14

⁸⁴⁴ The KJV “On earth peace and goodwill toward men” tends to be more suggestive of this idea but newer translations indicate that the peace is upon those on whom his favour rests – presumably the saints now raised to immortality – and also to the faithful of the kingdom age who will share in the peace of God that is beyond understanding. Ed]

⁸⁴⁵ See Revelation 20:8-9

"Then the end will come, when he (Christ) hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he (Christ) must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed in death. For he (Christ) 'has put everything under his feet'. Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him (Christ), it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all."⁸⁴⁶

From this we learn that, at the end of the thousand years, Christ will abdicate the position of absolute sovereignty, which he occupies in the earth during that period. It would seem as if, on the accomplishment of his mission in the complete redemption of the world, that God Himself is manifested (without a medium) as the only eternal Governor. The idea will be understood in the light of Paul's statement that "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God."⁸⁴⁷ During the thousand years, it is Christ's headship that is supreme: after that, it is the headship of the Father in some specially manifested form. The headship of the Father is the fact now, but it is in the background even though the world, in its present state, fails or chooses not to recognise it. During the thousand years, the headship of the Father is a visible fact in the headship of Christ but at the end of the thousand years, the headship of the Father will be directly manifest.

It, therefore, seems that the change to take place at the end of the millennial age is more a change in the aspect of things as they appear to humans, than as they exist in themselves. Though no longer the supreme ruler of the earth, Christ will continue in his position of peculiar pre-eminence as "Captain" of the "many sons and daughters" whom he will have been instrumental in "bringing to glory." God will be "all in all." He will be seen as the power, and supporter, and constitutor of all, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the only self-Almighty one. He will no longer work by interposition. He will no longer deal with man through mediators of his appointing but will establish direct communication with His perfected children; and the world, freed from sin and death, will become a happy, loyal, glory-giving province in that already universal dominion which extends to the utmost bounds of space, reflecting the wisdom and the goodness of the Highest. The divine scheme of redemption will then have been consummated: and earth's glorified inhabitants, in holy gratitude, exalted. Before them will stretch an eternity of unbroken contentment and they will realise the perfection and glory and gladness of life as it is in God.

It has been shown that the kingdom of the thousand years is just a transitional period between the purely human and purely spiritual ages. It will blend elements of both. It will exhibit the perfection of the eternal ages in the Lord Jesus and the saints who will be immortal and incorruptible, and the imperfection of the human age in the mortal population who will make up the subjects of their rule. Both will co-exist for a thousand years, and will constitute a state of things as superior to the present dispensation as it will be inferior to the glory of ages beyond. The Kingdom of God will lead us, by a bridge of a thousand years, from the age of sin and death to the age of restoration to the bosom of the Deity, in righteousness and eternal life.

Chapter 11 Christ – The Future King of the World

The time will come when the Son of God, who is now in the heavens, will return to the earth as a visible person, to dispossess all human governments of their power, both secular and ecclesiastical, and establish himself as the universal ruler of mankind. The essential characteristic of the Messiah-ship of Jesus Christ, and the most prominent element of his character, as

⁸⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

⁸⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 11:3

portrayed in all the Scriptures, is his kingship. Therefore, any faith which ignores this aspect of his character misses a vital element of the gospel message. The future kingship of Jesus is all too frequently overlooked by many mainstream Christian believers.

The Scriptures abound with information about the kingship of Christ. In the Old Testament, particularly, we find very little mention of the shame and the suffering to which he was to be subjected on account of sin. The sacrificial role of his first advent is kept pretty much in the background. That which stands out with brilliant prominence is the glory that is to cover the earth when he will reign in righteousness. This is true also of the New Testament, although it tells us more of the “man of suffering, and familiar with pain.”⁸⁴⁸

Although almost every mainstream Christian is willing to speak of Christ as a king, few understand the full meaning of this kingship. Most accept that his kingship refers to his present spiritual authority in heaven without recognising the full Messiah-ship of Christ in its true sense.

The Jewish expectation of the Messiah was that he would appear upon the earth in person, and visibly exercise the power of a king over all nations. This is a view that the disciples themselves shared. The real controversy is as to whether this view represents a true interpretation of the Scriptural message given that so few mainstream religious teachers promote this understanding today. Those who believe that the Jews were misguided, along with both the disciples and the apostles, promote a view that lacks the support of the Scriptures.

Jesus said to those who heard him, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them.”⁸⁴⁹

With this statement in mind, we shall take quotations from the prophets concerning Jesus:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel.”⁸⁵⁰

Jesus of Nazareth came from Bethlehem and here we find justification in the prophets for recognising him as the future “ruler In Israel.” Consider the following words from Jeremiah:

“The days are coming”, declares the LORD, “when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.”⁸⁵¹

Such prophecies clearly inspired the Jewish national hope. David’s righteous Branch is none other than Jesus Christ. Jesus says, “I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.”⁸⁵² (The term ‘offspring’ equates to ‘Branch’ as it is the antithesis of ‘Root’.) From the text above we learn that Christ will reign in the land (= earth). This concept is not limited to one or two statements but occurs repeatedly. The quotations offered below are examples:

⁸⁴⁸ Isaiah 53:3

⁸⁴⁹ Matthew 5:17

⁸⁵⁰ Micah 5:2

⁸⁵¹ Jeremiah 23:5-6

⁸⁵² Revelation 22:16

- ““The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will fulfil the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land.””⁸⁵³
- “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”⁸⁵⁴
- “Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place. . . and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne.”⁸⁵⁵
- “He will judge between nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.”⁸⁵⁶
- “The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.”⁸⁵⁷
- “See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice.”⁸⁵⁸
- “The LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders – with great glory.”⁸⁵⁹
- “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious.”⁸⁶⁰
- “Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”⁸⁶¹
- “I will make them (the Jews) one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them.”⁸⁶²
- “The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath he will not revoke: “One of your own descendants I will place on your throne.”⁸⁶³
- “The LORD says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The LORD will extend your mighty sceptre from Zion, saying, “Rule in the midst of your enemies!””⁸⁶⁴
- “I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”⁸⁶⁵
- “May he rule from sea to sea and from the River (Euphrates) to the ends of the earth . . . May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him.”⁸⁶⁶

⁸⁵³ Jeremiah 33:14-15

⁸⁵⁴ Isaiah 9:6-7

⁸⁵⁵ Zechariah 6:12-13

⁸⁵⁶ Isaiah 2:4

⁸⁵⁷ Zechariah 14:9

⁸⁵⁸ Isaiah 32:1

⁸⁵⁹ Isaiah 24:23

⁸⁶⁰ Isaiah 11:9-10

⁸⁶¹ Isaiah 12:6

⁸⁶² Ezekiel 37:22

⁸⁶³ Psalm 132:11

⁸⁶⁴ Psalm 110:1-2

⁸⁶⁵ Psalm 2:8 [See Psalm 2:2 for context]

⁸⁶⁶ Psalm 72:8,11; Also see Daniel 7:14

These few references, from the divinely inspired Scriptures, are taken from a much larger number of similar quotations. All show that the expectations that the Jews held in anticipating a Messiah, who would rule over the nations, is more than amply justified. The scriptures all point to Christ's visible appearing as a king on earth. The teaching of the New Testament is in total agreement with the teaching of the prophets on this subject. As we enter the gospel records we read of the message of the angel Gabriel to Mary. He said:

"You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end."⁸⁶⁷

Here is a distinct New Testament reference that confirms it is the purpose of God to give to Jesus "the throne of his father David." To understand the significance of this statement, we must know what the throne of David is. David was the most famous of Israel's God-anointed kings ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel in the Holy Land, and ruling many smaller nations. He was a mighty warrior, a distinguished prophet, and a poet of the highest order. He was the ancestor of Christ, through Mary, who was descended from the royal house; and was a fitting type of his most distinguished son, whom he acknowledged as "Lord".⁸⁶⁸

Peter introduces the theme of Christ's throne in his address to the Jews, on the day of Pentecost:

"But he (David) was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah."⁸⁶⁹

There is, therefore, a connection between Christ's mission and David's throne. Unlike the teachers of the Law who often considered everything in a very literal sense, it is clear that the "throne of David" as a literal seat would have crumbled into dust long before the first advent of Jesus. The idea of "the throne" is related to the office or position of the monarch. Even this idea, which is easy to understand, can be demonstrated from the Scriptures.

On the occasion of Solomon's accession the scriptures record that "Solomon sat on the throne of his father David."⁸⁷⁰ However, we read later that Solomon "made a great throne covered with ivory and overlaid with fine gold."⁸⁷¹ Therefore, while sitting on the throne of David his father in the political sense, Solomon really occupied a different royal seat. Jesus will do likewise.

At present Christ is in heaven and cannot now be sitting on David's throne as nothing that David ever possessed is in heaven. David is not there himself. Peter made this clear in his address on the day of Pentecost, "For David did not ascend to heaven".⁸⁷² When the time arrives, the throne of David will be set up again on the earth and Jesus will share it with his faithful ones, as indicated in Revelation: "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne."⁸⁷³ The theme of Christ's kingship is taken up in Matthew: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will

⁸⁶⁷ Luke 1:31-33

⁸⁶⁸ Matthew 22:43

⁸⁶⁹ Acts 2:30-31

⁸⁷⁰ 1 Kings 2:12

⁸⁷¹ 1 Kings 10:18

⁸⁷² Acts 2:34

⁸⁷³ Revelation 3:21

sit on his glorious throne.”⁸⁷⁴ Therefore, before Jesus sits upon David's throne, he will return to earth, appear in Israel, and assume the position which David occupied when he held the sceptre of Israel; that is, he will become king of the Jews.

In the Old Testament, the prophet Ezekiel was sent to King Zedekiah who was an unfaithful prince and the last to occupy David's throne. He was sent to tell him of coming retribution, and in the course of his prophecy, he spoke the following words:

“You profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! The crown will not be restored until he to whom it rightfully belongs shall come; to him I will give it.”⁸⁷⁵

The crown was to be removed and Israel as a national unit was to be completely abolished, as indicated in the triple repetition of the idea of “a ruin”. The history that followed is well documented and about a year after the prophecy was given Zedekiah was uncrowned by Nebuchadnezzar. The nobles were put to death; the people were killed or carried away as captives, and the land was left desolate. Seventy years later, a partial restoration took place under Ezra and Nehemiah, but the throne of David was not restored. The Jews existed as a vassal people from that time onwards. After varied political fortunes, they were overtaken by a storm which swept away every vestige of their national existence.

The Romans, under Vespasian, invaded the country, and subdued its fortified places. Vespasian transferred command to Titus, and he laid siege to Jerusalem, which at that time was crowded with people from all parts of the country. The details of that awful siege are familiar to all who have studied this period of history. The city was tediously beleaguered for months; famine arose among the inhabitants; civil dissensions divided their counsels, and led to mutual slaughter; and, finally, the place was sacked and burned, and more than 1,000,000 Jews perished. The remainder were sold as slaves, or were scattered throughout the Roman empire as fugitives. Their scattering continued for almost two thousand years until, in the twentieth century, a partial re-gathering has taken place. The political state of Israel today is a republic and has no monarch. Throughout the last two thousand years the throne of David has been a mere idle phrase which is taken to refer to a tradition of the past.

The time will come, however, when he (Christ) will come and the kingship will rightly be given to him as the prophet indicates. Jesus Christ, to whom the throne belongs, both by lineal descent and divine bequest, will rule as monarch. He will become King of the Jews, and Lord of the whole earth. We perceive, therefore, a striking significance in the words of the angel:

“The Lord God will give him (Jesus) the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end.”⁸⁷⁶

Going a step further in our New Testament enquiry, we come to the birth of Christ, and we note the following incident:

⁸⁷⁴ Matthew 25:31

⁸⁷⁵ Ezekiel 21:25-27

⁸⁷⁶ Luke 1:33

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?"⁸⁷⁷

The enquiry by the Magi was understandable in view of all that the prophets had foretold of the man who was to be ruler in Israel. From this we see that Christ is not *just* the spiritual Saviour of mankind, in a universal general sense, as the Magi are specific in their use of language. Christ is described as "king of the Jews," and this term is too specific to apply to a broad spiritual relationship to the humanity as a whole.

Some have suggested that the term "king of the Jews" means that he is simply "king of the church". This does not sit well with texts such as:

- "I no longer call you servants . . . Instead I have called you friends."⁸⁷⁸
- "We are children . . . co-heirs with Christ."⁸⁷⁹
- "They (the faithful) will reign with him"⁸⁸⁰

They are not his subjects, but together they are his bride, "the wife of the Lamb"⁸⁸¹ - signifying the closest communion and relationship. Christ, therefore, cannot be king of the Jews in any spiritual sense.⁸⁸² He is king of those Jews of whom David was king; for he is heir to his throne. This was the nature of his claim, as understood by his contemporaries, and is obvious from what followed the enquiry made by the Magi:

"When King Herod heard this he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the clans of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." . . . And he (Herod) gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and younger, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi."⁸⁸³

We can only understand Herod's jealousy if he had considered Christ to have been a political rival. If Christ was simply to be a spiritual ruler, as some suggest, exercising power from heaven in the hearts of men, it is inconceivable that there would have been such a commotion as Christ's spiritual dominion would not in any way have conflicted with Herod's jurisdiction as a king.

Assuming, however, that the enquiry of the Magi was understood in terms of Christ's becoming a king, appointed of God to sit on David's throne, Herod's reaction appears in a natural light. He was at that time ruler in Israel. He was, in fact, "King of the Jews," in the name of the Roman Caesar. For him, therefore, to hear of the birth of a rival to that position aroused his jealousy. He knew that if he allowed this infant king to live, the people's allegiance might become diverted, and his own throne would be endangered. He therefore conceived the inhuman project of slaughtering the entire babyhood of Bethlehem, in the hope of destroying the object of his jealousy - a proof that he recognised in Christ, a prospective claimant of the literal kingship of Israel.

⁸⁷⁷ Matthew 2:1

⁸⁷⁸ John 15:15

⁸⁷⁹ Romans 8:17

⁸⁸⁰ Revelation 20:6

⁸⁸¹ Revelation 19:7; 21:9

⁸⁸² His "lordship", his role as "head over the church" indicate that he is also spiritually "king" to all who believe [Ed]

⁸⁸³ Matthew 2:3-6;16

If we trace the career and note the sayings of Christ, we shall find constant indications of the correctness of the view expressed by the apostles about his kingship. For instance, in the course of his Sermon on the Mount, he said: "Do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne . . . or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the Great King."⁸⁸⁴ It will be seen as the city of the Great King when Jesus returns to rule the world from Jerusalem. The connection between Jesus and Jerusalem is so sacred that Jesus prohibits those who are his disciples from using the name of the city as the basis of an oath.

Throughout many centuries the city of Jerusalem remained in a comparatively ruinous state and a rather neglected town in a Turkish province. Many, throughout that period would not have regarded the settlement with any real significance but divine regard, remained then as it ever had been: "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me."⁸⁸⁵ The Lord Jesus spoke of this period of desolation but also looked to a restoration at a later date:

"They (the Jews) will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."⁸⁸⁶

He also said (with tears in his eyes):

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."⁸⁸⁷

The trampling down of the Jews and the desolation was foretold. It is worth noting, that the place involved in the prediction of ruin, is the same which is related to the "until" by which that prediction is limited. Both the trampling down and the restoration as events are certain from the prophetic point of view and both have come to pass (although the current re-gathering is partial). Although the Jews have returned in considerable number to Israel and declared Jerusalem as their capital city, they remain in a state of unbelief as far as the promise and the means to its fulfilment are concerned. The day is coming, however, when Christ will be received by his penitent nation the Jews:

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."⁸⁸⁸

When the Jewish nation have mourned and turned to the Lord, the following texts indicate the future glory of Jerusalem (Zion).

⁸⁸⁴ Matthew 5:34-35

⁸⁸⁵ Isaiah 49:16

⁸⁸⁶ Luke 21:24

⁸⁸⁷ Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 13:34-35

⁸⁸⁸ Zechariah 12:10

- “The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem.”⁸⁸⁹
- “The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.”⁸⁹⁰
- “Awake, awake! Rise up, Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes people stagger . . . Therefore hear this, you afflicted one, made drunk but not with wine. This is what the Sovereign LORD says, your God who defends his people: “See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of my wrath, you will never drink again.”⁸⁹¹
- “Awake, awake, Zion, clothe yourself with strength! Put on your garments of splendour, Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. . . Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.”⁸⁹²
- “The LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders – with great glory.”⁸⁹³
- “At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honour the name of the LORD.”⁸⁹⁴
- “The Law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more.”⁸⁹⁵

From these texts we learn that the city of Jerusalem has an important place in the purpose of God. It is destined to be the seat of the divine government which is to bless the world in the future age. It will, in fact, be the capital of the coming universal kingdom, constituting the centre of power, of law, of enlightenment, for the happy nations who will look to it for instruction in that glorious age. As it is written:

“Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”⁸⁹⁶

This ‘going up’ of peoples will take place annually:

“Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles.”⁸⁹⁷

⁸⁸⁹ Zechariah 2:12

⁸⁹⁰ Isaiah 51:3

⁸⁹¹ Isaiah 51:17,21-22

⁸⁹² Isaiah 52:1,9

⁸⁹³ Isaiah 24:23

⁸⁹⁴ Jeremiah 3:17

⁸⁹⁵ Micah 4:2-3

⁸⁹⁶ Isaiah 2:3

⁸⁹⁷ Zechariah 14:16

If any people or nation refuses to pay this annual homage to the king of all the earth, they will be punished. There will be no need for armed force as a word from the King will hold back the supplies of heaven, and compel submission. It is written:

"If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, they will have no rain."⁸⁹⁸

Now the Lord Jesus was aware of this glorious destiny in store for the city of Jerusalem, and knew well the intimate relationship he would have with it when the time would come and when his countrymen would say to him, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;"⁸⁹⁹ and, with this in his mind, he could say with an appropriateness which can only be appreciated by those who understand the purpose of God "Do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven . . . or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King."⁹⁰⁰ Blessed are all those who are looking to the redemption of Jerusalem.⁹⁰¹ To them the words of the prophet are addressed:

"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her, all you who mourn over her. For you will feed and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance."⁹⁰²

On the theme on kingship we now consider another testimony, that of Nathanael, the "Israelite in whom there is no deceit."⁹⁰³ Upon recognising Christ he said, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."⁹⁰⁴ This conviction was clearly shared with others and impressed upon the minds of the people at that time as John also records that "Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself."⁹⁰⁵ Their language on the occasion of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, is evidence of the same point:

"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David."⁹⁰⁶

Christ gave them reason for this conviction in the parable of the vineyard, recorded in Luke 20. Jesus says that the vineyard was planted by a man who let it out to farmers, and, at the time of harvest, the owner sent his servants to the tenants to get the fruit of the vineyard: but they ill-treated and killed them one after another. "Then the owner of the vineyard said, "What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him." But when the tenants saw him they talked the matter over. "This is the heir," they said. "Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."⁹⁰⁷ This parable related to the nation of Israel, and the rulers of it. This is clear from the verse 19, and also from a statement in Isaiah: "The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel."⁹⁰⁸

⁸⁹⁸ Zechariah 14:17

⁸⁹⁹ Matthew 23:39

⁹⁰⁰ Matthew 6:34-35

⁹⁰¹ Luke 2:38

⁹⁰² Isaiah 66:10-11

⁹⁰³ John 1:47

⁹⁰⁴ John 1:49

⁹⁰⁵ John 6:15

⁹⁰⁶ Mark 11:10

⁹⁰⁷ Luke 20:13-15

⁹⁰⁸ Isaiah 5:7

With this in mind, let us note the meaning of its teaching. In the rejected servants we recognise the prophets who shared the fate indicated in the words of Christ: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you."⁹⁰⁹ The "Son" was the Lord Jesus Christ, as is clear from the words the letter to the Hebrews, which might be almost accepted as a commentary on this parable: "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son."⁹¹⁰

If Christ is the "son" in the parable, he is, of necessity, also the "heir". He is heir of the inheritance held by the owner who planted the vineyard, for they said, "Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." Now, if that inheritance is the land and nation of the Jews, of which the Pharisees were the rulers or "farmers" and Christ is the heir of these things, there is no escape from the conclusion that he, Jesus, is the rightful claimant to David's throne. "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him."⁹¹¹ Why didn't they receive him? What motive prompted the chief priests and rulers to destroy Jesus? It was not merely their hatred of righteousness. If Christ had simply been a teacher of religion, in the same way as so many are today, doubtless they would have been among his admirers, but then he was "the heir". He was divinely sent by God to occupy David's throne, and put down all opposing authority and power, and as he did this, it brought him into instant collision with them, because they had the inheritance in their possession. Therefore, they said, in their short-sighted, callous, jealousy – "Let's us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours."

So they plotted his destruction, and succeeded in their evil plans. They brought him before Pilate, who, finding no fault in him, was willing to release him.⁹¹² This inflamed their animosity, and showed the true nature of its origin. They shouted out saying – "If you let this man go you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."⁹¹³ This had the desired effect: Pilate gave judgment; and Christ was crucified, and according to the Roman custom, the nature of the charge against him was specified in writing over the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth THE KING OF THE JEWS."⁹¹⁴

Here again the kingship of Christ is to be noted. He was crucified because he "made himself a king".⁹¹⁵ This is the declaration written over the cross. However, this declaration was not sufficiently definite for the chief priests. We read: "Many of the Jews read this sign . . . The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write "The King of the Jews", but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."⁹¹⁶ Here is an important testimony from the chief priests about Christ's own assertion of his royalty. In fact the closing scenes of our Lord's life on earth, altogether constitute the most decisive proof that prospective Jewish royalty was the essential feature of his character as the Messiah, - a feature which is most commonly overlooked in mainstream Christian teaching. The teaching of the Apostles after our Lord's ascension was the same on this important point. We read that the Jews of Thessalonica accused them to the rulers of the city after this fashion:

⁹⁰⁹ Matthew 23:27

⁹¹⁰ Hebrews 1:1-2

⁹¹¹ John 1:11

⁹¹² Luke 23:13-16

⁹¹³ John 19:12

⁹¹⁴ John 19:19

⁹¹⁵ Matthew 27:11

⁹¹⁶ John 19:20-21

“These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar’s decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.”⁹¹⁷

Paul made the same proclamation to the Athenians, in his address in the meeting of the Aeropagus:

“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge⁹¹⁸ the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”⁹¹⁹

In fact, the great message of the New Testament teaching about Jesus is, that he is “the Christ,” that is, the Anointed One foretold by the prophets as the future king of the world. If you deny to him this kingship, you deny that he is the Christ - for the anointing refers, not only to his character as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,”⁹²⁰ but to his future development as God’s ruler on earth. His “anointing” is prospective, culminating in “the glory that will be revealed,” which will “cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” To belong to Christ, to be “in Christ” requires the believer to understand the role and purpose of Christ in the past, in the present and in the future.

The fact that Christ is the future king of the world is one of the most joyous truths of revelation. What other real hope is there for a world afflicted by sin? It has groaned under ages of misrule. The riches of the earth are in the hands of a wealthy minority who keep them for themselves. The great mass of humanity is left to eke out a degraded existence in poverty, ignorance, and misery. God’s goodness has been fraudulently squandered. The provision of God which is sufficient for all has been greedily plundered by the unprincipled and the strong, and held back from those who desperately needed it. This is as true in the present world as it was in the ruthless days of times gone by. As time passes, things tend to go from ‘bad’ to ‘worse’ as humans lead increasingly superficial lives. In many areas of the world the Word of God is, at best, lightly esteemed and faithfulness to God is increasingly less evident.

Where shall we find comfort for the future? The problems of the world are too great to be solved by human endeavour. Its only hope lies in recognising that a great Deliverer is waiting the appointed time of blessing; Christ is the future king of the world. He who endured the shame of a criminal’s cross is coming in honour to wear the universal crown. Even though the times leading up to his coming may be difficult for many, and times of spiritual darkness, the glory of the new age he will bring will be breathtakingly wonderful, and provide everlasting rest for those in this age who place their trust and confidence in his saving grace.

Chapter 12 The Covenant made with David and the Kingdom of Israel under Christ

We have seen that “the promises made to the patriarchs,” in remote Old Testament times, form the basis of the plan which God is developing through Christ. We now consider the covenant made with David, which may be considered as being similar to a clause in the greater covenant established with the patriarchs, clarifying an important matter of detail which is covered by, but not

⁹¹⁷ Acts 17:6-7

⁹¹⁸ The implication here is of “ruler-ship” - RR

⁹¹⁹ Acts 17:30-31

⁹²⁰ John 1:29

expressed in, the older general promises on which the whole plan of God's intended goodness towards mankind rests.

The fact that God made a covenant with David, that had reference to Christ, is placed beyond all doubt by the statement of Peter on the day of Pentecost:

"But he (David) was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne."⁹²¹

Reflect on the further references to the 'oath' referred to by Peter:

- "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, "I will establish your line for ever and make your throne firm through all generations."⁹²²
- "The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath he will not revoke: "One of your descendants I will place on your throne."⁹²³
- "I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness – and I will not lie to David – that his line will continue for ever and his throne endure before me like the sun."⁹²⁴
- "From this man's (David's) descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised."⁹²⁵
- "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets long ago.)"⁹²⁶

These quotations from Scripture establish the facts.

First, we note that God entered into an undertaking with David, king of Israel, to uphold his kingdom in an unlimited future; and, second, that the pledge, covenant, or oath had reference to Jesus. David's "last words"⁹²⁷ confirm this conclusion:

"If my house were not right with God, surely he would not have made with me (David) an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part and grant me my every desire."⁹²⁸

The identity of this covenant with that referred to in the Scriptures quoted above, is evident from the immediate context:

"The Spirit of the Lord spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: "When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth."⁹²⁹

David was an old man when he wrote these words by the Spirit, and it is evident that the text does not primarily refer to David himself. Solomon, a young man of promise, was about to ascend to

⁹²¹ Acts 2:20

⁹²² Psalm 89:3-4

⁹²³ Psalm 132:11

⁹²⁴ Psalm 89:34-36

⁹²⁵ Acts 13:23

⁹²⁶ Luke 1:69-70

⁹²⁷ 2 Samuel 23:1

⁹²⁸ 2 Samuel 23:5

⁹²⁹ 2 Samuel 23:2-4

the throne, and, although David himself recognised Solomon's ascension to the throne as a preliminary fulfilment of the covenant, it is evident that this was not the complete fulfilment of the event contemplated. The Spirit in David points forward to a period when it would be fulfilled in the rule of one who should rise over the world like a cloudless morning; and when David's "every desire" would be accomplished in connection with that great event. This did not come to pass in David's day.

Solomon's reign was doubtless the high-point of Israel's glory; but it was not a cloudless morning - it was not the fulfilment of the covenant. Solomon sinned and led Israel astray. David's salvation was not in any sense secured in Solomon's achievements. On the contrary, his crown was tarnished and his kingdom divided, through the sins of a son who departed from God, multiplied wives, and turned aside to the worship of pagan gods.

It was not to Solomon's reign that "the last (spirit) words of David" had reference as the consummation of "the everlasting covenant" which was David's every desire. There was, visible to the spirit, in the far distance, way beyond the days of Solomon, the form of one whose name should endure for ever - who should descend like rain upon the earth diffusing life and fragrance, in whom men would be blessed throughout the world,⁹³⁰ who, while the destroyer of the wicked, the conqueror of kings, the avenger of injustice, should be a refuge for the poor, a shadow from the heat, a hiding place from the storm, and streams of water in a desert.⁹³¹

So as to be able to study the covenant itself, that passage in the history of David in which it occurs is quoted:

"After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you."

But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'

"Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.'

⁹³⁰ Psalm 72:17

⁹³¹ Isaiah 32:2

“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established for ever.”⁹³²

Now, before beginning to look at the significance of these words, it is important to deal with an objection which is sometimes urged with considerable force - that as, they were fulfilled in the reign of Solomon, they cannot legitimately apply to Christ. That the things affirmed had a parallel in the events of Solomon's reign cannot be denied. Both David and Solomon apply them in this way.⁹³³ Solomon was David's son; God, in a sense, was his Father, as He took him under His special care, and endowed him with a degree of wisdom that made him more famous than other kings. He sat on the throne of David being elevated to the crown before David's decease, by David's own instructions, and continued after David was gathered to his fathers.⁹³⁴ He built the temple of God at Jerusalem, according to plans drawn out by David under the influence of inspiration.⁹³⁵ He was a man of peace. He sinned greatly and was punished by God by means of adversaries that opposed him toward the close of his reign; but God's mercy did not depart from him as it did from Saul, for he was allowed to reign until removed by death.

To this extent, the covenant with David was fulfilled in the days of Solomon, but to say that this parallel was the substance of the things promised, completely contradicts the testimony of Scripture in both Old and New Testaments. David and Solomon's application of the covenant, as recorded in the Scriptures above, does not interfere with this testimony. It may be presumed that neither David nor Solomon realised its full scope. The prophets generally did not understand the full effect of their words.⁹³⁶ In Hebrews the terms of the covenant are applied to Christ: “You are my Son; today I have become your Father.”⁹³⁷ Peter, as we have already seen, clearly says that the covenant had reference to him.⁹³⁸ Jesus applies David's language to himself: “The LORD says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.””⁹³⁹ and furthermore, he says of himself, “I am the root and the offspring of David”,⁹⁴⁰ and that he holds the key of David.⁹⁴¹ In the days of his mortality, he was known and described as “the son of David”, the whole nation of the Jews looked for a son of David to be the Messiah; all the prophets speak of him as a descendant of David, calling him by a number of different expressions such as: “a shoot from the stump of Jesse”⁹⁴², “a righteous Branch” raised up for David⁹⁴³; “a child born and a son given . . . He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom.”⁹⁴⁴

⁹³² 2 Samuel 7:1-16

⁹³³ See: 1 Kings 5:5; 8:20; 11:38; 1 Chronicles 22:7-10; 28:3

⁹³⁴ ‘gathered to his fathers’ = died and buried

⁹³⁵ 1 Chronicles 28:12-19

⁹³⁶ 2 Peter 1:20-21

⁹³⁷ Hebrews 1:5

⁹³⁸ Acts 2:30

⁹³⁹ Psalm 110:1

⁹⁴⁰ Revelation 22:16

⁹⁴¹ Revelation 3:7

⁹⁴² Isaiah 11:1

⁹⁴³ Jeremiah 23:5

⁹⁴⁴ Isaiah 9:6-7

For those who regard Scripture as their guide, it is quite impossible to apply the "everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part"⁹⁴⁵ to anyone but Jesus, David's son and Lord, the "greater than Solomon," on the mere strength of a view taken by David and Solomon, which does not exclude this application, but which merely declares that the covenant made with reference to Jesus was incipiently fulfilled in Solomon.

A question that arises is as to how a prediction can have two fulfilments, separated by so much time. The fact is evidence of the comprehensive nature of the divine word, but does not disprove the fact that the prediction in its ultimate and complete form has reference to Jesus. This is proved in too many ways to leave room for doubt.

On this basis, we consider how much of the covenant has been fulfilled in the career of Christ until the present time, and second, what Christ will do when he appears a second time, in order to fulfil that part of the covenant which was, unquestionably, not realised at his first appearing.

The facts bearing on the first point may very briefly be summarised: After David's days were over and he rested in the grave, fulfilled, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, to Mary, a virgin, descended from the line of David, and engaged to a man named Joseph, who was of the house and line of David. The event was announced by an angel to shepherds in the neighbourhood, watching their flocks by night:

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord."⁹⁴⁶

Zechariah, the father of John, expressed his joy in the following way:

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago)."⁹⁴⁷

Jesus, as we have seen in a previous chapter, was born without human fatherhood; his conception was the result of the power of the Holy Spirit overshadowing Mary. "Therefore," the angel,⁹⁴⁸ said "he will be called the Son of God." Therefore, in a sense far transcending the case of Solomon, terms of the covenant realised were fulfilled in Christ – "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son".⁹⁴⁹ In fact, the divine son-ship of Jesus is the crowning feature of his position as the Messiah. On the basis of Scripture, no one can believe that he is the Christ (Messiah), while denying that he is the Son of God. A scriptural confession of his name involves the recognition of the two facts expressed in the words of Nathaniel – "You are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel".⁹⁵⁰ John says, "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."⁹⁵¹ The divine testimony to Jesus, given at his baptism, and again at his transfiguration, was expressed in these words - "This is my Son whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"⁹⁵² Therefore, the most striking feature in the covenant made with David shines out in Jesus, who was both Son of God and Son of David; and in view of this, it is easy to

⁹⁴⁵ 2 Samuel 23:5

⁹⁴⁶ Luke 2:10-11

⁹⁴⁷ Luke 1:68-70

⁹⁴⁸ Luke 1:35

⁹⁴⁹ Hebrews 1:5

⁹⁵⁰ John 1:49

⁹⁵¹ 1 John 5:5

⁹⁵² Matthew 17:5

understand the words of David in Psalm 110, in reference to which Jesus astonished the Pharisees so that they could not answer again. Jesus said:

"What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he? "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him "Lord"? For he says, "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right until I put your enemies under your feet." If then David calls him "Lord", how can he be his son?"⁹⁵³

This was a question that the Pharisees could not answer from their point of view, because, having supposed that the Messiah was merely to be a natural son of David, on no principle admissible in Jewish practice could David have addressed him as Lord, for that would have been to accord to him a position and a deference which could never be recognised as properly to be yielded to a son by a father. But in view of the truth, the question has an easy solution: Christ is the son of David by Mary; but he is also David's Lord, because of a higher parental origin than David; "Moreover , the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father."⁹⁵⁴

The next feature in the history of Christ corresponds to the next feature in the covenant made with David. He did no wrong; but he was "punished with a rod yielded by men" and "with floggings inflicted by human hands." The original Hebrew of this part of the covenant, according to Dr. Adam Clarke, is more correctly translated as follows: "Even in his suffering for iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men." This is understandable as applied to the death of Christ:

"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. . . The LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."⁹⁵⁵

But the mercy of God did not desert him as it did Saul, who was rejected, and as we might assume it did in the case of Solomon, whose last days seem to have been spent in disobedience. Christ was forsaken on the cross; but it was only for a moment; God's favour returned with the morning which saw his deliverance from the grave of Joseph of Arimathea, and was to him an eternal river of joy. His relation to Deity in these things cannot be better expressed than in the words of the Psalm 16, which Peter, on the day of Pentecost, applied to him:

"I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life; you fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."⁹⁵⁶

In Psalm 89 the covenant with David is repeated and the text makes it clear that it could not be applied to Solomon:

⁹⁵³ Matthew 22:42-45

⁹⁵⁴ John 5:22-23

⁹⁵⁵ Isaiah 53:4-6

⁹⁵⁶ Psalm 16:8-11

"And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. I will maintain my love to him for ever and my covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line for ever, his throne as long as the heavens endure."⁹⁵⁷

In no sense was Solomon Yahweh's firstborn. However, the following statements are made with reference to Jesus:

- "He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."⁹⁵⁸
- "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters."⁹⁵⁹
- "Christ, the first-fruits"⁹⁶⁰

In this respect, he fulfils a condition of the covenant made with David, which is in no sense satisfied in Solomon. And he is indeed "the most exalted of kings of the earth", for Paul says: "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow."⁹⁶¹

When consideration is given to other things said in the covenant of the son promised to David, we find that Jesus has not yet fulfilled them. The first item may be stated in the words of Peter, "that he would place one of his descendants on his (David's) throne."⁹⁶² In no sense can Jesus be said to have done this. The throne of David is in ruins. Its condition is described in the following text:

"But you have rejected, you have spurned, you have been very angry with your anointed one. You have renounced the covenant with your servant and have defiled his crown in the dust. You have broken through all his walls and reduced his strongholds to ruins. All who pass by have plundered him; he has become the scorn of his neighbours. You have exalted the right hand of his foes; you have made all his enemies rejoice. Indeed, you have turned back the edge of his sword and have not supported him in battle. You have put an end to his splendour and cast his throne to the ground."⁹⁶³

These circumstances were predicted by Ezekiel in the following terms:

"You profane and wicked prince of Israel, whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: take off the turban, remove the crown. It will be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! The crown will not be restored until he to whom it rightfully belongs shall come; to him I will give it."⁹⁶⁴

This prediction was given in the reign of Zedekiah, the last Israelite king in the line of David in 593 BC - and throughout the centuries the kingdom has been in a state of ruin. It was overthrown by Nebuchadnezzar in the lifetime of Zedekiah, and was afterwards trampled down by Greece and

⁹⁵⁷ Psalm 89:27-29

⁹⁵⁸ Colossians 1:18

⁹⁵⁹ Romans 8:29

⁹⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:23

⁹⁶¹ Philippians 2:9-10

⁹⁶² Acts 2:30

⁹⁶³ Psalm 89:38-44

⁹⁶⁴ Ezekiel 21:25-27

Rome. Since the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, it has had no existence. Although the Jewish people proclaimed an independent State of Israel in 1948, this state is a democratic republic and not a kingdom. The time for theocratic rule by Messiah is yet to come. Jesus is the one to whom the crown rightfully belongs and only the resurrected Lord is in a position to sit on the throne of David throughout the Kingdom Age; he who is none but the first-born of Yahweh.

Therefore, at some future time, Jesus must return and re-establish the kingdom of David, and rule over it for God, as David did. The words of the prophets present this theme: "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it."⁹⁶⁵ Isaiah confirms these thoughts in a relatively well-known text:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time and for ever."⁹⁶⁶

The following quotations are selected from many possible texts from the words of the prophets:

- "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land."⁹⁶⁷
- "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will plant the kingdoms of Israel and Judah with the offspring of peoples and animals. Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the LORD.⁹⁶⁸
- "This is what the LORD says: as I have brought all this calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised to them."⁹⁶⁹
- "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will fulfil the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah."⁹⁷⁰
- "In that day," declares the LORD, "I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. I will make the lame my remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and for ever."⁹⁷¹
- "This is what the Sovereign LORD says, "I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms."⁹⁷²
- "They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew their ruined cities that have been devastated for generations."⁹⁷³

⁹⁶⁵ Acts 15:16

⁹⁶⁶ Isaiah 9:6-7

⁹⁶⁷ Jeremiah 33:15

⁹⁶⁸ Jeremiah 31:27-28

⁹⁶⁹ Jeremiah 32:42

⁹⁷⁰ Jeremiah 33:14 [This quotation is left in the text as it is indicative of God's future plans for Israel. RR quoted from the KJV which renders the passage 'I will bring upon them all the good I promised them.'

⁹⁷¹ Micah 4:6-7

⁹⁷² Ezekiel 37:21-22 [Many would regard the re-gathering of Israel throughout the 20th century as God's start to this process. Ed]

⁹⁷³ Isaiah 61:4 [Again, the current restoration of Israel may mark the beginning of the fulfilment of this prophecy. Ed]

Although many may feel that some of these prophecies are in an incipient state of fulfilment, these predictions will not be fully realised in the absence of Jesus Christ from the earth. This is evident from the quotations themselves, and is supported by Peter's teaching in the New Testament when he declares that the time of restitution or restoration will occur when Jesus returns to the earth:

"And that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."⁹⁷⁴

When Jesus appears, his kingdom will come as it is his return to the earth that causes his kingdom to be established. On this basis we can understand the statement that "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, he will sit on his glorious throne."⁹⁷⁵ This statement is repeated by Jesus in another form, which makes its identification with the re-establishment of the kingdom of Israel more certain. He said to his disciples:

"Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."⁹⁷⁶

When this comes to pass, there will be a fulfilment of the words addressed to Mary: "And he will reign over Jacob's descendants for ever; his kingdom will never end."⁹⁷⁷ And when these words are proven to be true, the covenant made with David will find a fulfilment which none will be able to doubt.

The covenant guarantees the Messianic establishment of David's kingdom in David's presence. The words are, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me."⁹⁷⁸ As we have seen, this was partially fulfilled when David witnessed Solomon's ascension to the throne before his own death; but it is easy to see how much more completely and substantially it will be fulfilled in the kingdom of David in the hands of Jesus. The kingdom of Israel, as ruled by Christ, will be the kingdom of God. The promise to all the faithful is that they shall inherit the kingdom of God.⁹⁷⁹ Therefore, David, who was a man after God's own heart, will be among those of whom Jesus says, in one of the foregoing list of references, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets - of whom David was one - will be seen in the kingdom of God.

This cannot mean heaven; for Peter categorically says, "For David did not ascent to heaven."⁹⁸⁰ It is the kingdom to be set up in the territory of the Promised Land, when the little stone descends from heaven to break in pieces all other kingdoms. David, looking forward to this time, said in prayer, immediately after hearing the words of the covenant, "You (the LORD) have spoken about the future of the house of your servant. . .Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue for ever in your sight; for you Sovereign LORD have spoken."⁹⁸¹ This prayer is answered in the words of Jeremiah: "For this is what the LORD says, "David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of Israel. . . If I have not made my covenant with day and night and established the laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David

⁹⁷⁴ Acts 3:20-21

⁹⁷⁵ Matthew 25:31

⁹⁷⁶ Matthew 19:28

⁹⁷⁷ Luke 1:33

⁹⁷⁸ 2 Samuel 7:16

⁹⁷⁹ Luke 22:29-30; Matthew 19:28; James 2:5; Luke 13:28-29; 12: 32,36; 2 Peter 1:11

⁹⁸⁰ Acts 2:34

⁹⁸¹ 2 Samuel 7:19-29

my servant and will not have one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.”⁹⁸²

The saints of all ages have expected this time to arrive quickly and that is true of believers today. Even more true is the fact that the time is nearer in this generation than it was in former ones. At God’s appointed time David himself will be in the land, rejoicing in the greatness of his son, who will be a triumphant witness of the truthfulness of Yahweh’s word. Every nation will come to an end, except the nation of Israel⁹⁸³ and every royal family will disappear, except the family of David, which will be in everlastingly remembered, because an everlasting and glorious Lord, even Jesus the Christ, will rule the ransomed inhabitants of the earth. Then all will witness the fulfilment of the promise that the house of David shall continue for ever.

In 2 Samuel 7 we read a phrase which many readers of the Bible have found difficult to apply to Jesus. The text says; “He is the one who will build a house for my name.”⁹⁸⁴ If this means that a place is to be constructed on the earth for the worship of Yahweh, it is very difficult to see how this could be a part of the work of Jesus.

The reason the apparent difficulty is that the application is to the future age. The building of a temple, at which the peoples of the world will worship is something that will happen in the age to come; this work is connected with the noblest mission of the kingdom of God.

Let us first give attention to the evidence which proves that all the things confirmed in the covenant made with David will be realised in the kingdom of Christ. It begins with a statement from Zechariah:

“Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne.”⁹⁸⁵

The applicability of this to Jesus might be doubted from the context if we had not been enlightened as to whom the one who bears the title “the Branch” refers to. The Messiah is uniformly described as ‘The Branch’ and he alone is to be “a priest on his throne,” combining in himself, like Melchizedek, the double function of rule in temporal matters and mediation in the things of God. If this were to be the only consideration, however, to justify the application of the prophecy to Jesus, it would fall short of proving the point. More conclusive evidence is now presented.

It is said of the time when Jesus will reign on the throne of his father David, that “many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him.”⁹⁸⁶ This is expressed by Jeremiah as a gathering of the nations to the name of the Lord to Jerusalem; in consequence of which they walk no more in the stubbornness of their evil hearts⁹⁸⁷ and by Isaiah, as the coming of many people to Jerusalem, saying, “Come, let us go to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.”⁹⁸⁸ Zechariah describes this also:

⁹⁸² Jeremiah 33:17,25-26

⁹⁸³ Jeremiah 30:11

⁹⁸⁴ 2 Samuel 7:13

⁹⁸⁵ Zechariah 6:12-13

⁹⁸⁶ Zechariah 8:22

⁹⁸⁷ Jeremiah 3:17

⁹⁸⁸ Isaiah 2:3

“Then the survivors of all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles.”⁹⁸⁹

It seems evident that these things belong to the time of Christ's reign on earth and nothing else, as they are associated with a time when the nations will have ceased from war, and when people will no longer follow their evil inclinations. Such a state of things has never been realised in the history of the world. If then nations are to go periodically to Jerusalem for the purpose of worship, it stands to reason that there will be a place in which this worship could take place. Why should nations come to Jerusalem, if there were no temple there? If their worship was simply to consist of the sentiment of devotion, this could as well be cultivated in the countries they inhabit as at the holy city.

The temple in Jerusalem would provide an appropriate setting for worship in the wonderful new dispensation, the Kingdom Age – and its location in the capital city is of divine choice. Many Bible texts speak of the temple which will be built, the house of the LORD.

- “Let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob.”⁹⁹⁰
- “And the cooking pots in the LORD’s house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar.”⁹⁹¹
- “Jerusalem will be holy . . . A fountain will flow out of the Lord’s house and will water the valley of acacias.”⁹⁹²

These indirect evidences are offered not so much to prove the point in question but so as to introduce the great and crowning evidence before which all others pale into insignificance. We refer to the vision of Ezekiel, contained in the last nine chapters of the book bearing his name. This portion of the Scripture has baffled many Bible commentators, for the simple reason that most mainstream Christian thinkers can see little reason or purpose in it. Why would anyone want to see the establishment of temple ritual at Jerusalem, if death results, as most traditional mainstream believers suggest, with a journey to ‘heaven’ or ‘hell’?

The chapters referred to were written after the destruction of Solomon's temple by Nebuchadnezzar, and reveal a state of things which has never since existed. The temple was rebuilt when the Jews returned from Babylon. But Ezekiel's prophecy was not fulfilled in that event, as may be seen by a comparison of Ezekiel's prophecy with the facts connected with the second temple. The rebuilt temple, rather than being greater than the first, was vastly inferior to it. This is most clearly seen in a text from Ezra:

“But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sounds of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.”⁹⁹³

Ezekiel's temple is to be contemporary with a division of the promised land among the twelve tribes of Israel.⁹⁹⁴ This has never taken place since the day of the Babylonian captivity. The

⁹⁸⁹ Zechariah 14:16

⁹⁹⁰ Micah 4:2

⁹⁹¹ Zechariah 14:20

⁹⁹² Joel 3:17-18

⁹⁹³ Ezra 3:12-13

⁹⁹⁴ Ezekiel 48

restoration from Babylon was only a return of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and only a fraction of them. The ten tribes constituting the Kingdom of Israel, were removed by Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, to countries beyond the river Euphrates, and have never returned. The conclusion is self evident: the land has never been divided to the twelve tribes of Israel, as it is to be when Ezekiel's temple is built.

Another fact proving the future nature of the prophecy is that, at the time foreseen by Ezekiel, a portion of the country, measuring about eight miles by eight miles, is to be set apart for divine purposes as "sacred district."⁹⁹⁵ In this stand the temple, the holy city, and the houses of the priests. Such a thing, as everyone knows, has never happened in the history of the Holy Land and thus it follows that the state of things depicted in the chapter under consideration lies in the future. This conclusion is established beyond all question by the concluding statement of the prophet who says: "And the name of the city from that time on will be: THE LORD IS THERE."⁹⁹⁶

As we can be sure that the fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecy remains for the future, it is interesting to note what Ezekiel describes. He says that he was brought in vision to the land of Israel, and set upon a very high mountain, from which he saw the outline of a city to the south. He finds himself in the company of a man, "whose appearance was like bronze . . . with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand."⁹⁹⁷ "whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed." This man, whom he sees standing in gateway addressed him as follows:

"Son of man, look carefully and listen closely and pay attention to everything I am going to show you, for that is why you have been brought here. Tell the people of Israel everything you see."⁹⁹⁸

Ezekiel then becomes attentive to his guide's work, and sees him proceed with a series of measurements which he records with much precision, in the first five chapters. Without following the intricacies of these, let us briefly state that Ezekiel is shown a temple exceeding anything ever realised in the history of Israel or any other nation. The temple is a gigantic building, with every object required in the worship of which it is the centre. The outside wall is pierced with many gates, each gate being flanked with rooms for the temple service, and entered by an upward flight of steps. Mounting the steps, the prophet sees an inner wall, nearer the temple; the space lying between the inner and the outer wall being described as "the outer court," and forming a spacious promenade or pavement. The inner wall has gates similar to those in the outer wall. These gates open by eight steps into the inner court, in which stands THE TEMPLE - an immense circle of lofty arched and latticed buildings, capable of holding a multitude of worshippers. This is the centrepiece of the vision. For height, breadth, and in its elaborate structures, it exceeds anything devised in human architecture, and is only surpassed in interest by the event which the prophet witnessed after surveying the external approaches to the building. He describes this event, which he saw from the eastern gate of the outer wall, in the following way:

"And I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. . . The glory of the LORD entered the temple through the gate facing east."⁹⁹⁹

⁹⁹⁵ Ezekiel 45:1,4 –[the dimensions are given in cubits and a rough indication of size^d from the notes in the NIV 2011 Bible. RR suggested originally that the size would be considerably larger at 40 miles by 40 miles. This appears an overestimate. Ed]

⁹⁹⁶ Ezekiel 48:35

⁹⁹⁷ Ezekiel 40:3

⁹⁹⁸ Ezekiel 40:4

⁹⁹⁹ Ezekiel 43:2,4

Ezekiel is then conveyed by the spirit into the inner court, standing in which he sees the house filled with the glory of the Lord. He then hears the divine voice addressing him as follows:

“Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites for ever. The people of Israel will never again defile my holy name – neither they nor their kings – by their prostitution and the memorial monuments for their kings at their death.”¹⁰⁰⁰

Afterwards, Ezekiel is taken back via the eastern gate, and observes that it is shut, in reference to which the following explanation is given:

“This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered through it. The prince himself is the only one who may sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the LORD. He is to enter by way of the portico of the gateway and go out the same way.”¹⁰⁰¹

At a later stage, Ezekiel received the following information in reference to the same gate:

“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: The gate of the inner court facing east is to be shut on the six working days, but on the Sabbath day and on the day of the New Moon it is to be opened. The prince is to enter from the outside through the portico of the gateway and stand by the gatepost. The priests are to sacrifice his burnt offering and his fellowship offerings. He is to bow down in worship at the threshold of the gateway and then go out, but the gate will not be shut until evening. On the Sabbaths and New Moons the people of the land are to worship in the presence of the LORD at the entrance of that gateway.”¹⁰⁰²

The temple, we are informed, stands in the centre of an area of country which is to be occupied by a group described as “the sons of Zadok,” who were faithful in ancient times. To the south of this, there is a similar tract of country measured out for the Levites, whose duty it will be to perform the duties connected with the temple worship. Again, to the south of this, there is a strip of country allotted for the city and land for fields and gardens. The measurements of the city show it to be both extensive and magnificent and thus reflect the name by which it will be known, “THE LORD IS THERE.”

The temple stands on the site of ancient and modern Jerusalem, crowning the hill of Zion. We bring to mind the words of the Psalmist: “For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling, saying, “This is my resting place for ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.”¹⁰⁰³

These details leave no doubt as to the reality of the temple to be erected in the day when the fallen tent of David is restored by the Son of David.

The reason that many mainstream believers are unable to understand this topic, is that they know so little about the kingdom of which the temple and its service form a part. In addition, many find the idea of animal sacrifice a stumbling block. In the temple that the sacrifices superseded by the death of Christ are found restored, burnt offerings and sin offerings, of “bulls and goats,” are

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ezekiel 43:7

¹⁰⁰¹ Ezekiel 44:2-3

¹⁰⁰² Ezekiel 46:1-3

¹⁰⁰³ Psalm 132:13-14

required with all the minute ceremonial performance observed under the law of Moses. They argue that this is no longer necessary as the Lamb of God has taken away the sins of the world.

A little reflection, however, will help engender a fuller understanding. It is clear that the reign of Christ on earth is a priestly one. This is stated in the testimony that "he will be a priest on his throne"¹⁰⁰⁴; and is further evident from the statement: "He made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father,"¹⁰⁰⁵ a double function which appears to have reference to the time when Christ shall reign on earth: "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."¹⁰⁰⁶ If, then, the millennial dispensation is a priestly one, it is appropriate, that the people should have something to offer as a token of their obedience; and the priests, something to present on their behalf.

Some may ask, how can the sacrifice of animals be revived, when he who was slain is present in the earth as a perfected mediator between God and man? And since Christ's priesthood is in force even now, without the use of material sacrifices on the part of his own household, why need there be material sacrifices in the age to come, when his priesthood is only transferred from his own household to the world?

The answer to this must take a general form. As the sacrifices under the law of Moses pointed forward to the death of Christ, so the sacrifices under the "prophet like unto Moses," may point backward to the death of Christ. In the law of Moses, the sacrifices were prospective and typical of that which was to come. Under the law of Christ, they may be retrospective and commemorative of that which has gone before. This would be rather similar to the Lord's supper, which, in Christ's absence, is a standing memorial of his broken body and shed blood. Whatever explanation of the fact may be suggested, there can be no doubt of the fact itself, that sacrifices form part of the institution of the age to come. We gather this, not only from Ezekiel, but from a variety of Scripture testimony, of which we cite the following examples:

- "My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offering will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty.¹⁰⁰⁷
- "Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. All from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD. All Kedar's flocks will be gathered to you, the rams of Nebaioth will serve you; they will be accepted as offerings on my altar, and I will adorn my glorious temple."¹⁰⁰⁸
- "So the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings; they will make vows to the LORD and keep them."¹⁰⁰⁹
- "Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite¹⁰¹⁰ in the house of the LORD Almighty."¹⁰¹¹

¹⁰⁰⁴ Zechariah 6:13

¹⁰⁰⁵ Revelation 1:6

¹⁰⁰⁶ Revelation 5:10

¹⁰⁰⁷ Malachi 1:11

¹⁰⁰⁸ Isaiah 60:6-7

¹⁰⁰⁹ Isaiah 19:21

¹⁰¹⁰ Marginal alternative translation: merchant

¹⁰¹¹ Zechariah 14:21

At first sight, it may appear incongruous that the glorious administration of power and righteousness characteristic of the reign of Christ should be mixed up with a ritual that has been obsolete for centuries and that seems to lack any relationship with the lives of believers in Christ today. There is, however, a line of reasoning which reveals wisdom in the arrangements God has made.

It is part of eternal truth that without faith it is impossible to be accepted by God. This principle is unaffected by time or circumstances; it will be as true in the future age as now. Men and women who live as subjects of the Messiah's kingdom, will have to obtain a right to eat of the tree of life by faith and obedience, as much as those who now have to struggle in the absence of an open vision. But how can their faith be exercised, and how can their obedience be tested in the presence of the overpowering fact of God's visible government of the nations through Jesus and the saints? Given these circumstances it is hard to imagine that faith would really need to be called upon and obedience would seem to be almost overtaken by the practical compulsion brought to bear upon all by the existence and supervision of divine government.

It may well be that the restoration of sacrifice in the Millennial Age will be the means by which faith and obedience are exercised. Called upon to perform acts in the worship of God, which in themselves appear needless and unsuitable, the faith and obedience of the mortal population will be put to as powerful a test as in ancient days, when similar things were required of Israel. Their minds will be educated to submit to the divine will, and to have faith in God's purpose by a ritualism which shows the recognition of divine authority, while at the same time, their minds will be enlightened by the lessons taught by it in allegory. We must remember that in the age to come, the nations subject to Christ and his people will be composed of men and women constituted as men and women are now - and, therefore, in need of spiritual education.

The kingdom of God, in its millennial phase, is a time of spiritual education. Peoples will have to be taught first principles, and taught how to live in a godly way at all times. Left without external stimulus or a specific purpose, the human mind becomes listless and retrogressive. The most brilliant moral impressions will fade in a state of inactivity. Degeneration of this description will be prevented by a system of universal compulsory religion, which will require the presence of every one once a year¹⁰¹² at the centre of divine government and worship, and which, for every offence against the laws of the age, will require the token of penitence in the sacrifice of an animal or property. The minds of everyone will be spiritually active as they turn from ignorance and evil to serve God.

Thus we see a beauty and a force in that clause of the covenant made with David, which gives to the Messiah the duty of building a house for the Lord of all the earth. The physical work of the building, it would seem, would be undertaken by the mortal population of the millennial age but the work will be executed under the supervision of Christ, as the temple of Solomon was built to David's directions:

¹⁰¹² [Whilst it is clear from the Scriptures that the nations will worship annually in Jerusalem, it does not appear clear that every single citizen would be required to make such a journey. RR maintains a clear vision but the details of the future age remain speculative in matters of detail. Ed]

- “Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favour I will show you compassion. . . The children of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel. “Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one travelling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations.”¹⁰¹³
- “They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Strangers will shepherd your flocks: foreigners will work your fields and vineyards.”¹⁰¹⁴
- “See I will beckon the nations, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their hips. Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.”¹⁰¹⁵

It will be the honour of Jesus to bring all nations to worship before God: and this he will do to fulfil the covenant made with David.

In summary then, God will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever, in the hands of Jesus; and, under Him, give Israel the secure dwelling place from which they will never be moved. These two fundamental concepts are integral to the Bible message. People who understand this Bible teaching are able to have a clear understanding of much of Bible prophecy, whereas, those who fail to grasp this teaching, frequently regard Old Testament prophecy as almost impossible to understand and virtually irrelevant to the message of the gospel.

Unfortunately mainstream religious teaching has, to a large extent, failed to grasp the main theme of the gospel message. Led on by a large majority who maintain unscriptural views about the kingdom of God, and by a system of religion that is in bondage to tradition, few are able to reassess their position on these matters. All systems of religion tend to be slow to change even in the light of new understanding as they tend to be held in bondage by training systems in which new teachers are persuaded to retain the traditional teachings of the church. Those who speak out are often side-lined in terms of career progression and ignored by the majority who remain content in their religious customs and traditions.

As a result, nothing will break into this intellectual slavery except for the iron rod of the Son of David. When he comes as King with the authority now exercised by all the kings and parliaments of the world; when he unsparingly takes hold of vested interests which obstruct the path of divine progress; when he shatters earthly respectability; when he overturns the institutions which unenlightened crowds fall down and worship, through the simple force of their traditions; when he sends out into all the world the decrees of divine authority; when he sets up a system of pure worship which all will obey; when he demands the allegiance of all; when he comes to sweep from the face of the earth the existing institutions which shelter ignorance, vice, and misery; while professedly based on right, religion, and morality; and to bring swift, unerring justice; when he breaks in pieces the whole constitution of human society and substitutes for it a new order of things, having restored the kingdom of David, in the land of Israel, - then, and not until then, will mankind recognise the foolishness of their ways, and “come from the ends of the earth and say, “Our ancestors possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good.”¹⁰¹⁶ In

¹⁰¹³ Isaiah 60:10,14-15

¹⁰¹⁴ Isaiah 61:4-5

¹⁰¹⁵ Isaiah 49:22-23

¹⁰¹⁶ Jeremiah 16:19

that day he will “rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth.”¹⁰¹⁷ “On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.”¹⁰¹⁸

Chapter 13 The Second Coming of Christ

Hope is the special feature of the Gospel and it relates to the second coming of the Lord Jesus to this earth. Jesus is now at the right hand of God in heaven and, at God’s appointed time he will descend just as he ascended, and appear in person on the earth, as the same Lord Jesus who sojourned in Judea among the Jews and Romans. This is the teaching of the Word of God and it forms an essential part of the true Christian hope.

The apostles declare there is only “one hope,” as there is only “one faith and one baptism.”¹⁰¹⁹ That this “one hope” is an essential element of the gospel, is apparent from Paul’s words to the Colossians, where, speaking of “the hope stored up for you in heaven” (Christ being there), he says, “about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel.”¹⁰²⁰ He even says, “In this hope (the hope of redemption) we are saved.”¹⁰²¹ The writer to the Hebrews explains that the salvation of the believer is contingent upon adhering to that hope. His words are, “and we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.”¹⁰²² Paul’s letter to the Colossians is equally noteworthy on this point:

“But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight . . . if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.”¹⁰²³

These testimonies ought to impress us with a sense of the importance of the question about to be considered. If we fail to grasp the basic teachings that make up the message of the Bible we find ourselves mistaken in the things that we hope for – and end up hoping in things that God has never promised! The faith that builds its house upon the foundation-rock of the assured promises of God, will withstand the storm, whereas, that house which is built on sand, lacking firm foundations, will be swept away.¹⁰²⁴

Before looking at Scripture references about the coming of the Lord, it will be helpful to reflect a little on the personal ministry of Christ when he was on earth. During his three year ministry in the land of Judea, he did wonderful works that attested to his divine mission. He proclaimed the things of the kingdom of God, and asserted his Messiah-ship. This proclamation had the effect of drawing many disciples to him, and of causing them to look upon him as the anointed king of Israel in a literal sense, and destined to bring about “the redemption of Israel” from the Romans and all other nations, and to establish the kingdom of God in triumph over all the earth.

The teaching of Christ had a further effect upon the minds of the disciples. It created in them an expectation that they themselves would share the kingly honours of Christ at the time when his kingly mission would take place. Their hope of inheriting the kingdom of God in a real, personal

¹⁰¹⁷ Psalm 67:4

¹⁰¹⁸ Zechariah 14:9

¹⁰¹⁹ Ephesians 4:4-5

¹⁰²⁰ Colossians 1:5

¹⁰²¹ Romans 8:24

¹⁰²² Hebrews 3:6

¹⁰²³ Colossians 1:22-23

¹⁰²⁴ Matthew 7:26

way, like their view of the kingship, was based both on prophetic testimony, and the clear teaching of our Lord himself. In the prophets they had observed texts such:

- “But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it for ever – yes, for ever and ever.”¹⁰²⁵
- “The time came when they (the saints or holy people) possessed the kingdom.”¹⁰²⁶
- “The sovereignty, power and greatness of all kingdoms will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High.”¹⁰²⁷
- “Let his faithful people rejoice in their honour and sing for joy on their beds. May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them – this is the glory of all his faithful people.”¹⁰²⁸

- “Your sons will take the place of your fathers; you will make them princes throughout the land.”¹⁰²⁹
- “See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice.”¹⁰³⁰
- “I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them.”¹⁰³¹
- “Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD’s.”¹⁰³²

The Lord also taught a similar message with which the disciples would have been acquainted:

- “It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.”¹⁰³³
- “The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ His Master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been found faithful with a few things: I will put you in charge of many things.’”¹⁰³⁴
- “‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied. ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’”¹⁰³⁵

Again, Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the Jews, “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”¹⁰³⁶

¹⁰²⁵ Daniel 7:18

¹⁰²⁶ Daniel 7:22

¹⁰²⁷ Daniel 7:27

¹⁰²⁸ Psalm 149:5-9

¹⁰²⁹ Psalm 45:16

¹⁰³⁰ Isaiah 32:1

¹⁰³¹ Jeremiah 23:3-4

¹⁰³² Obadiah 21

¹⁰³³ Matthew 24:46-47

¹⁰³⁴ Matthew 25:20-21

¹⁰³⁵ Luke 19:17

At the time Jesus spoke the last quoted words, the chief priests and Roman rulers were in authority over “the kingdom of Israel,” which having been originally established by God, was called the kingdom of God. Now most people can understand the meaning of the prediction that the kingdom would be taken away from them. They know as a matter of history that the Jewish nation was brought to an end, and that, in fulfilment of Christ’s prediction, its rulers were deposed from their seats of authority, and were destroyed in the awful judgments that befell the city of Jerusalem. But when directed to the second part of the statement, most people seem to have difficulty in understanding what it refers to. It “will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”

A moment’s reflection will enable us to see that the ‘thing taken’ is the same as the ‘thing given’; so, the kingdom of Israel, which was taken from the chief priests and Pharisees, will be given to “a people who will produce its fruit.” We now must identify who the fruit-producing nation is; and this is easily answered. Jesus said to his disciples, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”¹⁰³⁷ He also said, in answer to Peter’s question, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”¹⁰³⁸

“Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”¹⁰³⁹

Again, when the disciples were together at the last supper, Jesus said to them:

“You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”¹⁰⁴⁰

Here is a complete identification of “a people who will produce its fruit.” The people consist of the disciples of our Saviour, who is himself at their head as “the heir”. They are described by Peter as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession”¹⁰⁴¹. This is in accordance with the testimony that they will inherit the kingdom of God that was taken from the Pharisees, and that, though now in ruins, is to be restored in to glory.

If the disciples were mistaken about the concept of Christ’s Kingdom, and the position that they should hold in it, it is remarkable that we never read of any correction by Christ of that mistake. There were three occasions which would have elicited such correction had it been required.

The first was when “the mother of Zebedee’s children” came with her two sons - James and John - saying, “Grant that one of these my two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom”¹⁰⁴² The Saviour, who was never slow to correct the misconceptions of his disciples, or even to rebuke them severely, but we do not see any sign of censure. Not the softest whisper of implied rebuke! Rather a direct and significant confirmation of the idea embodied in the fond mother’s petition. “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them . . . To sit on my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been

¹⁰³⁶ Matthew 21:43

¹⁰³⁷ Luke 12:32

¹⁰³⁸ Matthew 19:27

¹⁰³⁹ Matthew 19:28

¹⁰⁴⁰ Luke 22:28-30

¹⁰⁴¹ 1 Peter 2:9

¹⁰⁴² Matthew 20:21

prepared by my Father.”¹⁰⁴³ So, instead of pronouncing her request the result of a misunderstanding, he actually declares that the position requested will be given to those for whom it is prepared.

The second occasion occurred after the resurrection. Jesus joined two of his disciples as they walked to the village of Emmaus¹⁰⁴⁴ but were kept from recognising him. They talked with him on the subject of his own death. In the course of conversation, one of them, expressing the view shared by the disciples generally, said: “We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel.”¹⁰⁴⁵ Here again was the opportunity to explain their misconception to them, had it been a misconception. Here again there is an entire absence of any remark relating to any kind of misunderstanding. He rebuked them but the rebuke did not refer to what they did believe, but to what they did not believe. “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”¹⁰⁴⁶ He reproached them for disbelieving in his sufferings – not for believing in his kingly glory.

The third time was immediately before his ascension. Jesus and his disciples were together and the disciples asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel.”¹⁰⁴⁷

They had had their eyes opened to the fact and necessity of his sufferings, but seeing that these were now accomplished, and that he had been gloriously resurrected from the dead, they evidently thought that the time had at last arrived when their cherished hope of national restoration under the Messiah should be realised; and so they asked him if he would *at that time* make that which was their hearts’ desire happen.

Now it is a remarkable circumstance, that this question was asked after Christ had spoken to the disciples “about the kingdom of God” for a period of forty days.¹⁰⁴⁸ This fact suggests that the question was based on the teaching they received during that time. How was the question received? With discouragement and rebuke? No: but, as in the previous case, with a confirmatory answer: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”¹⁰⁴⁹ This was equivalent to saying that “times and dates” had been provided for the event contemplated in their question - that is, that the event, the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel, would really come to pass in the process of time, but that it was not for them to know when. How inappropriate would such an answer have been if their whole understanding was incorrect.

But the fact is, there was no question about the event itself. Jesus had been enlightening them on the subject of the kingdom for a period of forty days. Their enquiry related purely to the time of the event, and his answer was confined to that same thing. They supposed the event would take place at that time. “People thought the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.”¹⁰⁵⁰ This was a particular mistake of early times. They did not make a mistake in believing that God would establish His Kingdom on earth, and that Christ should visibly manifest himself as the “king over the whole earth”¹⁰⁵¹ as these things have been so fully spoken of in the prophets and proclaimed by Jesus himself. Their mistake lay in supposing that they would be accomplished in their own day.

¹⁰⁴³ Matthew 20:22-23

¹⁰⁴⁴ Luke 24:13

¹⁰⁴⁵ Luke 24:21

¹⁰⁴⁶ Luke 24:25-26

¹⁰⁴⁷ Acts 1:6

¹⁰⁴⁸ Acts 1:3

¹⁰⁴⁹ Acts 1:7

¹⁰⁵⁰ Luke 19:11

¹⁰⁵¹ Zechariah 14:9

Many who adhere to mainstream Christian teaching have gone to the opposite extreme. They do not look for the kingdom of God at all. They make the sacrificial element of the gospel everything and omit the kingly element altogether. They tend to exclude the kingdom of God, as they know so little about it, while emphasising only the death of Christ, a crucified Lord, the lamb slain from the creation of the world.¹⁰⁵² The disciples saw only the *king* in Christ, and expected his manifestation in their own times; mainstream thinkers see only the *sacrifice*, and consider his mission accomplished in the saving of ‘immortal souls’ at death.

The mistake of the disciples was corrected in due time. The occurrence of Christ's crucifixion and subsequent resurrection and ascension, filled the gap in their knowledge, enabling them to see that the promised glories of the future age were not attainable by mortal man without a sacrificial intervention - a tasting of death for every one, “in bringing many sons and daughters to glory.”¹⁰⁵³ But this addition to their knowledge did not divert their attention from the glories of the future age. Quite the opposite; the death of Christ, apart from its prospective relationship, had no attractiveness; its interest and importance arose from its connection with the glorious result it achieved. So that instead of removing the kingdom from their mind, it only intensified their appreciation of it, by showing them its value in the greatness of the sacrifice necessary to secure it. It made them all the more eager to witness the consummation of “the glory to come.” They therefore said, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”¹⁰⁵⁴ They evidently had no idea of Christ’s leaving them again. They had forgotten the many parables in which he had taught them of his approaching departure into “a distant country” from which he should later return, to take account of his servants.¹⁰⁵⁵ Only one feeling was uppermost in their minds - a desire that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.

When, therefore, “he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight”¹⁰⁵⁶ they looked with astonishment at the unexpected and inexplicable occurrence. Christ taken away from them again! They were utterly unable to understand the new disappointment. Their hopes had been raised to the highest pitch by a companionship of forty days, and the grief which had overwhelmed them during their Lord’s incarceration in the tomb, had been replaced by a wonderful hope as they learned more about the things of the kingdom of God; and now again, their Lord and Master, their best friend, their hope and salvation, he on whom their whole affection and the most yearning desire were concentrated, had left them. What were they to do? They were again thrown to the world, perplexed and bewildered. But this time relief was at hand:

“Two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way as you have seen him go into heaven.”¹⁰⁵⁷

The disciples were comforted in their distress by being assured that Jesus would come again; this was the balm administered to their troubled spirits; this, the hope by which they reconciled themselves to the absence of their Lord and Master. From that day forward, it became the central point of their teaching, the prominent and essentially distinguished feature of the good news they proclaimed.

¹⁰⁵² Revelation 13:8

¹⁰⁵³ Hebrews 2:10

¹⁰⁵⁴ Acts 1:6

¹⁰⁵⁵ Luke 19:12; Matthew 25:4

¹⁰⁵⁶ Acts 1:12

¹⁰⁵⁷ Acts 1:10-11

Jesus himself had repeatedly taught them about his return, even before he was crucified. The parable of the nobleman¹⁰⁵⁸ was intended for this very purpose, and it is said that he used it "because people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once." Its teaching is very clear:

"A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas¹⁰⁵⁹. "Put this money to work," he said, "until I come back." . . . He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money."¹⁰⁶⁰

By this the disciples were taught that Jesus would be taken up to heaven to be invested with power, and that afterwards he would return to the earth, and then judge his servants. He would award the servants with the ruler-ship of cities, or the ignominy of a shameful rejection, according to their response. It was an amplification of his other statement: "You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."¹⁰⁶¹ - a resurrection which does not take place until "the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command."¹⁰⁶² The parable of the ten virgins teaches the same lesson. The absent bridegroom stands for the ascended Christ, and the waiting virgins for those who "look for his appearing." In addition to other parables which also taught this lesson, Jesus had plainly said, "The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them"¹⁰⁶³ and had assured them in plain speech: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."¹⁰⁶⁴

But they were not able to understand the simple lesson, for the reason that Christ was with them, and they never expected him to leave them. They could not see what his "return" could mean, when they knew nothing about his going away; but when the days came that the bridegroom was taken from them, "then they remembered his words."¹⁰⁶⁵ The announcement of the angels would have doubtless revived the many lessons which Jesus himself had taught them about his intended departure and return to establish the kingdom; and from then on the second coming of the Lord became their cherished hope - the great event to which they looked for salvation. It was the thing they preached and wrote about, the thing they hoped and prayed for, the main feature of their faith.

Of course, it did not, and could not, exclude, but rather involved and necessitated the teaching of Christ's sacrifice for sin, and the necessity for contrition and personal regeneration; for the second coming of the Lord will only benefit those who love him and who are accepted by him as his faithful ones. The teaching about the second coming and the establishment of the kingdom of God, however, was the prime focus of the gospel message. We find Peter teaching it in one of his first addresses after the ascension of Christ:

¹⁰⁵⁸ Luke 19:11-12

¹⁰⁵⁹ A mina equates to about 3 months wages (NIV 2011 footnote)

¹⁰⁶⁰ Luke 19:12-13,15

¹⁰⁶¹ Luke 14:14

¹⁰⁶² 1 Thessalonians 4:16

¹⁰⁶³ Matthew 9:15

¹⁰⁶⁴ John 14:3

¹⁰⁶⁵ Luke 24:8

“Turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”¹⁰⁶⁶

And the same apostle, when writing to the elders, repeated the teaching saying:

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and witness of Christ’s sufferings who will also share in the glory to be revealed: be shepherds of God’s flock . . . And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”¹⁰⁶⁷

The immediate disciples of our Lord most definitely believed that his second coming was their great hope, in fact, their *only* hope, for what other hope could they have? They loved their Lord and Master dearly, and knew that his return to them would be their own deliverance from the imperfections of a sinful body, and from their suffering caused by wicked men, and not only so, but the establishment on earth of “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”¹⁰⁶⁸ To what other event, then, could they look with *Christian* hope than to the coming of *Christ*?

To what other event could they look with any hope at all? No event in their lifetime had promise for them; and what was there in death except a hope of resurrection? For them it had none of the fascination with which much traditional mainstream teaching has given to it. They did not recognise in “sudden death sudden glory.” Death to them, instead of being the “doorway to bliss,” was “the gateway of corruption.” It was the bondage of that hereditary mortality from which Christ had come to deliver them – they would lie unconscious in the grave until the return of their master to wake them to an incorruptible resurrection, when they should say, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, where is your sting?”¹⁰⁶⁹

No; their hope was not death, but the return of the Lord, to which all their personal hopes and fears, and all their expectations concerning the fulfilment of God’s promises, inevitably directed them. This then became the hope of those who were afterwards converted to the Christian faith.

The gospel they preached, conveyed the same hope. Paul desired to attain to the resurrection from the dead.¹⁰⁷⁰ He expected to be included among those who belong to Christ when he comes.¹⁰⁷¹ He looked forward to¹⁰⁷² “a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day” which is described as the day of “his appearing and his kingdom.”¹⁰⁷³

These were the hopes of all those who embraced the Gospel. Resurrection to eternal life, and inheritance in the kingdom of God, is the salvation offered to every son or daughter of Adam irrespective of their circumstances in this life. Those who receive that promised salvation in the sense of believing it, “rest in hope” – in hope of resurrection to eternal life in the kingdom of God.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Acts 3:19-21

¹⁰⁶⁷ 1 Peter 5:1-2,4

¹⁰⁶⁸ Luke 2:14

¹⁰⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:55

¹⁰⁷⁰ Philippians 3:11

¹⁰⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 15:23

¹⁰⁷² 2 Timothy 4:8

¹⁰⁷³ 2 Timothy 4:1

Those who are truly faithful will have a constant and longing desire for the salvation that they teach others about. They will long to be witnesses to, and partakers in, the perfection of the kingdom of God. In addition to this, they will seek to prepare themselves with devotion for the day when they meet their Lord. This will be seen in the way they live their lives – lives characterised by the highest moral standards, by kindness to others, and by taking part individually and collectively in teaching others of the true gospel message, the gospel of salvation.

Now as these “things hoped for” cannot be attained until the Lord comes and initiates them, the faithful believer will keep them uppermost in his mind, expecting at any time the return of Jesus to the earth. It doesn’t matter whether the actual event occurs during the natural life span of the believer because, whenever it happens, it will be the time of personal deliverance. In clinging to the concept that each person possesses an ‘immortal soul’ which must be accommodated in heaven or hell immediately a person dies, traditional mainstream teaching contradicts the plain teaching of the Scriptures. From this mistaken point of view, it follows that the idea of enjoying an eternal reward upon the return of the Saviour to earth is of little practical interest, since they believe that they have received it already in heaven. Thus for such their attention is naturally concentrated on death, as the great revealing event, and diverted from the coming of Christ, which many have come to look upon as a sort of profitless and even questionable teaching. In fact, many religious people go the length of rejecting it altogether and interpret all references to it in the New Testament as meaning the occurrence of death.

When we accept the teaching of the Bible and reject the teaching of the immortality of the soul - the root of all evil in a theological sense - harmony is restored. We see the righteous dead asleep in corruption, and recognise the necessity of the Redeemer's second coming to wake them to incorruptibility and life, and the essential importance of that event as the object of hope during their lifetime.

In endeavouring to show that the second coming of Christ is the hope of Christians converted by the preaching of the apostles, the arguments that have been advanced can be seen to be supported by many references from the epistles addressed to them in which the teaching is set out plainly and with conviction:

- “For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say, “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age while we wait for that blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁷⁴
- “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”¹⁰⁷⁵
- “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”¹⁰⁷⁶
- “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”¹⁰⁷⁷
- “What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”¹⁰⁷⁸
- “You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus”¹⁰⁷⁹

¹⁰⁷⁴ Titus 2:11-13

¹⁰⁷⁵ Philippians 3:20-21

¹⁰⁷⁶ Hebrews 9:28

¹⁰⁷⁷ Colossians 3:4

¹⁰⁷⁸ 1 John 3:2

- “Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”¹⁰⁷⁹
- “Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming . . . be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near.”¹⁰⁸⁰
- “Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace that is to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is to be revealed at his coming.”¹⁰⁸¹
- “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all his holy ones.”¹⁰⁸²
- “Keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time.”¹⁰⁸³
- “And now, dear children, continue in him (Jesus), so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed at his coming.”¹⁰⁸⁴
- “God is just . . . he (will) give relief to you . . . when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven.”¹⁰⁸⁵
- “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”¹⁰⁸⁶

It is superfluous to comment upon these eloquent testimonies. Their scrupulous explicitness leaves no room for argument. They show that the hope of the early Christians was different from that of many who hold to traditional mainstream teaching. Each was to seek the time of the Lord’s coming as the time of personal salvation. Jesus himself had encouraged them to be watchful: “Look, I come as a thief! Blessed is the one who remains awake.”¹⁰⁸⁷ He had also said:

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on your watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”¹⁰⁸⁸

In much of the professing Christian world of the present day, we fail to see any evidence of this anxiety about the second coming of Christ and, frequently, there is indifference to it. Many seem to have failed to heed the teaching of the parable which, in speaking of the coming of the bridegroom, describes those who were supposed to have been attentive to his coming in these words: “They all became drowsy and fell asleep.”¹⁰⁸⁹ Such teaching is also found elsewhere in the New Testament. Peter rebukes those who fail to prepare for his coming for they say: “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the

¹⁰⁷⁹ 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

¹⁰⁸⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:7

¹⁰⁸¹ James 5:7-8

¹⁰⁸² 1 Peter 1:13

¹⁰⁸³ 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

¹⁰⁸⁴ 1 Timothy 6:14

¹⁰⁸⁵ 1 John 2:28

¹⁰⁸⁶ 2 Thessalonians 1:6-7

¹⁰⁸⁷ 2 Timothy 4:8

¹⁰⁸⁸ Revelation 16:15

¹⁰⁸⁹ Luke 21:34-36

¹⁰⁹⁰ Matthew 25:5

beginning of creation.”¹⁰⁹¹ Let all who seek the true message of the Bible pay attention to the warning given by Jesus: “that day will close upon you suddenly like a trap.”¹⁰⁹²

Let the faithful believer remember that death is not the moment of immediate transfer to paradise, or worse to eternal punishment, but a time when we are consigned to darkness and silence, to await the coming of Christ. The time of his coming and of our resurrection is the time of judgement.¹⁰⁹³ Eternal happiness awaits all those who prepare for the day of his coming, who look for his appearing the second time and to his salvation.

Chapter 14 The Hope of Israel

It will seem a strange to most people today that there is a connection between the hope of the gospel and an event as local in its character as the restoration of the Jews to their own land (Israel). Nevertheless, such a connection exists, if we are to be guided by the Scriptures, rather than by tradition.

The interest taken by most mainstream “Christians,” as a body, in the Jews, is purely sentimental in character, and it is very weak and purely retrospective. It arises from the history of the Jews - from their national relation to the Deity in former times; from their ancient role as the channel of revelation; and from their flesh-and-blood connection with the Messiah. It does not stretch into the future and recognises no connection between their future and the salvation that will appear on the earth when the Messiah returns.

The truth of God justifies an interest of a much more practical kind than this. In the purpose of God, the salvation of the world is bound up in the destiny of the Jews and that their ultimate glorious re-establishment on a permanent basis in the land of Israel in an essential part of God’s plan and purpose. God’s concern and care for his people, the Jews, is a clear theme within the gospels and in the teaching of the apostles.

Jesus said to his disciples, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”¹⁰⁹⁴ Jesus was referring to the Jews as can be seen from another of his statements:

“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.”¹⁰⁹⁵

He also said to the woman of Samaria, at Jacob’s well, “Salvation is from the Jews.”¹⁰⁹⁶ These passages alone show the national interest of the salvation proclaimed by Jesus and his apostles. Jesus was a Jew, born of the house of David as the God-appointed heir of David’s throne, and the apostles who laboured with him were also Jews. They proclaimed a message which came from the God of the Jews, and which according to the original teaching of Christ was for the Jews. Therefore, Paul could emphatically characterise the gospel as “the hope of Israel,” saying “It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”¹⁰⁹⁷ He could also make the following statement when he defended himself before Agrippa:

¹⁰⁹¹ 2 Peter 3:4

¹⁰⁹² Luke 21:34

¹⁰⁹³ Romans 2:16

¹⁰⁹⁴ Matthew 15:24

¹⁰⁹⁵ Matthew 10:5-6

¹⁰⁹⁶ John 4:22

¹⁰⁹⁷ Acts 28:20

"And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me."¹⁰⁹⁸

He could also say with a truthfulness that is infrequently appreciated:

"... the people of Israel. There is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises."¹⁰⁹⁹

It is evident that the gospel is intensely Jewish in its origin, its application, and its future outworking. It is equally evident that this was how it was regarded by the disciples after the day of Pentecost; for we read in Acts: "Now those who had been scattered . . . travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews."¹¹⁰⁰ It will also be remembered that Peter required a special revelation to teach him about God's proposed inclusion of the Gentiles into the blessings of Israel, and even then he threw the onus of it upon God. He did not attempt to justify it himself, but apologised for preaching to the Gentiles, saying, "Who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?"¹¹⁰¹

The fact is, the admission of the Gentiles was one of the "mysteries of the gospel." Paul makes this clear in the following text:

"You will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to people in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus."¹¹⁰²

This opening of the way for the admission of the Gentiles did not, however, destroy the Jewish nature of "the hope". The effect was precisely the other way round. The hope of the gospel converted Gentiles into Jews, and brought them in line with the essentially Jewish nature through which God's promises would come to pass. Therefore, Paul says to those Ephesians who received the gospel:

"Remember that at one time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. . . .Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household."¹¹⁰³

Elsewhere, he said to the Romans, "a person is a Jew who is one inwardly"¹¹⁰⁴ by which he meant, that, a person who, being a Gentile by birth, has become a Jew in heart, and taste, and hope, is more of a *real* Jew than the unfaithful natural descendants of Abraham. When talking about the admission of the Gentiles, he speaks of it as a cutting out of the olive tree, *which is wild*

¹⁰⁹⁸ Acts 26:6-7

¹⁰⁹⁹ Romans 9:3-4

¹¹⁰⁰ Acts 11:19

¹¹⁰¹ Acts 11:17

¹¹⁰² Ephesians 3:4-6

¹¹⁰³ Ephesians 2: 12-13,19

¹¹⁰⁴ Romans 2:29

by nature, and a grafting contrary to nature, *into the good olive tree.*¹¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the Gentiles are “wild olive branches” without hope - without birthright - without promises - without a future inheritance of any kind; and if they desire to become heirs of the inheritance to come, they must throw off “the old man” (their Gentile past) and put on “the new man” (becoming a ‘Jew’ – a person of faith) “which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”¹¹⁰⁶

Traditional mainstream teaching speaks little, if at all, about “the hope of Israel.” However, the essential feature of the gospel is to be recognised in a Jewish national hope, founded upon certain promises made of God to the patriarchs of the nation. Those promises on which that hope was founded, are the very basis of the good news, or gospel proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles. Those who believed this gospel message derived a specific hope from the things that they had appreciated. Now, as the one truly Christian hope arises from receiving the teaching of the gospel, and as the gospel is the basis of a Jewish national hope, it must be very evident that there is a close connection between the Christian hope and the hope of Israel.

The Jews are a people whose origin and history are well documented. Abraham, a member of a Chaldean family, was commanded to separate himself from his people, and go into a land which “he would later receive as his inheritance”.¹¹⁰⁷ He obeyed, and went out, “even though he did not know where he was going.” He was later informed that his descendants would become a great nation, with whom God would have special dealings, and who should be the special objects of His care. In the course of time Abraham's household went down into Egypt, and settled in that country, and were, initially, warmly received. In the course of events, the Pharoahs enslaved them, and subjected them to a bitter rule for more than two centuries. At the end of that time, they were delivered through divine intervention by the hand of Moses; and after various ups and downs, they settled in the land of promise under a divine constitution, which ensured that, for as long as the nation was obedient to its requirements, they would remain in the land in prosperity, but that so soon as they departed from the statutes of God, adversity would overtake them.

The subsequent part of their history is summed up in a sentence; they failed to observe the conditions of this national covenant, and were expelled from the national territory in disgrace, and scattered among the nations as fugitives.

Many people who hold to a mainstream pattern of Christian belief have looked upon Jewish national history as something that was primarily of the past and fail to see the future purpose that God has with his people. Ironically, many think that if they are able to persuade a Jew to become a Christian with beliefs in line with traditional mainstream teaching, it is a job ‘well done’. Little do they realise that it would be in line with gospel teaching to help a Jew realise that they need to embrace the promises made to their own patriarchs and also accept the means by which the future blessing is theirs, in accepting the sacrificial work of Jesus and his current ministry of grace that leads to salvation. Rather than becoming a ‘Christian’, in a sense, they should become the true seed of Abraham, real Jews, Jews “who are Jews inwardly” and not simply by natural descent.

Yahweh has said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”¹¹⁰⁸ Human “ways” would have removed the Jews from the earth centuries ago; but God’s way has preserved them throughout history – they have witnessed the fall of Gentile dynasties, and the annihilation of Gentile races, and to this day, they remain a distinct and indestructible people.

¹¹⁰⁵ Romans 11:24

¹¹⁰⁶ Colossians 3:10

¹¹⁰⁷ Hebrews 11:8

¹¹⁰⁸ Isaiah 55:8

Human “thoughts” have alienated the Jews, as a nation, from all further divine relationship; but God’s thoughts, while having, for the time being, set Israel aside as a result of their sins, have decreed the ultimate disappearance of every other nation under heaven, and the eternal preservation of the despised Jewish nation in close communion with Himself.¹¹⁰⁹ Consider the following testimonies regarding the national standing of the Jews before God:

- “I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.”¹¹¹⁰
- “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God. The LORD has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”¹¹¹¹
- “You are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession.”¹¹¹²
- “And the LORD has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands. He has declared that he will set you in praise, fame and honour high above all the nations he has made and that you will be a people holy to the LORD you God, as he promised.”¹¹¹³

It would be difficult to give more emphatic expression to the idea of a special, deliberate, and unconditional selection by God of the Jews as a people for Himself. The Eternal Creator, in His infinite wisdom, has the right to develop His own plans in His own way. The selection of the Jews is one feature of the plan which He has conceived in relation to this world. This is incontestably proved by the texts that have been referred to. Nothing can undo that selection. Even the Jews themselves cannot nullify God’s decision. They may bring upon themselves, as they have done, divine displeasure and divine affliction but they cannot alter their position before God as His chosen nation. The very punishments which they have endured for many generations are proof of divine interest in the nation. “You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for your sins.”¹¹¹⁴

In our day, we may see Israel as a nation, or Jews who remain living in other parts of the world, as having not appreciated the salvation which would be theirs in Christ. However, this does not mean that God has no longer any purpose with his treasured possession, his own people. Paul says, “God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.”¹¹¹⁵ Jeremiah uses plain language on this subject:

“Though I completely destroy all the other nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only in due measure; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.”¹¹¹⁶

The national sufferings of Israel are the measured discipline to which God has subjected them; they are not evidence that God has finally rejected them. The language of Yahweh, as recorded later in Jeremiah would imply that some, in ancient times, took an opposing view, and contended, as many who follow traditional mainstream teaching still do, that God has no further particular interest in His people, and ‘what will be, will be.’ The word of the LORD teaches a very clear truth:

¹¹⁰⁹ Jeremiah 30:11

¹¹¹⁰ Leviticus 20:26

¹¹¹¹ Deuteronomy 7:6

¹¹¹² Deuteronomy 14:2

¹¹¹³ Deuteronomy 26:18-19

¹¹¹⁴ Amos 3:2

¹¹¹⁵ Romans 11:2

¹¹¹⁶ Jeremiah 30:11

- “Have you not noticed that these people are saying, “The LORD has rejected the two kingdoms he chose”? So they despise my people and no longer regard them as a nation. This is what the LORD says: “If I have not made my covenant with day and night and established the laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.”¹¹¹⁷
- “But now many nations are gathered against you. They say, “Let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion!” But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD; they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them like sheaves to the threshing-floor.”¹¹¹⁸
- “You are my war club, my weapon for battle – with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms.”¹¹¹⁹

These are the very words of Yahweh. They show us that though the Jews are now fragmented, they are destined to be the breakers of all kingdoms under heaven.

For centuries, the Jews have suffered as a punishment for their sins. This was foretold by all the prophets. The sovereign people of the word have been scattered among the nations. Frequently they have been held in low esteem and had to endure insults and persecution from the nations where they found some degree of refuge. Throughout these centuries, however, the message of the prophets remained a hope for those who understood it. Brighter days would lie ahead and the LORD’s displeasure would not permanently rest on his treasured people. Jeremiah said:

“This is what the LORD says: as I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will give them the prosperity I have promised them.”¹¹²⁰

Here is a complete answer to the question. It confirms that prosperity will succeed the calamity which they have endured. Jeremiah gives more specific detail:

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will fulfil the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah. “In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.”¹¹²¹

Here the “good promise” is briefly summarised. Its two main features are, - a king to do what is just and right *in the land* and the salvation of Judah and Jerusalem *at that time*. This is the promise of the Messiah who will rescue them from their enemies, and recover them from the oppression to which they have been subjected throughout the ages, a promise which is repeated in the following words, in Ezekiel:

“I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or divided into two kingdoms.”¹¹²²

¹¹¹⁷ Jeremiah 33:24-26

¹¹¹⁸ Micah 4:11-12

¹¹¹⁹ Jeremiah 51:20

¹¹²⁰ Jeremiah 32:42

¹¹²¹ Jeremiah 33:14-16

¹¹²² Ezekiel 37:22

It is important to note the second element in the “good promise”: “In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety.” These days are yet to come as, at present, there is no Messiah to be seen in Israel who is doing that which is ‘just’ and ‘right’ and Israel does not have the absolute security it has been promised. The promise remains and this “good promise” shall come to pass. It is as certain in its fulfilment as the times of calamity were:

“Just as I watched over them (Israel and Judah) to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” declares the LORD.¹¹²³

This is to be in the days of the Righteous Branch, when he “does what is just and right in the land”. Jeremiah also records:

“At that time they will call Jerusalem the Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honour the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. In those days the people of Judah will join the people of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your ancestors as an inheritance.”¹¹²⁴

The prophet Ezekiel says:

- ““This is what the Sovereign LORD says, “I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land.”¹¹²⁵
- “For I will take you out of the nations: I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land.”¹¹²⁶

There is no evading this language. It is too definitely worded to be spiritualised or misunderstood. The One who scattered will be the One who will restore:

“Hear the word of the LORD, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: “He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.”¹¹²⁷

In the sense therefore, in which the Jews were scattered, they would seem now to be being ‘gathered’.¹¹²⁸ They were driven from their own land, and dispersed among the nations; this was the scattering. Their return to the land of promise was also prophesied – and the time is to come when they will be exalted in the earth. These are the words of Zephaniah and Zechariah:

¹¹²³ Jeremiah 31:28

¹¹²⁴ Jeremiah 3:17-18

¹¹²⁵ Ezekiel 37:21

¹¹²⁶ Ezekiel 36:24

¹¹²⁷ Jeremiah 31:10

¹¹²⁸ The re-establishment of the State of Israel in the 20th century and the large number of migrant Jews who returned to Israel are most probably testimony to the process the prophets described. However, many Jews remain ‘scattered’ and thus the prophecy is not complete. It has also been postulated that this re-gathering may not necessarily be the final one. Those who believe the true message of the Bible are comforted by the process of incipient ‘restoration’.

- “At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honour in every land where they have suffered shame. At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honour and praise among all the people of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes.”¹¹²⁹
- “This is what the LORD Almighty says, “In those days ten people from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, “Let us go with you because we have heard that God is with you.””¹¹³⁰

This honour is connected with political supremacy. The Jews, the most despised people on the face of the earth, are to become the most powerful and famous among the nations, and all the nations will be subservient to them. This is evident from the following text:

“Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn . . . Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favour I will show you compassion. Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut day or night, so that people may bring you the wealth of other nations – their kings led in triumphal procession. For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. The children of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will fall down at your feet and will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Although you have been forsaken and hated, with no one travelling through, I will make you the everlasting pride and the joy of all generations.”¹¹³¹

When this shall come to pass, the enemies of Israel will not know what has happened to them. Those who now deride the Jews will be overtaken by the retribution to which they are rendering themselves liable. The approaching time of Jewish prosperity, when Messiah returns, will be their destruction. The preliminary symptoms of the change that will take place will fill them with panic. This is what the Scriptures say:

- “Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will put their hands over their mouths and their ears will become deaf. They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the LORD our God and will be afraid of you.”¹¹³²
- “I will contend with those who contend with you, and your children I will save. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine. Then all mankind will know that I, the LORD, am your Saviour, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.”¹¹³³
- “All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish. Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all.”¹¹³⁴

Here, then, is certain doom for all who now oppose Israel; but there is a blessing in store for those who befriend her. “May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed.”¹¹³⁵

¹¹²⁹ Zephaniah 3:19-20

¹¹³⁰ Zechariah 8:23

¹¹³¹ Isaiah 60:3,10-12,14-15

¹¹³² Micah 7:16-17

¹¹³³ Isaiah 49:25-26

¹¹³⁴ Isaiah 41:11-12

¹¹³⁵ Numbers 24:9

This was the decree pronounced by Balaam under the influence of the spirit, and declared to Abraham centuries before. It has both an individual and national application.

When we look at the Jewish people today, many see in the re-established nation an assertive, aggressive regime which seems to show a lack of compassion for other groups of people who live within its borders or the territories it occupies. Whilst, individually, those who live in Israel are probably much the same in disposition as other citizens of western states, the regime itself often appears very 'hard-line'. What is it then, that will bring about their elevation and how can their hard-line nature be reconciled with the coming blessing of Him who shows no partiality, and who gives to everyone according to their work? The answer to this problem is found when it is realised that the restoration of the Jews was not conditional upon their moral condition but upon God's desire to elevate his own name. The prophet says:

- "It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone."¹¹³⁶
- "I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel."¹¹³⁷

To summarise, the main points that the Scriptures teach us about the Hope of Israel are:

1. The Jews are God's chosen nation.
2. The Jews are the nation in whom God's promises are centred.
3. The Jews were dispersed throughout the centuries as a punishment for their sins.
4. The Jews are to be regathered, restored as a people in their own land – a process that has been started in the 20th century.
5. The enemies of Israel are to be destroyed
6. Those nations which remain after the coming of Messiah are to become subject to the restored kingdom of Israel, and to visit Jerusalem to pay homage to the King of all the earth, and to learn his ways.

These things constitute "the Hope of Israel," for which Paul was bound with chains; they are also the bases of the true believer's hope. The hope of the believer is the coming of Christ, and the establishment of the kingdom of God, involving the restoration of Israel. The hope of the Jew is the coming of Christ, and the establishment of the kingdom of God. Hence their hopes are identical, though their relation to it is, at first, slightly different. The gospel as taught by the apostles is truly "the hope of Israel." That gospel was, in reality, a proclamation of a coming re-establishment of the kingdom of Israel under the "greater than Solomon." All have been invited to become partakers in Israel's glory by belief and baptism into the saving name of Jesus.

Our association with Jesus, through lives lived in faith, makes us the true children (or seed) of Abraham. We share the true hope and become people who are 'inwardly Jews' in the sense that we become 'of Israel'. For, "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel . . . In other words, it is not the children of physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."¹¹³⁸ As Abraham's children we are honoured to be "heirs of the promise" made to him.

¹¹³⁶ Ezekiel 36:22

¹¹³⁷ Ezekiel 36:32

¹¹³⁸ Romans 9:6-7

The fact that it is not the children who are of natural descent who are the spiritual children of Abraham does not in any way diminish the importance of the Jews as a nation or of the future that God has in store for them. It is *absolutely true* that all of Israel are not Israel - that thousands of the seed of Abraham are not children. To be counted as a child of Abraham a person must possess faith in God. Childhood is not a matter of carrying out religious rituals or requirements such as circumcision or sacrifice. Reverence for the name of God and faithful living as seen in keeping the commandments and ordinances of the Law of Moses, were laid down as conditions of citizenship in the nation. The penalty attached to almost every law was that anyone who transgressed it "must be cut off from their people."¹¹³⁹ Transgressors and those who lacked faith therefore, though of Israel, were not *Israel*, even under the law. A whole generation of such non-Israelites perished in the wilderness; but this did not nullify the national election of the seed of Abraham (through Israel). It only showed that fleshly descent from Abraham did not of itself constitute accepted citizenship of Israel - that it required Abraham's faith as well as Abraham's blood.

Individually, as well, in reference to the heir-ship of the kingdom, "it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring."¹¹⁴⁰ No fleshly son of Abraham has a natural title to the honour, glory, and immortality of the covenanted kingdom. These are reserved for those who develop a true belief or faith in the *promises*. In this respect, "the flesh counts for nothing"¹¹⁴¹ and even in respect of mortal citizenship, it counts for nothing, for, as been shown, that privilege is not to be granted on mere fleshly title. "I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. I will purge you of those who revolt and rebel against me."¹¹⁴² This is the prophetic declaration. Thousands of Jews will continue to be gathered from the countries who will never enter the land on an eternal basis. Yet this will not destroy their national relationship. Being Jews, whom God has specially chosen as a nation, with a view to the development of His ultimate purpose, every one of them will be gathered in the preliminary restoration. This is what Moses and Isaiah say:

- "Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the LORD your God will gather you and bring you back."¹¹⁴³
- "In that day the LORD will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, Israel, will be gathered up one by one."¹¹⁴⁴

The prophecies pointed to an indiscriminate national restoration, without any reference to moral condition, just as when the tribes of Israel were delivered from Egypt by Moses; because the nation, as a whole, is God's by sovereign election, and they cannot alienate themselves from that relationship, even though they may be rebellious.

Therefore, even in the national restoration of the Jews, the children of the flesh are not counted as the seed. In the ultimate purpose of God, many of those who are unfaithful at present will be moved to belief. Their current lack of faith was foreseen by the LORD and used as the vehicle for bringing the responsive from the nations to be recipients of the promises. This is how Paul explains the process:

¹¹³⁹ Examples abound e.g. Leviticus 7:20-25

¹¹⁴⁰ Romans 9:8

¹¹⁴¹ John 6:63

¹¹⁴² Ezekiel 20:37-38

¹¹⁴³ Deuteronomy 30:4

¹¹⁴⁴ Isaiah 27:12

- “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness from Jacob. . . As far as election is concerned, they are loved of God on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.””¹¹⁴⁵
- “But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!”¹¹⁴⁶
- “For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”¹¹⁴⁷

Here Paul contemplates a time of “full inclusion” for the nation, a national change, when “the full number of Gentiles has come in” and warns the Gentiles not to become conceited.¹¹⁴⁸ This informs us of Paul’s views on the subject of the restoration of the Jews. The prophets and Moses, as we have seen, foretell the glorious restoration and national restitution of the chosen nation that has suffered the punishment of God for nearly two thousand years. This, then, was the teaching of Paul, who declared only “what the prophets and Moses said would happen.”¹¹⁴⁹

In summary the kingdom of God cannot be established before the restoration of Israel is accomplished. Currently we see a nation which comprises many of the Jews who have migrated to it from other parts of the world but many still remain to be brought to their homeland.¹¹⁵⁰

“Salvation is from the Jews,”¹¹⁵¹ nationally and individually. It is important to understand this element of the truth of God so that we may be enabled to throw off our Gentile past and become related to the commonwealth of Israel, that being “Abraham’s children,” we will be “heirs according to the promise.”

Chapter 15 The Difficulties of the Last Days before the Return of Jesus

Traditional mainstream teaching has tended to suggest that God’s kingdom will eventually come to the earth through the work of the church as it preaches a gospel of peace. Thus mortal men and women will, according to this teaching, find themselves in a world that is ever more peaceful and gradually slips into millennial tranquillity without any disturbance to the present way of things. As they, depart, so traditional teaching says, the ‘immortal souls’ of the departed leave for heaven, or perhaps for hell. Nothing could be further from Bible teaching.

The Bible paints a picture of a troubled world before the Christ personally returns as King to earth in power and great glory.

In previous chapters, it has been shown that it is God’s purpose to send Jesus Christ to the earth again to destroy all kingdoms that exist, and set up a kingdom of his own that will be universal and never ending. We now consider the circumstances that will surround this momentous event in the

¹¹⁴⁵ Romans 11:25-29

¹¹⁴⁶ Romans 11:12

¹¹⁴⁷ Romans 11:15

¹¹⁴⁸ Romans 11:25

¹¹⁴⁹ Acts 26:22

¹¹⁵⁰ As has been suggested before, such a re-gathering is clearly anticipated by the prophets. It would seem likely that the 20th century has witnessed the beginning of this process but, whether this is the re-gathering that the saints are looking for, or whether there will be yet another is not clear. RR, in a paragraph in his original work in this chapter talked about a prophecy that indicated that the Jews would be called out of Egypt based on Ezekiel 20. This does not appear to have been the case in the current re-gathering unless it is viewed as being called from “Egypt” – in the sense of being called from the Gentile nations. Ed.

¹¹⁵¹ John 4:22

world's history. It is not left to our own imagination to consider the state of the world at this coming time – the Scriptures clearly point to a world experiencing considerable unrest:

- “There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginnings of nations until then.”¹¹⁵²
- “On the earth, nations will be in a state of anguish and perplexity at the roaring and the tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.”¹¹⁵³
- “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth. At that time those slain by the LORD will be everywhere – from one end of the earth to the other.’”¹¹⁵⁴

These texts show that the setting up of the kingdom of God on earth will be accompanied by troubles on a scale without parallel in history and that the whole world will be involved in political turmoil. We shall find that another element of trouble will characterise the times of the second advent - that God Himself will operate in visible judgment upon the nations of the earth - that natural perplexities will be supplemented by miraculous retributions. The testimonies to this effect are numerous and emphatic and deserve the most thoughtful consideration:

“Now prophesy all these words against them and say to them: “The LORD will roar from on high; he will thunder from his holy dwelling and roar mightily against his land. He will shout like those who tread the grapes, shout against all who live on the earth. The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the LORD will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword.””¹¹⁵⁵

Here is a direct pleading with “all who live on the earth” on the part of the LORD, and the destruction of the wicked from among the people. History records no such awful happening. The time when it will come to pass is indicated by the following text:

“See, the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction.”¹¹⁵⁶

Who is “the Name of the LORD” personified in this quotation from Isaiah? We hear the answer from Jesus himself: “I have come in my Father’s name,”¹¹⁵⁷ and of whom it is written, “For there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”¹¹⁵⁸ This is Jesus the Christ, the anointed of God, who is to us Emmanuel-God-with-us, the Word made flesh - a name of God provided for the salvation of mankind. The prophecy says of him that he “comes from afar” and the meaning of this is explained in Christ’s parable to his disciples¹¹⁵⁹ in which a certain nobleman went into a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. Therefore, Jesus (the nobleman), returning from heaven (the distant country), is “the Name of the LORD (that) comes from afar.”

¹¹⁵² Daniel 12:1 (and context)

¹¹⁵³ Luke 21:25-26

¹¹⁵⁴ Jeremiah 25:32-33

¹¹⁵⁵ Jeremiah 25:30-31

¹¹⁵⁶ Isaiah 30:27-28

¹¹⁵⁷ John 5:43

¹¹⁵⁸ Acts 4:12

¹¹⁵⁹ Luke 19:12-27

The prophecy also reveals the character of the Lord Jesus at his return. "His lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire." This is Paul's description of this event: "This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."¹¹⁶⁰ This agrees with the prophet Isaiah who says: "He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked."¹¹⁶¹ Finally, we contemplate the picture symbolically elaborated in Revelation:

"Then I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron sceptre.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."¹¹⁶²

Having seen that "the Name of the LORD comes from afar, with burning anger" applies to the approaching advent of Christ to take vengeance, it will be profitable to cite other texts to show that this teaching about coming judgment is the uniform teaching of the Spirit in the Word, and not based solely on a few isolated passages:

- "See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with the sword the LORD will execute judgment on all people' and many will be those slain by the LORD."¹¹⁶³
- "Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages. He summons the heavens above, and the earth that he may judge his people: "Gather to me this consecrated people who made a covenant with me by sacrifice." And the heavens proclaim his righteousness for he is a God of justice."¹¹⁶⁴
- ""Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its rays."¹¹⁶⁵
- "See, the storm of the LORD will burst out in wrath, a driving wind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand this."¹¹⁶⁶
- "When you appear for battle you will burn them (your enemies) up as in a blazing furnace. The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath, and his fire will consume them."¹¹⁶⁷
- "On the wicked he will rain fiery coals and burning sulphur; a scorching wind will be their lot."¹¹⁶⁸
- "I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in safety in the coastlands, and they will know that I am the LORD."¹¹⁶⁹

¹¹⁶⁰ 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8

¹¹⁶¹ Isaiah 11:4

¹¹⁶² Revelation 19:11-16

¹¹⁶³ Isaiah 66:15-16

¹¹⁶⁴ Psalm 50:3-6

¹¹⁶⁵ Malachi 4:1-2 (KJV: Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in his beams)

¹¹⁶⁶ Jeremiah 30:23-24

¹¹⁶⁷ Psalm 21:9

¹¹⁶⁸ Psalm 11:6

- “At that time those slain by the LORD will be everywhere – from one end of the earth to the other. They will not be mourned or gathered up or buried, but will be like dung lying on the ground.”¹¹⁶⁹

Taking scriptural texts as a whole, two separate stages in the troubles that lie ahead are revealed. First, there is “great distress,” “nation rising against nation” and “people will faint from terror.”¹¹⁷⁰ Secondly, there will be the divine manifestation in the person of the Son of Man (who is “the name of the Lord”) accompanied by sweeping judgments by fire and sword which will destroy large swathes of mankind. As the times of the end draw near, we must anticipate times of trouble and commotion on the earth.

At some point in the course of these ‘natural’ troubles, the Lord Jesus will appear but no longer as “the Lamb slain from the creation of the world,”¹¹⁷² – as a man “of suffering and familiar with pain”¹¹⁷³ but as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,”¹¹⁷⁴ who “treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty”¹¹⁷⁵ - taking vengeance on this unbelieving generation. The vengeance in relation to mankind as a whole will be destruction to the majority, and discipline to the remnant. Multitudes will perish by war and disease; multitudes more will fall victim to the fire which will descend, in just the same way as was the case in the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and just the flames that consumed the military companies that went to fetch Elijah from the top of the mount. “At that time those slain by the LORD will be everywhere – from one end of the earth to the other.”¹¹⁷⁶

The earth's population will be greatly reduced; the rebellious will be removed, leaving a smaller number composed of the meek and submissive, and well-disposed of mankind, who will constitute the willing subjects of Messiah's kingdom.¹¹⁷⁷ These will comprise the nations which shall go up “to the temple of the God of Jacob”¹¹⁷⁸ at Jerusalem, to learn of his ways and walk in his paths.

But this outcome will not be immediate as the subjugation of the world will take a period of time. When Christ comes, the powers will join forces against him. This is evident from Revelation: “Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army.”¹¹⁷⁹ This is after his descent from heaven.¹¹⁸⁰ It may be thought incredible that nations should be so foolish as to attempt to oppose the operations of the omnipotent power of Christ as King. However, history frequently repeats itself. The Egyptians did not surrender before the unmistakable evidence of divine working, but madly pursued Israel after they left Egypt, and were destroyed in the Red Sea. It is not at all improbable that some national powers will regard Christ as some new leader intent on universal conquest. Under this impression they will join forces to depose him but their misguided efforts will recoil upon their own heads resulting in their own destruction:

¹¹⁶⁹ Ezekiel 39:6

¹¹⁷⁰ Jeremiah 25:33

¹¹⁷¹ Luke 21 and Matthew 24 indicate these troubles

¹¹⁷² Revelation 13:8

¹¹⁷³ Isaiah 53:3

¹¹⁷⁴ Revelation 5:5

¹¹⁷⁵ Revelation 19:15

¹¹⁷⁶ Jeremiah 25:33

¹¹⁷⁷ Referred to in texts such as Isaiah 2:3; Jeremiah 3:17; Micah 4:2; Zechariah 14:16

¹¹⁷⁸ Isaiah 2:3

¹¹⁷⁹ Revelation 19:19

¹¹⁸⁰ Revelation 19:11

- “Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumble-weed before a gale. In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone!”¹¹⁸¹
- “The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath.”¹¹⁸²
- “The Lord is at your right hand; he will crush kings on the day of his wrath. He will judge nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.”¹¹⁸³
- “In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison (i.e. the grave)¹¹⁸⁴ and be punished after many days. The moon will be dismayed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders – with great glory.”¹¹⁸⁵
- “Those who oppose the LORD will be broken. The Most High will thunder from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.”¹¹⁸⁶

Those forces who attempt to depose the Lord Jesus as King will take action that will result in their complete destruction. The entire system of human government which they represent will be “broken to pieces”¹¹⁸⁷, and the invincible theocracy of the “Greater than Solomon”¹¹⁸⁸ will be asserted and universally established.

This, however, will not be accomplished instantaneously. God could annihilate the power of the enemy in a moment, and at once clear the way for the establishment of his own power in the earth. If this were to happen, there would then be no scope for the intended punishment of the wicked of the world, and no depth in the moral effect upon “the remnant.” God could at once have destroyed the Egyptians and liberated the captive Israelites - but then the lesson which was intended to be taught for all time would not have been graven sufficiently deep; the Jews would simply have had an indistinct idea of the greatness and omnipotence of Yahweh; and the historical name of God, which is one of the supports of our faith, would scarcely have been remembered. God’s work is always characterised by comprehensiveness of aim, and it is only ignorance of the purpose that engenders contempt for the means. In the collision, then, which will take place at the end,¹¹⁸⁹ between the powers of this world and Christ, the man God has appointed to judge the world in righteousness, mankind will be allowed to go to any length, and to use his power in the vain attempt to vanquish unsuspected omnipotence. This will give time for the moral operation of the judgments which will be brought to bear in their suppression:

- “When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.”¹¹⁸⁹
- “All the nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”¹¹⁹⁰

¹¹⁸¹ Isaiah 17:13-14

¹¹⁸² Psalm 2:4-5

¹¹⁸³ Psalm 110:5-6

¹¹⁸⁴ Refer to Zechariah 9:11

¹¹⁸⁵ Isaiah 24:21-23

¹¹⁸⁶ 1 Samuel 2:10 [And further scriptures on this theme include Zephaniah 3:8; Haggai 2:6,22]

¹¹⁸⁷ Daniel 2:35

¹¹⁸⁸ A scriptural term relating to Jesus, the Messiah

¹¹⁸⁹ Isaiah 26:9

¹¹⁹⁰ Revelation 15:4

Many laborious campaigns will probably take place before complete surrender occurs. The governments of the earth will struggle desperately to preserve the status quo from annihilation. They will fight to the last, hoping against hope, for victory. However, they will be completely defeated and the Lamb of God will reign triumphantly for he "will overcome them." Following this the remaining people of the world will learn the righteous ways of God and will be pleased to welcome the start of the new world order, which will be universally established upon the ruins of "the kingdom of the world."¹¹⁹¹

What will be the position of Christ's own people at this time of crisis, those who now, and in the past, have "longed for his appearing"¹¹⁹² being like "servants waiting for their master to return"?¹¹⁹³ It is clear that they are not left among the nations during this dreadful time of trouble, they are with "the Lamb," as is evident from Revelation: "They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."¹¹⁹⁴ As Zechariah says; "Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him."¹¹⁹⁵

The saints co-operate with Christ in executing his judgments. This honour is in reserve for them all. It will be their privilege "to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them – this is the glory of all his faithful people."¹¹⁹⁶ Paul reminds the Corinthians of this approaching elevation of the saints to the judgment-seat: "Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more the things of this life?"¹¹⁹⁷ A similar picture is painted in John's vision in Revelation: "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge."¹¹⁹⁸

Thus it is clear that, in the closing judgment-scenes of this dispensation, the saints will be associated with the Lord Jesus in destroying the political, ecclesiastical, and social systems which taken together make up "the present evil age."¹¹⁹⁹ This is a work of devastation involving considerable loss of life, similar in style to the destruction that took place at the times of the Genesis flood, a time of unparalleled trouble, "a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness,"¹²⁰⁰ "the great and dreadful day of the LORD."¹²⁰¹

The outcome will be widespread desolation resulting from scathing judgments administered by Jesus and the saints. "The eyes of the arrogant will be humbled and human pride brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled) . . . People will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from the fearful presence of the LORD and the splendour of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth."¹²⁰²

¹¹⁹¹ Revelation 11:15

¹¹⁹² 2 Timothy 4:8

¹¹⁹³ Luke 12:36

¹¹⁹⁴ Revelation 17:14

¹¹⁹⁵ Zechariah 14:5

¹¹⁹⁶ Psalm 149:7-9

¹¹⁹⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:2-3

¹¹⁹⁸ Revelation 20:4

¹¹⁹⁹ Galatians 1:4

¹²⁰⁰ Joel 2:2

¹²⁰¹ Malachi 4:5

¹²⁰² Isaiah 2:11-12,19

It follows that before this judgment period commences, the saints will be removed from the world as otherwise they would not be with Christ, and would be involved in the general troubles, which is contrary to the words of Isaiah.

"Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by. See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed on it; the earth will conceal its slain no longer."¹²⁰³

The idea expressed by "enter your rooms and shut the doors" to hide, is clarified in the New Testament - first, where we read, "The virgins that were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut"¹²⁰⁴ and second, in Revelation¹²⁰⁵, where we find that this marriage is the reunion between Christ and his people at his coming.

Paul explains further in his epistle to the Thessalonians:

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever."¹²⁰⁶

This is referred to in the second epistle, as "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him."¹²⁰⁷ The first event that takes place, then, after the return of the Lord from heaven, is the "gathering together" of all his saints to him, including the dead of past ages, who will have been raised from the dead for the purpose. This gathering together is a gathering to judgment. Paul says: "We (the sons and daughters of the LORD) must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."¹²⁰⁸ and the parables which Christ spoke on earth, illustrative of his imminent departure to heaven, and his subsequent return, have this characteristic feature: "He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for his servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had gained from it."¹²⁰⁹

From all this, it appears, that on his return, his dead servants will be raised, and his living servants gathered with them from every part of the earth where they may be scattered, to be brought before him, that he may "settle accounts" with them.¹²¹⁰ He will approve of some, and reject others: the latter will be sentenced to share in the judgments which will descend upon the apocalyptic "beast and the kings of the earth and their armies,"¹²¹¹ or sin, as politically and ecclesiastically incorporated in the powers that will "wage war against the Lamb"¹²¹² and his army; the former will be admitted to the marriage ceremony, in which they will be acknowledged, "before my Father and

¹²⁰³ Isaiah 26:20-21

¹²⁰⁴ Matthew 25:10

¹²⁰⁵ Revelation 19:7-8

¹²⁰⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

¹²⁰⁷ 2 Thessalonians 2:1

¹²⁰⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:10

¹²⁰⁹ Luke 19:15

¹²¹⁰ Matthew 18:23

¹²¹¹ Revelation 19:19

¹²¹² Revelation 17:14

his angels,"¹²¹³ and will from then on "follow the Lamb wherever he goes,"¹²¹⁴ and co-operate with him in the infliction upon the nations of the judgments previously referred to in this chapter.

All this takes place before divine judgments commence, but not before the nations are "in anguish and perplexity"¹²¹⁵ which is the first symptom of the approaching "time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then."¹²¹⁶ This state of political upheaval will, probably, prevail for a considerable time before the saints are called away to judgment, and the people of the world will only consider it a repetition of upheavals that have recurred many times during the course of history. They will look only to its immediate cause. They will never suspect that a divine hand is guiding the development of events, or that "the judge is standing at the door."¹²¹⁷ They will never dream that the world is on the verge of the most awful crisis that has ever occurred in its history - that long restrained divine indignation is about to visit the world bringing destroying judgments that will break up the entire system of human society, as politically, ecclesiastically, and socially organised.

But like the little hand-cloud¹²¹⁸ indicating the coming storm, the saints will be removed at a particular juncture of affairs without previous intimation. In all probability, the event will be so inconspicuous as to attract little attention. All that the world in general will know of it will be that a few obscure individuals, holding "fanatical" teachings, have mysteriously disappeared; few will ever seriously suppose that there is anything supernatural in the occurrence. Theories of the phenomenon will be readily produced, and the incident will be forgotten - at least by the majority. Some who happened to know that this expected removal was part of the teaching of these fanatical people, may be unable to quell a certain feeling of uneasiness which will trouble them to some extent; but the world at large will be unaffected, and will move on to the destruction that awaits it at the revelation of Jesus with all his saints.

For the sake of clarity, the events already spoken of are summarised below in their chronological order:

- 1st: "Nations will be in anguish and perplexity" arising from the complication of international politics, described as "disaster is spreading from nation to nation," and producing a "fainting from terror" among the population. (Luke 21:26; Jeremiah 25:32).
- 2nd: The coming of Christ as a thief (Revelation 16:15)
- 3rd: The resurrection of "the dead in Christ."
- 4th: The gathering of the saints to Christ from all parts of the earth, including the living and those who have died.
- 5th: The judgment of Jesus' servants, including the rejection of the unworthy and acceptance of the faithful; the sending away of the former into the territory of the nations on whom judgment will descend, and the uniting of the latter as "the bride made ready," in glorious marriage, to the long absent, but then arrived bridegroom.
- 6th: War between a confederacy of nations and the Lamb, who shall overcome them.
- 7th: Heavy judgments inflicted on the nations by Jesus and the saints, producing great slaughter over all the earth, and resulting in the complete abolition of the existing order of things, and in the teaching of righteousness to men.

¹²¹³ Matthew 10:32; Revelation 3:5

¹²¹⁴ Revelation 14:4

¹²¹⁵ Luke 21:25

¹²¹⁶ Daniel 12:1

¹²¹⁷ James 5:9

¹²¹⁸ 1 Kings 18:44

- 8th: The setting up of the kingdom of God, which will last for a thousand years, and then undergo a change in its constitution, adapting it to the requirements of the eternal ages beyond.

Although this chapter has attempted to outline the events which will occur at “the end,” in connection with the establishment of the kingdom of God, it has not dealt in any detail with the events that are related to the return of Messiah.

Chapter 16 What must a person do to be saved?

Having recognised that we are mortal, and that immortality and the wonderful inheritance of the future ages are attainable, and having presented the gospel message as it appears in the pages of the Bible, it is now important to consider what individuals must do so as to please God and take hold of the wonderful promises he has made. If God is to be pleased, then we must listen and accept what he requires from us and we must realise that the wonderful gift of eternal life and a place in the eternal matters of God, is a gift of grace which is given at the absolute discretion of the Giver. The one who seeks has no natural claim on the gift and he who bestows the blessing has absolute right to say upon which conditions it will be granted.

Humility and a childlike acceptance of the things of God are needed. Jesus says: “Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”¹²¹⁹ We also need to realise that it is the gospel, our acceptance and appreciation of it, which is the “power of God that brings salvation.”¹²²⁰ Nowhere does the Bible suggest that salvation depends upon living up to a moral “goodness” or that salvation is found anywhere else but in the message of hope that it offers. (Perhaps the main reason for this mode of thought which is frequently expressed lies in the mistaken belief that each person has an “immortal soul” and consequently this has to have a future based on some kind of measure. This mistaken concept has been dealt with in detail in earlier chapters.)

Many find it difficult to believe that God has placed “conditions” upon individuals - especially when so few seem willing to adhere to them with the effect that the great majority of humanity is excluded from the possibility of his salvation. Many find it difficult to get to grip with the concept that millions of people, who they regard as “good”, should end up in “hell” because they lack knowledge of the gospel. Consequently, much main stream theology results in people, on the day of their funeral, being commended to, or ‘waved off’, to a heavenly dwelling with the prospect of eternal bliss and ultimate re-union with loved ones. This book has shown these ideas to be untrue and fanciful. When the concept of innate immortality is set aside, and the plain Bible (and scientific) truth is accepted, that death is cessation of conscious being, we are at a good starting point for we see humanity perishing and involved in a process from which it is unable to deliver itself.

“Death came to all people, because all sinned.”¹²²¹ Without help from God it is impossible for any human to escape this experience. Good living cannot save and, often, we witness the “good” dying at a younger age than the “bad”. To know what can save, we must listen to the apostles. Jesus Christ was sent for the purpose of opening a way of salvation and having opened the way, he sent his apostles to tell men and women how it might be entered.

¹²¹⁹ Luke 18:17

¹²²⁰ Romans 1:16

¹²²¹ Romans 5:12

God's purpose in sending this message to the nations was not to convert them *en masse*. James reported that Peter made clear that Yahweh's purpose in bringing the gospel to the Gentiles was "to choose a people for his name."¹²²² This is all, then, that is intended in the preaching of the Gospel - the gathering out of "every tribe and language and people" of all generations, a people who will collectively make up that great name in the earth, when "the LORD will be king over the whole earth. . .and his name the only name."¹²²³ (in which all who bear it will be included). The gospel is, in fact, an invitation to all who accept it, to form part of that name, by putting it on in the appointed way. Sadly the number who choose to do so is very small. "Many are invited, but few are chosen."¹²²⁴ "Many will try to enter and will not be able to."¹²²⁵ Jesus gave his commission to his disciples in the following words:

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."¹²²⁶

Here is a clear indication of the principle on which the "people for His name" are to be selected. The gospel was to be proclaimed, and those to whom it was proclaimed, were required to believe it. Without belief, there could be no salvation; for whosoever will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. The gospel was made the means of salvation. Paul calls it "the gospel of your salvation."¹²²⁷ He also says "the gospel . . . is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."¹²²⁸ The same point is made elsewhere: "God was pleased through the foolishness¹²²⁹ of what was preached to save those who believe."¹²³⁰ Therefore, if any person wishes to be saved, the very first thing that is required is belief in the gospel.

Cornelius was instructed by an angel to "Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved."¹²³¹ And the Philippian jailer was told by Paul, in answer to his question, "What must I do to be saved?" – "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household."¹²³² Believing in the Lord Jesus, and believing the gospel, is exactly the same thing; for the gospel is made up of the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ: and if anyone believes the gospel, they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. (If anyone has no knowledge of the gospel, they cannot believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, for "the Lord Jesus Christ" is not simply the name of the Saviour as a person, but a wonderful title, which can only be understood by those who have an understanding of what the gospel is about.

The first thing a person has to do, then, in order to gain salvation, is to believe the gospel. To do this he must know the gospel, for as Paul says, "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?"¹²³³ Knowledge must always come before belief as it is not possible to believe anything that we know nothing of. Therefore, anyone who seeks salvation, will wish to enquire as to what the gospel is. Only then can they go on to the second stage of believing with a view to salvation.

¹²²² Acts 15:14

¹²²³ Zechariah 14:9

¹²²⁴ Matthew 22:14

¹²²⁵ Luke 13:24

¹²²⁶ Mark 16:15-16

¹²²⁷ Ephesians 1:13

¹²²⁸ Romans 1:16

¹²²⁹ Not that it was, in fact, "foolishness" – it appeared that way to those who had no regard for it. [Ed]

¹²³⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:21

¹²³¹ Acts 11:13-14

¹²³² Acts 16:30-31

¹²³³ Romans 10:14

The gospel is termed "one faith,"¹²³⁴ because it is made up of things which require faith so that they may be believed. Scripture lays down a straight-forward principle: "Without faith it is impossible to please God."¹²³⁵ Of believers it is said, "For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith."¹²³⁶

Now this faith, as used and described within the Bible, is not simply relying on the omnipotent power of Yahweh but it involves belief in a specific promise. It is said that "Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness."¹²³⁷ Let us consider the nature of this faith that had righteousness 'credited':

"He (Abraham) did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised."¹²³⁸

It is said, therefore, that faithful Abraham was counted as the father of those who believe, and that scriptural faith is belief in the promises of God even though the Gospel which must be believed in order to obtain salvation, is made up of unfulfilled promises for the most part.

At the time when Philip preached to the Samaritans, we are informed that he proclaimed "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ."¹²³⁹ In addition, then, to our understanding that which is meant by the good news of the kingdom of God, as outlined in previous chapters, we must understand things about the 'name' of Jesus Christ. A fundamental starting point is found in Peter's teaching when he says: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."¹²⁴⁰

How this name has been "given" is illustrated in the events recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Begotten by the Holy Spirit, Jesus was "for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption"¹²⁴¹ and manifested in human nature a character with which the Father was well pleased. In his death, flesh and blood were sacrificially slain, and God's righteousness, declared. In resurrection, the slain sacrifice was accepted, and Jesus lives, never again to die - a name which men and women may take upon themselves, and stand before God, accepted in Christ.

The way by which believers may take this name upon themselves lies in the ordinance of baptism, as in this act the believer is baptised "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."¹²⁴² The Apostle Paul says: "For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ"¹²⁴³ Having put on Christ, they have put on the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as Jesus is a manifestation of the Father, in the Son, by means of the Holy Spirit. Those who are clothed in this way no longer stand in the nakedness of the

¹²³⁴ Ephesians 4:5

¹²³⁵ Hebrews 11:6

¹²³⁶ Ephesians 2:8

¹²³⁷ Romans 4:9

¹²³⁸ Romans 4:20-21

¹²³⁹ Acts 8:12

¹²⁴⁰ Acts 4:12

¹²⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 1:30

¹²⁴² Matthew 28:19

¹²⁴³ Galatians 3:27

natural man, but are “found in him,” not having their own righteousness but “the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”¹²⁴⁴

We must, therefore, understand both the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ before we can comprehend and believe the gospel which is the power of God leading to salvation. The one without the other is insufficient. If we do not know about the kingdom of God, we are lacking in our knowledge of the gospel. Even if we know much of the historical facts of Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension but fail to understand their true significance in their connection with future glory, we lack a real knowledge of the gospel – at best, we have a limited understanding of just some aspects of it.

Such a limited knowledge is also seen when people cling to mistaken ideas about their possession of an “immortal soul”. The very idea invalidates the Scriptural teaching that Christ died to purchase life. “He brought life and immortality to light through the gospel”¹²⁴⁵ and we are informed in the very same text that our Saviour, Christ Jesus, destroyed death. We are further told that “by the grace of God, he (Jesus) might taste death for everyone.”¹²⁴⁶ If we regard immortality as the essential attribute of human nature, we displace the sacrifice of Christ from its Scriptural position. We destroy its character as a means of securing life, and are compelled to view it as substitutionary suffering of divine wrath, in order to save immortal souls from the eternal tortures of hell!

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul must be removed from the mind before gospel truth can be properly embraced, for it makes a nonsense of the Bible message, by denying its fundamental teaching, that “sin entered the world through one man, and death by sin”¹²⁴⁷ and destroys its efficacy by entirely diverting attention from the salvation which it offers, and directing it to a reward which God has never promised. In fact, its effect is to pervert and destroy everything pertaining to God's truth

The point at which we have arrived, is, that one of the fundamental conditions of salvation is belief of a number of definite matters of teaching contained in the gospel about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. This involves the whole circle of divine truth. It includes the knowledge of the Creator himself; of our relationship to him as sinful, worthless creatures; of the teaching about Jesus Christ; of Yahweh's dealings with our race, his promises, the means which he has provided for salvation, and of our duties towards him. A definite hope gives rise to an active hope; it provides the stimulus to obedience and to life styles commensurate with the service of our Lord and our Father. It provides the object of faith – without which faith cannot be exercised. The very beauty of true Christian teaching is that it supplies the mind with exactly what is needed to draw out and satisfy its higher instincts.

God is making ready “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,” which he describes as his “treasured possession” so that each may “declare the praises of him who called (them) out of darkness into this wonderful light.”¹²⁴⁸ And this people God is preparing on the basis that they have “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator”¹²⁴⁹

¹²⁴⁴ Philippians 3:19

¹²⁴⁵ 2 Timothy 1:10

¹²⁴⁶ Hebrews 2:9

¹²⁴⁷ Romans 5:12

¹²⁴⁸ 1 Peter 2:9

¹²⁴⁹ Colossians 3:10

and it is he who fills them “with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”¹²⁵⁰ And so, by the preaching of the gospel, God is accomplishing his will.

It is important that we try to comprehend the will of God as contained in the Scriptures and that we are faithful in our observance of the things that are required of us. We must remember that our faith does “not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.”¹²⁵¹ Jesus said, “The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”¹²⁵² Jesus also said, “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”¹²⁵³

- “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self. Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.”¹²⁵⁴
- “If any of you think that you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become ‘fools’ so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.”¹²⁵⁵
- “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”¹²⁵⁶

Frequently people suggest that all God requires is sincerity of intention and the living of a moral and exemplary life. However, the Bible is clear in as much as it places clear expectations upon those who would wish to inherit the promises of God. God does not simply seek abstract sincerity, ‘goodness’ of character or piety of sentiment.

The Bible uniformly and distinctly narrows down salvation to a certain arbitrary “narrow road” which few find, or care to walk in when found. Definite conditions are stated, and compliance required, involving something more than general goodness of moral nature: and all who are intentionally or circumstantially on the side of non-compliance are excluded from the blessing.

The issue is, therefore, directly between the Bible and unbelief. We are on one side or the other in this matter; there is no neutral ground. If we have any expectation of future perfection at all, it is because of promises contained in the Bible as we can draw no hope from any other source. If, then, we desire, or simply conceive it possible to realise this perfection, it can only be on the ground of full compliance with the conditions upon which it is offered. It is this that gives us ground for confidence.

If we discard the Bible altogether, or regard it as a book of questionable authority, we are without hope of any kind. There is no middle position. If people hope to attain to the salvation of the Bible, they must comply with the Bible's own terms. They are not at liberty to set terms of their own pleasing. Salvation is special to human life and the means of attainment are, therefore, special.

¹²⁵⁰ Colossians 1:9 (margin)

¹²⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 2:5

¹²⁵² John 6:63

¹²⁵³ Matthew 7:14

¹²⁵⁴ Luke 9:23-26

¹²⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:18-19

¹²⁵⁶ Mark 16:15

No one forces another to believe and to become associated with the promises of God. Each must be responsible for the decisions made. All are free to make the most they can out of ephemeral mortality, with all its petty concerns, valuing the desires of things of their present life. However, if this is the case, there is nothing to hope for in the future, and there may be something to answer for, in contemptuously refusing the preferred conditional goodness of God.

It is only in Christ that we have the hope of eternal life. Many would suggest that they have lived virtuously, having refrained from crime, having restored lost property to rightful owners, having given to the help the poor and having been kind to neighbours. This is humanism not Christianity and humanism does not offer entitlement to a future life. It concerns itself with the present life seeing nothing else. The message of the Bible is clear. John says: "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."¹²⁵⁷ Little could be plainer.

Belief is, in fact, a mainstay of our everyday existence. It is not simply a religious experience. A person will work for an employer on the basis that he believes he will get paid. A criminal who has been caught fears because he believes he will be sentenced; one who is in prison, on hearing of a reprieve, is joyful as he believes that release is imminent. Our whole commercial system is based on belief, and the moment that society begins to be distrustful, that is, *unbelieving*, then we have panic, and all the troubles that follow. So in religious matters: belief is the first principle, the foundation of practical faith, the source of spiritual ecstasy, the cause of consistent action.

Belief is the assent of the mind to points of information. Therefore, knowledge (though only in the limited sense of information) is the foundation of belief. This principle is true for the things of everyday life as well as in matters of a religious nature. The information that has been considered and which, in its totality, comprises and describes the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ are items of information on which our belief about the future is based.

Belief in the Gospel is the first condition of salvation. This, however, is not all. A person may believe in all the glorious promises of God, and yet not become a participant in them. The next step is baptism – for "whoever believes and is baptised will be saved."¹²⁵⁸

Baptism, as was practised in the church of the first century, is very much overlooked by the majority of mainstream Christians today. Those who believe that they practise it rarely follow the way as indicated in the scriptures, preferring 'christening' (sometimes loosely called 'baptism') followed by 'confirmation'. Consideration has already been given to the conditions or 'terms' on which our salvation is offered. The teaching about baptism is not ambiguous and is set out in the New Testament.

On the day of Pentecost, for example, when those who listened were cut to the heart, they asked, "Brothers, what shall we do?"¹²⁵⁹ The answer was: "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins"¹²⁶⁰ and the narrative tells us that "they accepted his message and were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day."¹²⁶¹ In this passage we have both the precept and the example.

¹²⁵⁷ 1 John 4:11-12

¹²⁵⁸ Mark 16:16

¹²⁵⁹ Acts 2:37

¹²⁶⁰ Acts 2:38

¹²⁶¹ Acts 2:41

Let us consider the response of the Samaritans at the time when they heard Philip preach the gospel: "But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptised, both men and women."¹²⁶²

Again, in the case of Cornelius and his friends, we read, that at the close of their conversation with Peter, the apostle said, "Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptised with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ."¹²⁶³

In the case of Paul himself, we find the same course of action after his conversion: "And now what are you waiting for?" Ananias said to him "Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name."¹²⁶⁴ "He got up and was baptised."¹²⁶⁵

Then we have the case of the Philippian jailer in which the same lesson is given by the powerful argument of example. Of the jailer, it is recorded: "Immediately he and all his household were baptised."¹²⁶⁶

We should also remember that even the Lord Jesus submitted to this act of obedience. We read:

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness." Then John consented."¹²⁶⁷

The numerous and decisive examples from the New Testament show that baptism in water was a rite to which all who believed the truth in early times submitted. Surely what was necessary or appropriate for the first Christians, is just as necessary and appropriate for Christians today. Although many in mainstream Christian churches neglect this teaching, the apostles looked upon the act in a much more serious light. Paul, in the words already quoted, is very clear on the subject. Consider these texts:

- "For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."¹²⁶⁸
- "In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him (Jesus) from the dead."¹²⁶⁹

¹²⁶² Acts 8:12

¹²⁶³ Acts 10:47-48

¹²⁶⁴ Acts 22:16

¹²⁶⁵ Acts 9:18

¹²⁶⁶ Acts 16:33

¹²⁶⁷ Matthew 3:13-15

¹²⁶⁸ Galatians 3:27

¹²⁶⁹ Colossians 2:11-12

- “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”¹²⁷⁰

Finally, Peter makes the following reference to it, which, though incidental, is unmistakable:

“. . . in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this symbolises baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience towards God.”¹²⁷¹

There are other similar references to baptism throughout the letters in the New Testament but these are sufficient to show the significance of baptism. The apostles recognised in it a transition from one relationship to another – an act that symbolises the “putting off of the old self”, or Adamic nature, and a “putting on of the new self”, or Christ, who is the one covering name, in which the naked children of Adam can be clothed and stand before Yahweh, approved in his sight. Of course this effect is imputative; that is to say, it is not brought about by the mere act of submersion in water, which in itself has no religious virtue whatever, but is the result recognised by God when the act is performed in connection with an intelligent understanding and loving belief of the truth.

It may seem strange and incredible that God would connect such a momentous change with a trivial and (as some regard it) ridiculous ritual. This is the wisdom of God who chooses “the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; . . . the weak things of the world to shame the strong. . . . God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are”¹²⁷² by which to accomplish important results that it may be seen that the power is of God, and not in the means, and that true obedience may be found in his servants. It was not the eating of the fruit *in itself* - apart from the divine prohibition - that constituted Adam's offence.¹²⁷³ It was not the mere looking at the bronze snake in the wilderness that cured the snake-bitten Israelites.¹²⁷⁴ It was not Naaman's mere immersion in Jordan that cured him of his leprosy.¹²⁷⁵ It was the *principle involved* in each case that developed the results - the principle of obedience to the divine law, which is one prominent feature in all God's dealings with man. Obedience is the great thing required of us:-

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”¹²⁷⁶

It does not matter what the act may be; the more unlikely the thing required, the more severe the test, and the more conspicuous the obedience, even if it be the offering up of an only son¹²⁷⁷, or the slaughtering of a whole nation.¹²⁷⁸ In any case, and at whatever cost, obedience must come

¹²⁷⁰ Romans 6:3-6

¹²⁷¹ 1 Peter 3:10-11

¹²⁷² 1 Corinthians 1:27-28

¹²⁷³ Genesis 3

¹²⁷⁴ Numbers 21

¹²⁷⁵ 2 Kings 5

¹²⁷⁶ 1 Samuel 15:22

¹²⁷⁷ Genesis 22

¹²⁷⁸ Joshua 10

first. God is no less exacting in this respect under the Christian dispensation than He was under the law; but, if possible, more so. The following text suggests this to be the case:

"We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we (Christians) have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels (the Law of Moses) was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him."¹²⁷⁹

Although Christianity may be described as a yoke which is easy and a burden that is light,¹²⁸⁰ in terms of its *obligation*, we are taught by the apostle that it exceeds the law in rigidness and responsibility. It would seem perilous, then, to tinker with it and to suggest that it doesn't really matter whether we really believe its teachings or attend to its commandments.

God requires the one hope, the one faith, and one baptism,¹²⁸¹ as the only acceptable offering which a poor child of Adam can present under the Christian dispensation; and to offer him, instead, a mere sentimental piety of our own devising, is to offer "unauthorised fire,"¹²⁸² which assuredly will bring death to the one who offers it. God has required all believers of his truth to be immersed, as a means of transferring them from the dominion of the old mortal Adam to a life-giving connection with the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, who is made a life-giving spirit; and though it may be very humiliating to submit to an act in which the eye of sense can perceive no reason, yet in that very submission, obedience is more thoroughly tested and God more greatly honoured than in the performance of that which necessity or a natural sense of fitness would dictate.

The change that takes place by baptism is through "faith in the working of God."¹²⁸³ Without faith baptism has no value. The understanding of the value of baptism depends on how we view ourselves before God. Childlike faith in, and obedience to God's word, will make us regard baptism as an essential act on the part of every one who has a real desire to attain to salvation.

As baptism follows belief and repentance, a person who lacks either belief or the desire to repent is not a suitable person for its observance. It is only prescribed for those who believe the Gospel and in early times it never was administered to any other. People were never encouraged to be baptised until they had knowledge of the gospel. For without such knowledge, the act would have been a simple washing with no value in relation to eternal life. It would be similar to the washings performed under the Law of Moses. Whenever baptisms occur in the New Testament it is evident that the gospel has been explained, at least in outline, before the baptism takes place.

In some situations people may realise that they were baptised without a real knowledge of the kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism which takes place without faith and repentance is, as has been suggested, a washing that has no real spiritual value. In such cases it would seem appropriate for another baptism to take place. Although there are no specific examples in the Scriptures of believers being re-baptised on the basis of a different understanding of teachings within the Christian faith, deductions can be made from an incident that is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. In Corinth a group of believers had been baptised into John's baptism without having a fuller understanding of the gospel and the meaning of baptism into Christ. We

¹²⁷⁹ Hebrews 2: 1-3

¹²⁸⁰ Matthew 11:30

¹²⁸¹ Ephesians 4:5

¹²⁸² Numbers 26:61

¹²⁸³ Colossians 2:12

read: "Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus."¹²⁸⁴ ¹²⁸⁵

Clearly those who seek to become members of the Church and who have experienced infant 'baptism' or 'sprinkling' or 'christening' will recognise that it has no spiritual value in place of baptism on the basis of belief and repentance as a young baby cannot 'believe' or 'repent'. There is no record of such a practice in the New Testament. Its existence and support can primarily be put down to one factor, a mistaken belief in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

To sum up the whole matter, a person who understands the things of the kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who wishes to know what should follow from this, may be guided by one very straight-forward text: "Repent and be baptised . . . in the name of the Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."¹²⁸⁶

In baptism, the one who has been baptised has entered into covenant relationship with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism covers all previous sins (they are forgiven) and a new life in Christ begins. He is born of the Spirit and is a son or daughter of God. As children of God they have become "children of the resurrection"¹²⁸⁷ and are of those who "wait eagerly for (their) adoption to sonship, the redemption of (their) bodies."¹²⁸⁸

But ultimate acceptance depends upon the character developed in this new relationship. Those who bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, that is, moral well-doing based upon the teaching of Jesus¹²⁸⁹ as the source of their motivation, will be approved by the Lord when he returns and calls his servants to account. But if, in this new relationship, "the works of the flesh," continue to be prevalent, or actions dictated by fleshly instincts, whether "respectable" or otherwise, characterise lifestyle choices, the final outcome will be disastrous. For those who are wise and please their Lord are like the seed that fell on the good soil in the parable of "the sower" for they, upon hearing, by perseverance produced a good crop. Those who fail to please their Lord through the choices they make are like those who either "have no root" or are "choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature."¹²⁹⁰

Paul says, "Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."¹²⁹¹ The two different groups, those who seek to please God and those who seek to please themselves are dealt with differently by the Father. Jesus says that the Father is the gardener and that Jesus is the true vine. "He (God) cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that

¹²⁸⁴ Acts 19:4-5

¹²⁸⁵ [This passage does not deal with a situation where believers, upon re-appraising their understanding, become more fully acquainted with the Bible message. If there is a significant change in belief, and assuming that the baptism has been by full immersion, it would seem to be a matter of individual conscience whether there should be a new baptism or whether the original baptism is sufficient. The arguments in favour of the latter would include the fact that Christ died once – and in a figure so do believers, and secondly, that baptism takes place as a sign of commitment at the beginning of a pilgrimage and all believers should develop in terms of their understanding of the things of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ as they progress. Ed]

¹²⁸⁶ Acts 2:38

¹²⁸⁷ Luke 20:36

¹²⁸⁸ Romans 8:23

¹²⁸⁹ John 6:63

¹²⁹⁰ Luke 8: 1-16; Matthew 13:2-23; Mark 4:1-20

¹²⁹¹ Galatians 6:8

it will be even more fruitful.”¹²⁹² The names of those in the first group are blotted out of the book of life¹²⁹³ while those in the second group are divinely trained through the providential circumstances and experiences in their lives for “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”¹²⁹⁴

Jesus last request of his disciples was that they should teach the believers to obey everything he had commanded them.¹²⁹⁵ He counts as friends those who do the things he has commanded.¹²⁹⁶ Jesus asked the believers to meet together to break bread and drink wine and to “do this in remembrance of me.”¹²⁹⁷ Our attendance to this is a sign of our friendship. The “breaking of bread” or “the Lord’s supper” was something that the first Christians attended to regularly.¹²⁹⁸ It was originally instituted when Christ and his disciples met together for the last time to observe the Jewish Passover. We read that on the occasion:

“And he (Jesus) took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you: do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you.”¹²⁹⁹

Here is a symbolic breaking of bread instituted by Christ for his disciples to observe during his absence. It was to be attended to “in remembrance of him,” until he would return again as is apparent from Paul’s comment: “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”¹³⁰⁰ The observance is a very appropriate one. The bread, according to the Master’s direction, represents his broken body, and the wine his shed blood; and therefore the scene which human nature is most liable to forget - the exhibition of Christ’s personal love and the condemnation of sin in the flesh - memorialised before the disciples in partaking of those symbols. The observance provides a common centre, around which the brothers and sisters of Christ may rally, and be spiritually refreshed by the contemplation of the great sacrifice to which he lovingly submitted on their account, while it affords a tangible mode of expressing their love for him who, though absent, has promised to come again. Though simple in its nature, it is profoundly suited to their spiritual needs, necessitating assembling together which might otherwise rarely take place, and providing opportunity for encouragement and advice, which might otherwise never be given. It, therefore, creates circumstances that are so valuable and conducive to the building up of all in the glorious faith and hope which they possess, and counteracts the secularising and spiritually corrosive effect of the business life which they have to live in the world.

Having been commanded, its observance is a duty which no really enlightened Christian will underrate in importance, or seek to evade. Different groups within the broad spectrum of ‘Christianity’ have run to extremes in this matter. Some groups, such as the Quakers, have discarded the use of all Christian institutions and others, such as the Roman Catholics have run to the other extreme by exalting them into *de facto* vehicles of spiritual virtue. The New Testament examples, if used as a pattern, preserve us from both extremes.

¹²⁹² John 15:1-2

¹²⁹³ Clearly implicit in Revelation 3:5; a phrase that is used of the enemies of the godly in Psalm 69:28

¹²⁹⁴ Romans 8:28

¹²⁹⁵ Matthew 28:20

¹²⁹⁶ John 15:14

¹²⁹⁷ Luke 22:19

¹²⁹⁸ Acts 2:42

¹²⁹⁹ Luke 22:19-20

¹³⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:26

As to the time of day or frequency at which the ordinance should take place, there is no command. The practice of the first Christians may be taken as a guide, as they were under the immediate supervision of the apostles. We read that the early church met weekly for this purpose: "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread"¹³⁰¹ and elsewhere "On the first day of each week, each of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income. . ."¹³⁰² The first day of the week was the Jewish Monday, [the first day of the Jewish week began at sunset on Saturday] and therefore our Sunday. It was the day upon which Christ rose from the dead, and, therefore, an appropriate occasion for the celebration of an event of which his resurrection was the glorious consummation.

It will be noted that there is no reason from the facts and texts produced on this subject, for strictly keeping the Sabbath as is still enforced in many Catholic countries in the present day. The Sabbath was a Jewish institution. It was part of the yoke that, says Peter, "neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear."¹³⁰³ It was no part of the Christian system. It was abolished with "our legal indebtedness which stood against us"¹³⁰⁴ and the fact that it has been incorporated with Christianity may be best explained by the fact, that in the days of the apostles, there were many who wished to keep circumcision and the things of the Law of Moses. But this doctrine was not a true one then, any more than it is now: for at a council of the apostles which was held to consider the matter, the following letter was adopted:

"The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: Greetings. We have heard that some went out from us without our authorisation and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul . . . to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things."¹³⁰⁵

Therefore, the apostles distinctly prohibited the imposition of any of the Mosaic requirements, except those they specifically mention, upon the practice of the Christians in the first century, and, this includes the keeping of the Sabbath, as, had it been an exception, it would have been mentioned among the exceptions. But this authoritative prohibition did not extinguish the Judaising spirit which had crept in. Hence, we find Paul writing in the following way:

- "You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you."¹³⁰⁶
- "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day."¹³⁰⁷

His teaching on the subject of the Sabbath is, "One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own

¹³⁰¹ Acts 20:7

¹³⁰² 1 Corinthians 16:2

¹³⁰³ Acts 15:10

¹³⁰⁴ Colossians 2:14

¹³⁰⁵ Acts 15: 23-29

¹³⁰⁶ Galatians 4:10-11

¹³⁰⁷ Colossians 2:16

mind.”¹³⁰⁸ He is saying that it is a matter of so little importance, that everyone must be ruled by private conviction.

It is frequently the privilege of Christ's brothers and sisters to rest from work on the first day of the week, and to engage more fully in spiritual meditation than is possible on a weekday, but they are under no commandment to do so. They are free to engage as circumstances may determine, without the risk of infringing any law of God. Whatever is rightfully done on a weekday, can equally well be done on a Sunday, although it may not always be helpful. Brothers and sisters of Christ do not advocate the abolition of Sunday as a day of rest from secular labour, and attendance upon religion. They are only too thankful for the opportunity it confers upon them.

In conclusion, let men and women appreciate the truth expressed in the New Testament phrase, “the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ”¹³⁰⁹ and then be baptised into the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, the great covering name provided in the Lord Jesus. May they then wait with those who share a faith “as precious as ours”¹³¹⁰ and attend the weekly memorial service appointed by Jesus; and continue in the daily practice of everything that Christ has commanded, and in the daily cultivation of that exalted character which was exemplified in Christ himself, waiting and anxiously desiring the return of the Lord from heaven. Those who put themselves in this position, and faithfully occupy it until the end, will certainly be approved when the Lord comes, and be invited, each as a “good and faithful servant”¹³¹¹ to enter and inherit his glorious kingdom.

Chapter 17 The Commandments of Christ

Salvation is dependent on faith but faith alone must not be allowed to obscure the principle of obedience as the basis of our acceptance with God in Christ. If we are to follow the teaching of the apostles we must recognise distinctly, that while faith turns a sinner into a saint, only obedience will secure a saint's acceptance at the judgment seat of Christ; and that a disobedient saint will be rejected more decisively than even an unjustified sinner.

Jesus speaks plainly on this subject in the following quotations:

- “You are my friends if you do what I command.”¹³¹²
- “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I commanded you.”¹³¹³
- “Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”¹³¹⁴
- “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”¹³¹⁵
- “If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.”¹³¹⁶

Both the apostles James and John, along with other apostles, repeat the same message:

¹³⁰⁸ Romans 14:5

¹³⁰⁹ Acts 8:12

¹³¹⁰ 2 Peter 1:1

¹³¹¹ Matthew 25:21

¹³¹² John 15:14

¹³¹³ Matthew 28:20

¹³¹⁴ John 13:17

¹³¹⁵ Matthew 7:21

¹³¹⁶ John 15:10

- “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”¹³¹⁷
- “Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person.”¹³¹⁸

Christians are expected to comply both with the commandments of Christ and with the commandments of the apostles. There is no complication in this respect since they are effectively one and the same. The commandments given by the apostles were not of their authorship. They were as definitely divine as those that came from the mouth of the Lord. Paul distinctly claims this to be the case:

“If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command.”¹³¹⁹

This claim is in harmony with what the Lord Jesus himself said on the subject. In sending his apostles out to further his teaching after he should have departed from the earth, he did not leave them to their own resources as natural men for the execution of the work. He made specific promise of supernatural wisdom and guidance. This promise occurs in various forms:

- “For I will give you words of wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.”¹³²⁰
- “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything.”¹³²¹
- “But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”¹³²²

The promise of Christ that he would send the Spirit to the apostles was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus told them not to begin their apostolic labours until the Spirit would come.¹³²³ They were to “remain in Jerusalem” until the promised “power from on high” came, by which they were enabled to witness effectively. They did not have long to wait. Ten days later, when they were all assembled (the apostles and disciples, 120 in total) the Spirit came with the sound of a violent wind, and filled the place where they were, crowning each apostle with a flame of fire that came to rest on each of them, and imparted to the apostles the power of delivering the gospel message in all the spoken languages of the day.¹³²⁴

When the commotion caused by this wonderful occurrence had come to a head, Peter explained the nature of it to the bewildered spectators. He reminded the multitude of the recent crucifixion of Jesus, which they knew about. He then declared the resurrection of Jesus as a fact, a fact of which the apostles had been eyewitnesses, and added, “Exalted to the right hand of God, he (Jesus) has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.”¹³²⁵

¹³¹⁷ James 1:22

¹³¹⁸ 1 John 2:4

¹³¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:37

¹³²⁰ Luke 21:15

¹³²¹ John 14:26

¹³²² Luke 10:19-20

¹³²³ Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4

¹³²⁴ Acts 2:1-13

¹³²⁵ Acts 2:33

The Spirit which was bestowed upon them remained with them as a guiding teaching presence to the end. It was this that justified Paul's claim to divine authority for the things he wrote (as quoted above) as, although Paul was not among the apostles at that time, he was added to their number shortly afterwards, and was, in every way, as supernaturally gifted as the other apostles were. It was this that enabled the apostle John to take the same strong ground in his first letter: "We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognise the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood."¹³²⁶ When John said this, he said no more than Jesus himself had said about John and his fellow apostles: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."¹³²⁷ "Whoever listens to you listen to me; whoever rejects you rejects me."¹³²⁸

Here is Christ's own authority for placing the word of his apostles on a level with his own. He said concerning his own teaching, "These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."¹³²⁹ By the same principle, the apostles could say with Paul that the things which we write and speak are not ours but they are Christ's who sent us. The principle is this: the Holy Spirit was with the Lord from the Father without measure, making him one with the Father, who is the eternal and universe filling Spirit, through which he was able to give commandments that were as truly divine as if proclaimed direct from heaven in the hearing of all the world.¹³³⁰ So the Holy Spirit was upon the Apostles from Christ, who is one with the Father, imparting to their words a divine authority equal to that of his own words. It is perfectly fitting then for Jesus to say, "Whoever listens to you listen to me; whoever rejects you rejects me."¹³³¹

The whole matter is clearly touched on by Jesus in his last message to the believers. He says, "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done."¹³³² That which is to be done must include the keeping of his commandments.

The same lesson of obedience is taught in the parables of Jesus. In concluding his "Sermon on the Mount" (which includes very many commandments - most methodical and extensive collection of them to be found in the whole course of his recorded teaching), he says:

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."¹³³³

In no plainer way could Christ tell us that our ultimate acceptance with him will depend upon our doing of the things he has commanded. Thus the parable emphasises the direct teaching of Jesus earlier within the chapter from which it has been taken.¹³³⁴

¹³²⁶ 1 John 4:6

¹³²⁷ John 20:21

¹³²⁸ Luke 10:16

¹³²⁹ Luke 14:24

¹³³⁰ Luke 3:22; John 3:35; Acts 1:2

¹³³¹ Luke 10:16

¹³³² Revelation 22:12

¹³³³ Matthew 7:24-27

¹³³⁴ Matthew 7:21

The concept of our need to be obedient to the commands of Christ is found very frequently throughout the Lord's teaching. Speaking of those who claimed a relationship with him, he said, pointing to his disciples: "Here are my mothers and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father is my brother and sister and mother."¹³³⁵ This theme is also taken up in the gospel of Luke where it is recorded that a woman in the crowd called out to Jesus "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." But Jesus replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."¹³³⁶

The problem which tends to have been inherited over a period of time in connection with the keeping of the commandments of Christ is not a new one. Speaking of the commandments that were given by Moses, and which formed what is known as "the Law (of Moses)", Jesus said of the religious leaders of the Jewish nation: "You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition."¹³³⁷ Within the many Christian groups there have also arisen traditions which have nullified the commandments of Christ. These have usually been based on human opinion and on human judgments. Most mainstream Christian teaching has 'forgotten' or 'set aside' the command to believe the gospel in its true sense, the command for meaningful baptism has been 'reduced' and the command that believers meet to break bread has been totally neglected in some areas.

The purpose of God's commands is to try, and purify, and chasten and discipline the mind into subjection to the divine will. This does not sit easily with the human mind which, being 'of the flesh' seeks to be its own master. It is important to ensure that our obedience is not compromised by an adherence to the "consensus thinking" of modern society as exemplified in either respectable or humanitarian protocols. Human thinking, however deep or apparently 'rational' cannot override those things which are divine.

The commandments remain as the expression of Christ's will and it will be a poor apology for disobedience, in the day of judgment to say that we did not dare to comply with them because they were considered unnecessary in the more (humanly) 'enlightened times in which we now live. The inclinations and traditions of the majority have always been antagonistic to the will of God. The divinely recorded history of the world is proof of this. It is, therefore, the responsibility of those who believe in God, to listen to the voice of His word, and not to the opinions of the people and their leaders.

Looking more particularly at the commandments, there are many which are beautiful in themselves and that commend themselves to the moral instincts of the population as a whole. Equally, within the mainstream Christian world, there are many commandments that all would see as fittingly applicable to them. Examples of such would be, that believers should love and serve God, that people should be true, fair and kind and that we should think of and be willing to help others. There are also commandments that possess an inestimable value, the aim of which is not to make the present life agreeable, but to subject obedient believers to a discipline that will subdue and mould them to the divine pattern in preparation for the kingdom of God which will be established by Christ upon the earth in the day of His coming. This group of commandments requires more detailed consideration.

¹³³⁵ Matthew 12:49-50

¹³³⁶ Luke 11:27-28

¹³³⁷ Matthew 15:6

[1] Do not conform to the pattern on this world¹³³⁸

There is not much danger of mistaking the meaning of this. The world refers to the population who live on it, called by Peter, "ungodly people."¹³³⁹ The command is to ensure that we are not conformed to the world as it now is. Jesus clearly said that he did not belong to such a world, and commanded his disciples to accept a similar position in relation to it. The world to come is the world of their citizenship. Of their position in the present world, Jesus said in prayer, "They are not of this world, even as I am not of it."¹³⁴⁰ By John he commanded them, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – comes not from the Father but from the world."¹³⁴¹ Through Peter, he indicates their position in the world as that of "foreigners and exiles"¹³⁴² and that they should live out their lives in this mode seeking at all times to be holy.¹³⁴³

The world that hated Jesus was the Jewish world. Consequently, we are prevented from erroneously supposing that the term "the world" refers to the extremely vile and immoral of mankind. The Jews were certainly not like this: they were a very religious people who openly made show of their religion and its attendant ceremony. The standard of their respectability was high in a religious sense. All their conversations with Christ show this. That which led to the complete separation indicated in Christ's words and precepts, is indicated by Jesus himself, in his prayer to the Father, so wonderfully recorded in the gospel of John: "Righteous Father, though the world does not know you"¹³⁴⁴ It is the world's relationship to God that cuts off the friends of God from the world (if the friends of God are faithful). The world does not love or know or consider God. It does not care for him in any way - his expressed will, his declared purpose, his sovereign claims, are either directly rejected or treated with entire indifference. His great and dreadful and eternal reality is ignored. Daniel's indictment against Belshazzar aptly describes them all: "But you did not honour the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways."¹³⁴⁵

If the world is God's enemy, how can the friends of God be friends with it? With very good reason the Scriptures record that "friendship with the world means enmity against God."¹³⁴⁶ "You cannot serve both God and money."¹³⁴⁷

To understand how the world can be regarded as the enemy of God requires us to go right back to the beginning of creation.

This beginning shows us man in harmony with God, and things are described as "very good."¹³⁴⁸ Then it shows us disobedience (the setting aside of the divine will by our first parents - *alias*, sin), and as the result of this, the divine fellowship previously enjoyed was withdrawn, and both Adam and Eve were driven off to exile and to death, permitted only, thereafter, to approach in sacrifice, representative of the final way of return. The present world is the perpetuation and enlargement of the evil way of humanity, resulting from humanity's alienation from God in the beginning. The New

¹³³⁸ Romans 12:2

¹³³⁹ 2 Peter 2:5

¹³⁴⁰ John 17:16

¹³⁴¹ 1 John 2:15

¹³⁴² 1 Peter 2:11

¹³⁴³ 1 Peter 1:14,17

¹³⁴⁴ John 17:25

¹³⁴⁵ Daniel 5:23

¹³⁴⁶ James 4:4

¹³⁴⁷ Matthew 6:24 (Money – also, and perhaps better translated "Mammon" KJV)

¹³⁴⁸ Genesis 1:31

Testament writer describes the world as “under the control of the evil one,”¹³⁴⁹ “without hope and without God.”¹³⁵⁰

The time will come, however, when this state of things will change. “This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction.”¹³⁵¹ In Revelation Christ is described, at this time, as one who “treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God.”¹³⁵² When this work of judgment and destruction has been completed, the kingdom of God will last on earth for a thousand years, leading the nations in ways of righteousness and peace; and after a brief renewal of conflict with human nature, there comes at last the day of complete restoration, the ungodly having been removed from the earth; the servants of God saved. “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”¹³⁵³

Here, then, we have harmony with God at the beginning and harmony with him at the end, and the dark and dreadful interval of “the present evil world” between, in which God is not obeyed or recognised, but the pleasures, gratifications, and interests of natural existence are made the objects of universal ambition. In this dark interval, however, the divine work goes on, the work of separating a family from the evil, in preparation for the day of recovery and blessing. It is easy, in view of these things, to realise how reasonable the divine command is, that his servants meanwhile, should not be conformed to the pattern of this world, in which God is disowned, and to which they do not belong.

In the present day, that a person should be known as “a man of the world” is an accepted compliment. It is seen to credit him with good judgment, a person who is ‘at home’ everywhere, who sees good in everything and nothing very wrong in anything. To such a person, the application of the principles of Christ and the apostles in everyday life seems rather antiquated, somewhat uncharitable and very narrow-minded.

The earnest recognition and observance of right and wrong, as set out by Christ are, in such a person’s eyes, the symptoms of taking things to fanatical extremes which are best ignored. The surprising, and worrying thing is that “the man of the world,” with his kindly unconcern about all things is often regarded as a good Christian by those around him. He is essentially “of the world” - and though Christ proclaimed himself as “not of the world” and commanded his disciples to accept a similar position, this man’s being of the world, is not considered in the slightest degree reprehensible by many who claim to be Christian. With sadness we can reflect on how easily the church can, and has slipped into the mould of the world. Each believer must be totally on guard to ensure that this does not happen to them.

If there is anything characteristically “of the world,” it is politics. It is written: “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”¹³⁵⁴ Consequently, the kingdoms are meanwhile “of this world.” Today most “kingdoms” have become “states” because the political form of the state varies. The alliance of church and State is sufficient illustration of the departure of Christendom from the commandments of Christ. It is proof

¹³⁴⁹ 1 John 5:19 (or KJV ‘lieth in wickedness’ – the word “one” is an interpolation by translators of the NIV)

¹³⁵⁰ Ephesians 2:12

¹³⁵¹ 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

¹³⁵² See Revelation 19:11-16

¹³⁵³ Revelation 22:3

¹³⁵⁴ Revelation 11:15

that the modern church is “of this world,” even if the private practice of its members were in harmony with the mind of Christ.

A number of people, notably those in high office, who consider themselves as “Christians” seem to pre-occupy themselves with the diligent discharging of all the duties and responsibilities that belong, or could possibly belong, to citizens of the present world – some to the point where there is no part or feature of the present evil world, in which they are not found to have deep involvement.¹³⁵⁵ The bishops are part of the world-system in Britain, as they sit in the House of Lords, to supervise the laws made for this world. The clergy are part of the social fabric of society and frequently they are found in positions of influence. Many of the laity look on riches, social position, and power as legitimate objects of ambition and seek recognition through the system of government honours that recognise service to the state and to others. It even appears, on occasions, that New Testament commandments linked to modesty of living, self-denial and personal holiness, have been exchanged for affluent life styles, personal fulfilment and respectability. For each believer, there are essential and significant lessons in this state of affairs.

The Bible message clearly anticipates that those who seek to be servants of Christ, and who desire his approval at his coming, will have the attitude of a pure and loyal bride preparing for the marriage. God has given us guidance in this matter: ““Come out from them and be separate,” says the Lord. “Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you.”¹³⁵⁶ The questions with which Paul prefaches this quotation emphasise the reasonableness of this command: “For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?”¹³⁵⁷

The believer of the gospel has no alternative but to step aside from the world. If he does not do so, he cannot carry out the will of Christ concerning those whom he asks for his own. What this stepping aside from the world means is easy enough to find out as Christ and the apostles have given an example which we are invited to imitate.¹³⁵⁸

It does not mean seclusion as the apostles lived an open daily public life. It does not mean isolation as they were always seen among people. It means abstaining from the aims and principles of the world, and from the movements and enterprises in which these find expression. The activities of Christ and the apostles were all in connection with, and on behalf of, the work of God among men. They never appear in connection with the business of the world. Their earthly occupations are private. Christ was a carpenter; Paul a tent maker; but at these, both worked as the sons of God. Disciples of Christ may follow any occupation of good repute but are prohibited from having to do with anything which appears evil.¹³⁵⁹ In all they do, they are to remember they are the Lord's servants, and act as if the matter they have in hand were performed directly for him¹³⁶⁰ Even servants are required to do their work for a bad master faithfully as “to the Lord”.¹³⁶¹

¹³⁵⁵[RR has written this from a British perspective and what he says remains true of UK institutions, of other ‘Christian’ states but the picture painted does not comprehend other parts of the world where secular or other religious faiths are involved in or responsible for aspects of government. Ed].

¹³⁵⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:17-18

¹³⁵⁷ 2 Corinthians 6:14-15

¹³⁵⁸ 1 Peter 2:21; John 8:15; 15:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 4:17

¹³⁵⁹ Romans 12:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:22

¹³⁶⁰ Colossians 3:23-24

¹³⁶¹ 1 Peter 2:18-20

The sense in which they stand apart from the world is in the purpose for which they work, and in the use to which they put the time and money that they call “their own.” They are to “pursue (works of) righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart”¹³⁶² They are to say “No” to “ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.”¹³⁶³ They are not to live in pleasure.¹³⁶⁴ They are to live to give God pleasure, in which, as they grow, they will find their own highest pleasure. They are to live lives of holiness, cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and walk as those who are the temple of God among men.¹³⁶⁵

Guided by these apostolic principles, they will abstain from defiling habits such as smoking and drinking heavily. And as men and women waiting and preparing for the kingdom of God (whose citizenship is in heaven, and not upon the earth) they accept the position of “foreigners and exiles” in the society of their day. They are not at home; they are “sojourners” who are passing through. They take no part in matters of government but pay all due taxes and obey the laws of the state where they do not conflict with the laws of Christ.

They do not vote; they do not aspire to receive honour from state or from civic authorities; they do not bear arms. They live under the realm of the state during the short time God may appoint for their preparation and, as such, they occupy a passive and non-resisting attitude, intent only upon seeking Christ's approval at his coming, by their obedience to his commandments during his absence. They are not of the world, even as he was not of the world; and therefore they refuse to conform to its pattern. The way is narrow and full of self-denial - too narrow for those who would like to perform the impossible feat of “making the best of both worlds.” But the destination is so attractive, and the results of the cross-bearing so glorious, that the enlightened pilgrim deliberately chooses the journey, and resolutely endures its hardships.

[2] “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise it over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.”¹³⁶⁶

“But you are not to be called “Rabbi”, for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers.”¹³⁶⁷ Nothing is more natural than for people to seek honour and deference from their fellows. It is the universal habit, of society “to accept honour from one another” and not to “seek the glory that comes from the only God.”¹³⁶⁸ It is considered praiseworthy to nurse “ambition” and to indulge the desire for “fame.” Jesus condemns it without qualification. He forbids men to aim at human approval. It is his specific commandment in charitable giving, for example, to “not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing”¹³⁶⁹ and in prayer to “close the door and pray to you Father, who is unseen.”¹³⁷⁰ In fasting, Jesus said that his disciples should fast “so that it will not be obvious to others.”¹³⁷¹ The reason for this is that “your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” For the same reason, he forbids us to accept honourable titles and honourable places, and directs us to take a low and serving place. In illustration of his meaning, he himself washed the feet of his disciples, remarking, “I have set you an example that you should do as I

¹³⁶² 2Timothy 2:22

¹³⁶³ Titus 2:12

¹³⁶⁴ Titus 3:3; 1 Timothy 5:6

¹³⁶⁵ 1 Peter 1:15; 2 Corinthians 8:7; 6:16

¹³⁶⁶ Matthew 20:25-27

¹³⁶⁷ Matthew 23:8

¹³⁶⁸ John 5:44

¹³⁶⁹ Matthew 6:3

¹³⁷⁰ Matthew 6:6

¹³⁷¹ Matthew 6:18

have done for you.”¹³⁷² Jesus said, “All those who exalt themselves will be humbled.”¹³⁷³ His command through the apostles is to “clothe yourselves with humility towards one another.”¹³⁷⁴

The purpose of these commandments is to “purify for himself a people that are his very own”,¹³⁷⁵ to declare “the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”¹³⁷⁶ The celebration of this praise is not finally and effectually rendered until the summons comes forth from the throne, to the immortal multitude of the saints in the day of His appearing: “Praise our God all you his servants”¹³⁷⁷ The preparation to offer such praise involves putting to death the desire for human honour.

The acceptance of human honour necessarily gives rise to a pre-occupation with one’s own affairs and does not prepare individuals for that self-abasement which is the first ingredient of true glory to God. Those who seek to honour the Lord should cultivate a frame of mind that is in harmony with the true reason for any apparent achievements and remember that the glory and credit for everything is due to God alone.

Even within mainstream Christian religious organisations we see an abundance of titles (for example: “The Right Reverend”, “The Very Reverend”, “The Most Reverend”), each awarded or ‘earned’ on the basis of service or appointment, but each tending to result in praise from men and women. Similarly, the education system produces “masters” and “doctors” and other letters and titles all of which tend to deflect praise from God and impart it to the individual.

Human nature does not change with time and all too frequently we find that the leaders are more prone to seek conventional honours (such as honorary degrees and political titles) even though they may prove to be lacking in compassion, integrity and justice when they are not under public scrutiny. There are exceptions but as a general rule it is now, as Jesus said it was, with the Scribes and Pharisees of his day, “Everything they do is for people to see: they make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to be called “Rabbi” by others.”¹³⁷⁸

Look at the public subscription lists: where would the contributions be if the names and amounts were not published? It is also interesting to note that there may be a tendency among Christian groups to publish figures relating to charitable giving as it is possible that, were this not the case, some may feel that their donations could be smaller than they may be at present.

And as for the “human praise”, it is the inspiration of all public life, the incense of public worship, and the peculiar fragrance of all public proceedings. Who can read the report of a public meeting without having their senses sickened by lengthy eulogies, exaggerated praise, and the cheap, but indispensable vote of thanks? The motives of men and women are corrupted by breathing such an atmosphere. The individual remedy lies in ensuring that the will of God is done in privacy and obscurity, in patient waiting for the glorious day of divine approval when Jesus returns to this earth.

¹³⁷² John 13:15

¹³⁷³ Luke 14:11

¹³⁷⁴ 1 Peter 5:5 (see also Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5-6)

¹³⁷⁵ Titus 2:14

¹³⁷⁶ 1 Peter 2:9

¹³⁷⁷ Revelation 19:5

¹³⁷⁸ Matthew 23:5-7

[3] “Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth.”¹³⁷⁹

This teaching is also plainly expressed in a proverb from the Old Testament: “Do not wear yourself out to get rich.”¹³⁸⁰ Nothing in the English language could be plainer than this. Christ, who surely knew better than anyone else, states a fact which gives a powerful reason for the commandment not to aim at getting rich. “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”¹³⁸¹ Riches he calls “the mammon of unrighteousness.”¹³⁸² He does not say their possession is absolutely inconsistent with divine favour and inheritance of life eternal. But He gives us to understand that the danger of this may be so powerful as to “choke the word.”¹³⁸³ Those who have plenty should be first among those who “give to the poor” and who, in so doing provide for themselves “a treasure in heaven that will never fail.”¹³⁸⁴ This advice is repeated by the apostles: “Command those who are rich in the present world . . . to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age.”¹³⁸⁵ “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace.”¹³⁸⁶

Jesus used powerful parables to teach lessons and in this case there is no exception:

“The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ ‘Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’ ‘But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ ‘This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.’”¹³⁸⁷

The message of the parable could not be clearer and how aptly Jesus introduced it with the comment, “Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”¹³⁸⁸

[4] But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.¹³⁸⁹

Of all the commandments of Christ, this of unresisting submission to legal and personal wrong is the one that most severely tests the allegiance of his disciples, and is the one that is most decisively neglected in many mainstream Christian churches. It would not be too much to say that it is deliberately refused and formally set aside by the mass of professing Christians, as an impracticable rule of life. It is, nevertheless, one of the plainest of Christ's commandments and was re-echoed by the apostles. That the practice was carried out by early Christians, is equally

¹³⁷⁹ Matthew 6:19

¹³⁸⁰ Proverbs 23:4

¹³⁸¹ Luke 18:24

¹³⁸² Luke 16:9 KJV (The NIV translation is ‘worldly wealth’)

¹³⁸³ Matthew 13:22

¹³⁸⁴ Luke 12:33

¹³⁸⁵ 1 Timothy 4:17-18

¹³⁸⁶ 1 Peter 4:10

¹³⁸⁷ Luke 12:16-21

¹³⁸⁸ Luke 12:15

¹³⁸⁹ Matthew 5:39-41; Luke 6:30

beyond contradiction. Yet, by so many, it is ignored as if it had never been written. To what can we attribute this willing disobedience?

Something of it is doubtless due to an incorrect understanding of the purpose of the commandments. Many people tend to think that the commandments of Christ were given to produce the best way of living among the people of each generation and, as a result, feel the need to make adaptations to suit the perceived needs on earth as circumstances and situations change. Even if this were to be the case, it is unlikely to have the desired effect in a world where the majority ignore such commandments and act out of selfish instincts, frequently lacking any principles whatsoever.

However, the commandments of Christ were never intended for that purpose but were intended to develop “a special people” whose ‘specialness’ would consist in the restraint of natural impulse in submission to the will of God. They were designed to chasten, discipline and purify such a people by the exercise of patient submission to wrong in preparation for another time when such commandments will be no longer in force, but when it will be given to the developed and obedient saints to “execute judgment” on the ungodly, and “dash them to pieces” as a necessity that will precede the blessing of all people.¹³⁹⁰

People tend to say that if these principles were to be the principles by which society were to be regulated, it just wouldn’t be able to carry on. Let the disciple, and others, remember that Christ is not aiming at carrying on society on its present footing, but is “taking out a people” to carry it on in the future age based on divine principles. His own case illustrates the position. The people wanted to take him by force and make him a king, but he withdrew¹³⁹¹ A man wanted him to interfere in a dispute over a will. He declined, saying, “Who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”¹³⁹² His part was to testify the truth, to do the will of the Father, to do all the good he could on divine grounds, and as for the world, to “testify that its works are evil.”¹³⁹³ In so doing, he created hatred for himself, which finally took the form of personal violence – which he did not resist. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, his life was taken from the earth. And he said with regard to his whole experience: “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”¹³⁹⁴

Mainstream Christendom resists evil; sues at law; resents injury, takes part in the police force, and fights in the army, even if the men it is called upon to shoot are fellow Christians. If pointed to the law of Christ, it shakes its head. It speaks of “duty to society,” the “protection of life and property,” and the certain chaos that would set in if the law of Christ were in force. In this, Christendom speaks as the world, and not as “the church,” because in this (as in many other things) it has come to operate by the values and principles of the world. The true church is composed of the brothers and sisters of Christ, and he tells us that his brothers and sisters are those who obey his commandments, and do the will of the Father.¹³⁹⁵ The question for such has no difficulties. The question is: “Does the law of Christ allow them to employ violence under any circumstances?” If not, the loss of life itself would not be a consequence to be considered by them. Thoughts of expediency or philanthropy are out of place when urged in defence of doing that which the law of Christ forbids. If riots must rage unless we disobey Christ, let riots rage. If life and property must be exposed to the ravages of wicked men, unless we do that which Christ tells us we are not to

¹³⁹⁰ Revelation 2:26; Daniel 7:22; Psalm 149:9

¹³⁹¹ John 6:15

¹³⁹² Luke 12:14

¹³⁹³ John 7:7

¹³⁹⁴ John 15:18-20

¹³⁹⁵ Matthew 12:50; John 12:49-50

do, let life and property be unprotected. If we must incur and pay heavy penalties, unless we choose to break the law of God, let the penalties be paid. If we must be killed, and all our families with us, unless we forfeit the approval of the Lord and Master, and lose eternal life at his coming, let us die at once.¹³⁹⁶

It is a mistake to hamper the question of duty with any secondary consideration whatever. The time has not come for the saints to put the world right. The position of the saints is that of pilgrims who are being prepared for eternal life. God will take care that their preparation is not interfered with by murder and violence before the time. The matter is His. We are in his hands - and so is all the world. We need not therefore be distressed by thoughts of what will be the outcome of any action required by Christ. He will take care of the outcome – and the final outcome is known. The simple and only question for believers, is that which Paul asked as he approached Damascus: “What shall I do, Lord?”¹³⁹⁷ We may not do that which involves disobedience to Him.

A special constable, for example, may be required to hit a man's head with a truncheon. The question in such a case is, therefore, best put like this: “Does Christ allow his servants to hit people's heads with truncheons?” It is an inadequate answer to say that as we have been commanded to obey magistrates¹³⁹⁸ we are bound to do as they order us to do and act as special constables. This is because no one will deny that this matter is governed by the larger precept, that we “must obey God rather than human beings.”¹³⁹⁹ No candid person will contend that Paul meant we were to obey magistrates when their order might be to disobey God. If any such contention is made, it is sufficient to cite the practice of the apostles, who must be allowed to be reliable interpreters of their own words.

The apostles were constantly disobeying magistrates in the particular matter of preaching the gospel, and brought themselves to prison and death by this disobedience. There was no inconsistency between this course of theirs, and their exhortation to “obey magistrates”; for in the matters referred to in this exhortation, they were themselves obedient to magistrates. They paid tribute, honoured the ruling powers, and recognised the authority of the law, in all matters not affecting their allegiance to the law of God. This is a duty required of all saints, and cheerfully rendered by them, notwithstanding that they expect all such orders and institutions to be abolished in due time. That time is the Lord's time; and for this they patiently wait. The work is the Lord's work, and for Him they wait.

But are they to be induced or coerced by human law to do what Christ has expressly forbidden? The only question is: Has he forbidden violence? As to this, nothing is clearer, because Christ was “leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”¹⁴⁰⁰ This is what Christ himself said to his disciples: “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”¹⁴⁰¹ Now what example of Christ does Christ set in this matter of violence? The testimony is that “he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.”¹⁴⁰² As Peter tells us: “When they hurled

¹³⁹⁶ RR is making his point with great enthusiasm but the believer must take great comfort in the knowledge that God is faithful. He will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. In addition, when tempted, he will also provide a way out so that we can endure the tempting that has come our way. 1 Corinthians 10:13

¹³⁹⁷ Acts 22:10

¹³⁹⁸ Titus 3:1

¹³⁹⁹ Acts 5:29

¹⁴⁰⁰ 1 Peter 2:21

¹⁴⁰¹ John 13:15

¹⁴⁰² Isaiah 53:9

insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”¹⁴⁰³

But some may argue that this refers only to circumstances of persecution: that when he said: “Do not resist evil”, he meant that his friends were not to fight against those who persecuted them for their faith, but patiently and unresistingly allow them to do their will. It will be found, upon investigation, that this is a mistake. Christ was not speaking of persecution at all. He was speaking of the legal principles and practices of the Jewish nation. He says: “You have heard that it was said, “Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.”¹⁴⁰⁴ By whom - to whom, for what purpose had this been said? It was said by Moses to Israel, as the principle that was to regulate proceedings at law. This will be apparent by referring to Exodus 21. “The offender must be fined whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”¹⁴⁰⁵ When, therefore, Jesus commands non-resistance of evil, it is not with reference to persecutors, but with reference to legal proceedings, and the ordinary relations between people at large.

This is perhaps more evident in the next verse¹⁴⁰⁶ “And if anyone want to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.” Here is no persecutor but a person who simply wants your property and tries to dispossess you by legal process. “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.”¹⁴⁰⁷ A persecutor would not be likely to want your company on the road. It is the case of a traveller who wants your comfort and protection on a lonely road, and to whom you are commanded to show particular generosity. The verse that follows¹⁴⁰⁸ commands the believer to give to those who ask and to lend to those who wish to borrow are clearly to do with personal interaction and have nothing to do with persecutors.

The suggestion that these precepts apply only to circumstances of persecution is a totally unsatisfactory “halfway house”. It is a suggestion that is absurd in itself; for why should we be allowed to fight for ourselves, and be forbidden to fight for the Lord? One would imagine that the distinction, if it existed, would lie in the other direction, namely, that we would be allowed to retaliate when it was the authority of the Lord that was in question, but that we should be submissive when it was merely a question of taking something we possess from us. But the fact is, no such distinction is made. We do not necessarily know the motives of those who hurt us, whether it be as a consequence of our faith or their greed.

The command of the Lord is absolute, that we are to be as sheep in the midst of wolves; shrewd as snakes, but innocent as doves.¹⁴⁰⁹ The faithful of the first century recognised this as involving non-resistance. This is evident from James’s incidental remark to rich oppressors: “You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you”¹⁴¹⁰

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul says: “Do not take revenge, dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge: I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will

¹⁴⁰³ 1 Peter 2:23

¹⁴⁰⁴ Matthew 5:38

¹⁴⁰⁵ Exodus 21:22-24

¹⁴⁰⁶ Matthew 5:40

¹⁴⁰⁷ Matthew 5:41

¹⁴⁰⁸ Matthew 5:42

¹⁴⁰⁹ Matthew 10:16

¹⁴¹⁰ James 5:6

heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."¹⁴¹¹ Elsewhere Paul says, "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong"¹⁴¹² and "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?"¹⁴¹³

These principles exclude a resort to law on the part of those who obey the commandments of Christ. Going to law is inconsistent with submission to precepts requiring us to accept evil, and to refrain from vindicating ourselves. What is going to law other than resorting to the utmost extremity of personal violence and coercion? Those who look on the surface may not see this, but they feel it readily enough when it is directed against themselves. They may imagine they are doing a very gentle deed when they pay a visit to a quiet lawyer's office, and ask him to set the law in motion in a "legitimate" way, protesting that they want only justice, etc., etc.

But follow the matter to its conclusion; see what it means, and then judge whether, as a friend of Christ, you are at liberty to do such an awful and forbidden thing. You get the judgment of the law in your favour: and let us suppose the debtor is unable to pay. What happens? Your servants (for the agents of the law are your servants, for the time being, and would not act a moment after your authority was withdrawn) enter his house and sell his possessions and cast him homeless on the street. But suppose he is able to pay and won't, and takes it into his head to resist, enlisting, let us suppose, a group of thugs to help him. The agents of the law arrive at the house; the door is locked, admission demanded in vain. Your agents knock the door down, but they find the passage barricaded. They demolish the barricades, but find the occupants of the house in an attitude of defiance. Your servants of the law push them; the debtor's friends hit your servants of the law. Your servants resort to violence in return, but seeing they are over-matched, they withdraw.

The debtor rejoices and fearing a return of the agents, he gets together a bigger group of thugs. The bailiffs return with assistance. A melee ensues: people are severely injured and property destroyed, and the bailiffs are defeated. What next? A riot. Some of the people take sides with the debtor and some with the bailiffs. What next? The soldiers are sent for. The soldiers are now your servants. If the men in the house don't give in brains will be blown out and lives taken, and all this will be done because you have set the law in motion. In fact, this is the law in motion. What is commonly called "the law" is but the smooth end of the bludgeon. It is the fear of the other end that makes people cower at the sight of the handle. A bailiff goes and shows the handle, and this is generally sufficient, but the fact remains, that what is called the law is a terrible instrument of destruction, which will resort to fatal force if there is any resistance. A battered house and blood-covered corpses, are elements in the picture to be considered. The fact that it is rarely needful to push matters to this length does not alter the nature of the transaction, or weaken the conclusion that saints are not at liberty to employ the law to meet their ends.

The fact that a man does not personally employ the violence only makes the matter worse, so far as the nature of his act is concerned; for which is worse: to do the deed honestly and bravely yourself, or to stand behind a curtain and whisper the words that set a lot of heartless ruffians to do it? If you were the personal actor, your debtor might have some chance of mercy by personal appeal; but when you set the law in motion you hand him over to the tender mercies of agents with hearts of stone, and without the power to be merciful even if they were minded so to be.

It is generally conceded that a brother or sister has no right to resort to law against another brother or sister, because of Paul's teaching in Corinthians¹⁴¹⁴ but some believe they may do so against a

¹⁴¹¹ Romans 12:19-21

¹⁴¹² 1 Thessalonians 5:15

¹⁴¹³ 1 Corinthians 6:7

¹⁴¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:1-4

stranger. The first thought upon such a proposition is, that it is contrary to the entire spirit of Christ's teaching to suppose we are at liberty to apply any process of hurt to strangers which we are not to apply to brothers or sisters. His command not to resist, extends even to any enemy, even more to a debtor, who may not necessarily be an enemy. The supposed distinction in favour of brothers and sisters in this matter would be a return to the spirit of things which said "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." This clearly is not the way of Christ.

Why is it that Paul mentions brothers or sisters in connection with law-going at all in this context?¹⁴¹⁵ Is it to intimate that a brother or sister may go to law against a stranger, while not at liberty to do so against another brother or sister? There is no such hint in the context. It is referred to, to illustrate the great extent to which the Corinthians had gone in their disobedience. "One brother takes another to court – and that in front of unbelievers!"¹⁴¹⁶ He commands the members of the church to judge if there is anything wrong between one and the other; but does not he recommend a resort to even process of judgement? On the contrary, he says, "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?"¹⁴¹⁷

The command to be passive in relation to evil, is an ordinance for the present age. In due time, the saints will trample the wicked as ashes under the soles of their feet, if they prove themselves worthy of the honour by a faithful submission to what God requires of them now. "To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations."¹⁴¹⁸ In view of this, it is of paramount importance that the saints remain true to the commandments of Christ; and do not let themselves be led into the path of disobedience by glosses on his word, which while making the way smoother to the flesh will have the effect of depriving us of the crown in the coming day of glory.

5. There are other commands to which mainstream Christian teaching seems to pay little attention. They are outside the scope of this relatively short book but are listed briefly. Christ:

- Forbids all manner of oaths¹⁴¹⁹
- Prohibits the bearing of arms¹⁴²⁰
- Condemns retaliation and vulgar speech, and speaking evil of others¹⁴²¹
- Insists on peace-making and personal private communication with the offended to this end¹⁴²²
- Commands kindness to even the undeserving and the evil¹⁴²³
- Allows marriage with believers only¹⁴²⁴
- Directs modesty of dress and appearance¹⁴²⁵

It is quite amazing that so many nominally Christian people overlook these commandments as Christ has plainly declared that it is vain for men to call him Lord if they do not obey his commandments.

¹⁴¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 6

¹⁴¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:6

¹⁴¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:7

¹⁴¹⁸ Revelation 2:26

¹⁴¹⁹ Matthew 5:34; James 5:12

¹⁴²⁰ Matthew 26:52; revelation 13:10

¹⁴²¹ Matthew 5:44; 1 Peter 3:9; Romans 12:14

¹⁴²² Matthew 5:24; 18:15; Colossians 3:13

¹⁴²³ Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:35

¹⁴²⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:39

¹⁴²⁵ 1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3-4

Oaths are regularly administered in public courts (not to speak of the profanities in private ‘conversation’).

The military profession is considered as a fitting sphere for the Christian sons of Christian men. The support of the “church” is extended to the army in the appointment of chaplains, involving this fearful anomaly that when two so-called Christian nations go to war, Christians on one side shoot Christians on the other side, as perfectly legitimate business. Christian “chaplains” on one side pray to God to ask him to help them kill and maim the Christians they are fighting against – whilst, at the same time, another ‘set’ of “chaplains” are praying that their Christian soldiers will more successfully kill and maim their Christian opponents. One group of “chaplains”, having knowledge of the battle field strewn with their corpses as their side has been victorious, sings praise to God for enabling them to butcher their Christian brothers!

Retaliation is both preached and practised among the many Christians as the right and the noble and manly thing to do; and arrogant and resentful speech is excused on the score of necessity. How often do we proudly hear accolades in favour of those who ‘stand up for themselves’.

Peace-loving and peace-making are looked upon as signs of weakness.

Showing kindness to the evil is almost unheard of. Ingratitude and unworthiness are invariably seized on as a reason for not helping anyone in distress and many both assist in, and rejoice when they hear, of the wicked receiving justice, whether it be fair or rough in its nature.

The idea of that believers will only marry within the faith is regarded as a sign of religious fanaticism.

And as for dress, many church congregations seem to consider it an honourable thing to enter into mutual rivalry in the style and magnificence of their attire. “Fashion” is a goddess whose sway is undisputed. No one owns up to be a worshipper, but everyone acts the part of one. Ambition, the love of display, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, are not acknowledged as the ruling motives, though there is scarcely another at work. All is justified on the score of “taste.”

This state of things must grieve every mind that is in sympathy with divine aims for human life, as revealed in the Scriptures. There is no alternative but to fight the prevailing corruption. It is for sincere believers, in private and in public, so far as there may be opportunity, to uphold the ideal exhibited in the apostolic writings. Only in this way can we save ourselves from a generation which is as “out of step” as the one that listened to a similar exhortation from Peter. The fight may be hard, but the objects are supreme.

We can afford to ignore the criticisms of those who oppose the path of the true believer. The commandments of Christ lead us in ways that help us to reverence God rather than defer to public-opinion; help us to listen compassionately to others rather than be self assertive; give us the enlightening stimulus of a clear philosophy rather than live for self-gratification; the virtue of self restraint rather than the action of resentment; principle for whim; knowledge for feeling; godliness for manliness; life for death.

The unpopularity of the commandments of Christ results from their opposition to natural impulse; and their opposition to natural impulse constitutes their very power to educate men and women in obedience to God, that they may be disciplined and prepared for the great glory He has in store for those who please Him. Let us not make the great mistake of following popular teachings but rather

follow ways that please God and our Lord Jesus Christ, showing our love by keeping all his commandments.

The only thing deserving earnest attention in our current world, is the truth revealed in the Bible. It makes the believer free for the present, and safe for the future. It gives a solution for all the problems of life; it inspires confidence amid the uncertainties; it guides believers in a simple, single-hearted, peaceful direction; it fills the mind with comforting assurance for the future, highlighting the prospect and expectation of attaining the perfection which the yearning heart does not find in the things of the present age; it subdues innate propensities, corrects the natural tendency to moral weakness, awakes the holiest of affections, develops interest, and improves and elevates and sanctifies the whole nature, while giving preparation for, and a guarantee of, "the inheritance of his holy people (the saints) in the kingdom of light."¹⁴²⁶

It "holds promise for both the present life and the life to come."¹⁴²⁷

Its pursuit is more worthwhile than that of any secular object. Work spent in its acquirement, or expended in its dissemination, will develop results that will flourish gloriously when the fruits of mere worldly effort will have perished in irrecoverable oblivion.

"All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flower of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures for ever." And this is the word that was preached to you.¹⁴²⁸

¹⁴²⁶ Colossians 1:12

¹⁴²⁷ 1 Timothy 4:8

¹⁴²⁸ 1 Peter 1:24-25