
Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 1

January 6, 2008

The Fruit of Atheism

It is a fact, which unbelievers themselves acknowledge, that ideas have consequences, and that these consequences are the implementation of these ideas and their implications in life (cf. Matthew 7:20).

Thought is constantly being tested not only within the laboratory behind walls, but also in the laboratory of life where the testing is not hidden from the eyes of other men.

The revelation of its futility, and the condemnation brought on it by its own fruits, should be sufficient to lead thoughtful, moral men to repudiate utterly its philosophy. When we examine its fruits of total pessimism; its wreck of morality; and its degrading superstitions; we know that atheism has reached its crisis in the world of thought and that its judgment against itself is devastating.

Pessimism

The pessimism of unbelief immediately strikes the thoughtful observer. That pessimism is a logical outcome of unbelief may not only be theoretically established, but also demonstrated by

statements from unbelievers. As the unbeliever, and poet, Swinburne put it: "The gods love not justice more than fate, and smite the righteous and the violent mouth, and mix with insolent blood the reverent man's, and bruise the holier as the lying lips." (Works, XIX: 109). In other words, no matter what one does his fate is the same. Conduct, whether good or bad, does not change the outcome.

James Thomson, who crawled into a drunkard's grave, was perhaps the most pessimistic of poets. Life was vain to him. "From Nothingness to Nothingness—all lost!" His *City of Dreadful Night* is filled with the crying despair of an unbeliever. We give a selection or so from it: "Here Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air. Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped pair. Here Hope died, starved out in its utmost lair. Speak not of comfort where no comfort is. Speak not at all; can words make foul things fair? Our life's a cheat, our death a black abyss: hush and be mute envisaging despair." The theme of the entire poem is

that "They leave all hope behind who enter there."

And if they did not want to continue this life of despair "over its wall hang ever the rich dark clusters of the Vine of Death, within easy reach of thy hand, which may pluck of them when it will."

One could continue to present atheism's dark view of life. If in the end man shall be conquered, and his work wiped out, then why "in a struggle strive and yearn?" It must be remarked that which is so utterly destructive of life can hardly be the truth about all life. It is unnecessary to spend much time reminding believers what a contrasting view of life they have, and what a hopeful and peaceful life the believer may experience when he really lives by his faith.

Immorality

The moral consequences of unbelief are even more frightful than its pessimism. This is not to say that all atheists are very immoral, for we are grateful that many of them live above their creed because they are held up by the moral ideals of either a

past religious faith or the general attitude of society which has been influenced by the moral principles of the Christian religion. And, yet logically speaking, atheism casts all morality out of the universe. Atheism removes the very basis of morality in that it denies human responsibility and the power of choice. It is as irrational to speak of an immoral man as it is to speak of an immoral rock. Man is a mere matter—machine without any power of choice, self-determination, or responsibility. The “ought” is an illusion and morality is mere mockery.

Atheism not only destroys morality, but it also undermines it in maintaining that morality is mere custom subject to flux and flow. Whatever society may sanction is moral; what it repudiates is immoral. In other words, morality is merely a matter of majority vote. If the majority are Nazis, Communists, or criminals, their customs are as moral as any other customs for there is no standard higher than customs. There is no absolute, fixed standard by which to evaluate one custom higher, and more moral, than another custom. Morality is destroyed when this doctrine, of might and majority as the makers of morality, is adopted.

From the pens of atheists let us prove our charges that atheism destroys the very idea of morality, of obligations, of responsibility. Woolsey Teller maintained that there are no

fixed principles of morality, but simply standards which various societies form, and that it is just a matter of what one thinks. He could not give one moral reason why it would be any more wrong for one atheist to kill another than to kill a cow.

Morality is also destroyed when a debased view of man is taken. Teller wrote that “As for the rank and file, they are no more biologically fit to profit by a cultural environment than a codfish is to fly an airplane” (*Essays of an Atheist*, p. 152). Darwinism does not offer any objections to, but gives reason for, their elimination. “For the rabble—I watch them as I do cattle” (*Ibid.*, p. 190). What is wrong with keeping cattle within fenced areas to serve us as we see fit? Such a philosophy cannot condemn China’s ruthless methods in dealing with her own citizens.

With reference to sex, morality is also banished. Bertrand Russell said that “mutual inclination” justifies sexual intercourse (*What I Believe*, p. 45). Russell thought that man is as much governed by the laws of nature as are the animals (p. 9); that “ought” means simply what “someone else wishes us to desire” (p. 37); and that there is no scientific justification for the idea of “virtue” or “sin.” (p. 42).

Teller agreed with him in robbing man of any feeling of responsibility, for he wrote: “all men act the way they do because they cannot act

otherwise” (*Essays of an Atheist*, p. 233).

These quotations are enough to indicate what a frightful world this would be if all men acted in harmony with such ideas. In fact, could the world exist if all men followed these ideas? Atheism would soon destroy all mankind if followed by all men, and thus there would be no one left to believe in atheism. It is only because there are enough people alive who do stand for decency, honesty, and such like that the atheists themselves have a lease on life. Atheism, when lived, would make life impossible.

—James D. Bales

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 2

January 13, 2008

The Keynotes of Scripture

Genesis

The Bible is God's great song of redemption. Every song has its keynote. Every note in the composition must harmonize with the keynote; otherwise the song will produce a discord where it should not. The "keynote" of the Scriptures is Jesus Christ. Everything promised for our good here and happiness eternal centers around Christ.

Words are the vehicles of expression. Christ is God's complete expression of His will to man, hence, He is called the Word. In the following articles we shall see God's expression of His will through Christ.

The book of Genesis is commonly referred to as the book of Creation, the book of Beginnings, or better the book of Origination. This book is not merely to give us an idea of things long ago, or the facts of where we came from, but rather to show the beginning of God's plan to save the human family through His promised seed, Christ.

In this first book of the Bible we have the following great truths revealed: (1) the seed of woman shall bruise the serpent's head. Here is a reference to Christ as the seed of Woman (Genesis 3:14–15). Such great characters as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. were never referred to as the seed of woman. Abraham was the seed of Terah, Isaac the seed of Abraham and Jacob the seed of Isaac (cf. II Chronicles 20:7; Genesis 19:32, 34; Numbers 16:40; I Samuel 2:20; I Kings 11:39). This seed of woman, Christ, shall bruise the serpent's head. Here is a direct promise of the virgin birth (cf. Galatians 4:4; Isaiah 7:14). The modernistic trend in and out of the church will not accept this statement from God, but nevertheless it is His revelation (Matthew 1:22–23) and we determine what we are by our attitude toward this note in God's great song of redemption.

(2) Abraham, in Genesis 12, the seed of Abraham would be the seed through which all nations of the earth should be blessed. Even though Abraham could not see the end of this great

promise God made to him regarding Christ, his seed, he did God's bidding (Galatians 3:16).

In the offering of Isaac, the child of promise, all can see a beautiful comparison to Christ the promised seed (Genesis 22:16; John 3:16). The command to offer his son on the altar is a clear reference, in God's great song of redemption, to Christ being offered by his Father for the sins of the world. With an eye of faith hear the cry of Isaac and see in the New Testament Christ "cried out and gave up the ghost" (Mark 15:39).

(3) See the promise renewed to Isaac and then to Jacob and finally notice even the particular tribe through which the seed was to come. In Genesis 49:10 "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." Here Jacob identifies Christ as the great Lawgiver and the one that would have on his head the royal crown of majesty, honor and power (Luke 1:32).

In the book of Genesis we see the origination of God's great song of redemption and every note in this great composition of revelation harmonizing as it strikes a beautiful melody on the strings of our heart, without a single discord the writer of God's will singing of Christ, the complete expression of God's will to man.

Exodus

Continuing our study of God's great song of redemption we now note the great theme of the book of Exodus. Many times we have heard about the going out of Egypt by the Israelites, their journeying, the Law given and so much about the faithlessness of these Hebrews. However, the real keynote in the book of Exodus to harmonize with the note of Revelation in our study of this book is the Passover.

Christ is our Passover according to I Corinthians 5:7. It was the blood of the innocent on the door post and lintel that protected the first born of man and beast from death. Similarly, it is the blood of our Saviour that saves every responsible person from sin.

The firstborn could not start the long journey to Canaan apart from the blood. He would not have been alive to journey. When we start our walk toward heaven we must have the blood of Christ upon us. This we do by getting where the blood was shed. In John 19 we find the blood was shed in his death. In

Romans 6 we learn that we are baptized into his death. When we start this journey to the Promised Land there is a line of separation as there was for the Israelites at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:22, 30). There is a time of trial and preparation before we can enter into the promised rest. The children of Israel had their trials and temptations in the wilderness wandering. They did not, in the main, prepare themselves for this country for which they yearned, and many of them fell in the wilderness (I Corinthians 10:1-12). Many in the church will not hold faithful. Their faith is not grounded in God's word, so, they will not reach the Heaven of rest (Hebrews 4:1-11).

As the Israelites were guided by the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day we, too, are guided by Christ. As they drank of that Rock that followed them which Rock was Christ, so we drink the water of life He gives (cf. John 4). Did it ever occur that on one occasion Moses was to speak to the rock and another time to strike the rock? Would it not seem a small thing to have one's hopes of heaven sacrificed for such a small act of disobedience? When God told Moses to strike the rock he used a different word for rock than when he told him to speak to the rock. The word for rock when commanded to strike the rock was a low, embedded rock; possibly referring to Christ in

his humiliation. The word for rock when told to speak to the rock was a high, towering rock; possibly looking to the exalted priestly reign of Christ (Hebrews 5:5-7). Striking the High Priest incurred the death penalty (Acts 23:5; Exodus 22:28; Leviticus 24:11-16, 23).

Think of the tabernacle and the church as we study the book of Exodus. Think of the wandering, the unfaithfulness, the blood of animals and see in this a wonderful pointing to of the complete revelation and the consummating of God's song of redemption and his scheme of redemption so wonderfully harmonized. Can you not see in this book Christ the complete expression of His will to us?

—Harold F. Sharp

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 3

January 20, 2008

The Keynotes of Scripture (2)

Leviticus

The book of Leviticus is sometimes called the book for the priests because of the tribe from which they were selected. However, in our study, the Song of Redemption is harmonized in a fine way as we look to the book of Leviticus as a book about sacrifices. It starts with the peace offering, sin offering, willing sin offering and the offering of thanksgiving. Think of Christ as our peace offering—“He is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14); as our sin offering—“made Him to be sin who for us” (II Corinthians 5:21). As you do, you will see the harmony in the book of Leviticus with God’s great Song of Redemption.

We should surely offer up the thanksgiving of our hearts to God for his gracious gift, for His Son and all He means to us for the redemption of our souls (Hebrews 13:15). The blood of Abel’s offering and the countless others offered for the Jews flowed to meet the blood of Calvary (Zechariah 13:1; cf. Hebrews 12:24). Here the blood of the animals mingled with that of Christ (Hebrews 10:1–10).

In Leviticus we learn the difference between the common and the holy, the clean and the unclean. Study the lesson of Nadab and Abihu. Learn well the lesson that to add or omit is

authority reserved only to God. What about instrumental music, benevolent societies, recreation facilities and all such that God has not commanded?

In Leviticus we learn the signs and treatment of leprosy which is a type of sin:

LEPROSY	SIN
Began with a hidden spot (Leviticus 13:24)	Hidden infection (Psalms 66:18)
Becomes conspicuous (Leviticus 13:9)	Betrays the heart (Matthew 15:19).
Spreads (Leviticus 13:22)	Spreads (I Corinthians 5)
Infected others (Leviticus 22:6)	Contaminates others (II Timothy 2:17)
Put out of camp (Leviticus 13:46)	Put away from (I Corinthians 5)
Publicly proclaim uncleanness (Leviticus 13:45)	Must confess and forsake (1 John 1:9–10)

Furthermore, we see in the forbidding of ceremonially unclean meats a parallel to Christians who are forbidden that which is spiritually unclean (Leviticus 11:43–47). The dance, strong drink, gambling, and other such things contaminate our souls and render us unfit for heaven (Galatians 5:19–21).

This separation from the world is further symbolized in the laws regarding marriage for the priest (Leviticus 21:7; cf. Luke

1:5). Christ expects us as His priests not to be entangled with the world which would turn us away from Him as the priests were turned away from God by their idolatrous wives (Ezra 9, 10; cf. II Corinthians 6:14–18; I Peter 1:16).

Notice the feasts they had: Passover was to remind them when they were saved from death in Egypt. In Leviticus they are order to be holy in its observance (Leviticus 23:1ff). By this the Christian is pointed to Christ our Passover which we are to “keep...with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (I Corinthians 5:8).

The Feast Tabernacles required their living in tents for seven days in order to remember the wanderings (Leviticus 23:34–36). This reminds the Christian how he must go through the wilderness of this world while remaining holy (I Corinthians 10:1–14; I Peter 2:11).

The offering of the Firstfruits at Pentecost reminded Israel of God’s goodness and His blessing upon those that seek Him first (Leviticus 23:10). It signifies to the Christian God’s goodness to him (Matthew 6:33; Romans 2:4).

The Day Atonement taught Israel their need for a True Redeemer (Leviticus 16;

Hebrews 10:1–3). In it the Christian sees Christ who put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26; John 1:29).

Concluding this book we are aware that God is continuing to speak of his Son and what He will mean to us in this great dispensation. He truly is the complete expression of God's will to us.

Numbers

We now note the book of Numbers. This book is a book of sojourning; therefore, we use this theme to see its harmony with the song of Redemption and the Keynote, Christ.

There are several interesting and helpful lessons in this book which we note.

In the first place there was the taking a census of the people and the place in the camp of each person under a captain (Numbers 2:17). Consider then the place each person occupies in the church under the Captain of their salvation, Christ. To be sure each congregation had elders but they are responsible to the Captain of our Salvation (Hebrews 2:10; 1 Peter 5:1–4; James 3:1)

Next observe that it was the place of the Levites to care for the Tabernacle (Numbers 4). Similarly, there is a place of work for every "priest" today. Each Christian is a priest and all have work to do (1 Peter 2:5–9). In Numbers we encounter the law of purifying (Leviticus 19). We know today one outside the body of Christ much reach the blood of Christ by obedience to the Gospel (Romans 6:3–4) and those in the church contact the blood of Christ as they walk in the light (1 John 1:7–10). We

must maintain contact with Christ's blood (cf. Hebrews 10:26). There are other laws pertaining to Israel in the book of Numbers such as to the rules for the Nazarites, the Passover, the Trumpets and the Sabbath.

Remember when Aaron and Miriam rebelled against Moses (Numbers 12). Miriam was stricken with Leprosy for her jealousy. Moses asked God to heal her, which He did.

However, God reminded Moses he had a law which she must honor before being allowed to remain in the camp. Even though Miriam was surely healed, Jehovah did not permit Miriam to disregard His law. Many today work to save souls contrary to the law of Christ, but such will not be permitted (Hebrews 2:1–4).

See this principle exemplified in matter of the fiery serpents and God's law of healing pertaining to those that were bitten. The remedy required that all look upon the brazen serpent (Numbers 21:8–9). In the New Testament we are told as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be lifted up (John 3:14–21). There is no cure apart from God's law and no forgiveness of sins apart from God's ordained way. It is through Christ that salvation comes.

Another important lesson is learned from the wicked prophet Balaam. Despite his evil desire he knew some things that were good. For example, he knew not to go beyond the word of God (Numbers 22:18). He knew he should ask of God what He wanted him to do (22:8). He also knew there was no price that justified going

beyond the word of God (24:13). God used Balaam to teach Balak these important lessons.

However, Balaam did not love God as he should (II Peter 2:15). He desired to have the wages of unrighteousness and was willing to teach others to sin in order to them (Revelation 2:14). He becomes a great example to us, one not to be followed (Jude 1:10–13).

Balaam is the antithesis of Christ. When the Lord knew he must die, how differently he behaved, saying, "Father if it be thy will let this cup pass from me." The desire of Christ was to completely do the will of the Father (John 8:29; Matthew 26:39, 42). That should be our will as well (Romans 6:11–18).

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 4

January 27, 2008

The Keynotes of Scripture (3)

Deuteronomy

This book has as its theme: Obedience (Deuteronomy 11:27–28; 13:4; 27:10; 30:1–20). Think of the statement in Hebrews 5:8–9, “Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and He being made perfect, He became the Author (Captain) of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him.” He was not made perfect in the sense he was ever imperfect. Actually he was made complete in His suffering to fulfill the demands of the law and its dignity in not allowing sin to go unpunished and extends the merciful hand of God in forgiveness of sins to the guilty as they obey His will. (See where the same word is used in Hebrews 2:10 as in 5:8–9.)

In Deuteronomy we see the entering of Canaan as a result of God's goodness and not the goodness of the Israelites (Deuteronomy 7:7–11). We will enter heaven because of the goodness and mercy of God rather than our own goodness (Titus 3:3–7).

Idolatry was forbidden in the new land (Deuteronomy 5:7–8). They had put away their idols in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 9:11–21; Joshua 24:15) and were commanded to destroy any who

set up or worshipped an idol (Deuteronomy 13:12–18). Furthermore, they were test every prophet and instructed in how to deal with the false prophet (13:1–11; 18:20–22). Yet, this false worship led by false prophets is contrasted with an extraordinary prophet that would come and proclaim the name of Jehovah (Deuteronomy 18:15–17). This prophet was Christ (Acts 3:22–26). God talked with Moses face to face (Deuteronomy 34:10). Christ said He spoke that which He had seen with the Father (John 8:28, 38; 12:49–50; 14:10).

It is revealed in Deuteronomy how God dealt with these who were disobedient to the Law given by Moses (Deuteronomy 17:6–7). We are similarly warned that there is a more severe punishment to those who reject so great salvation, at the first spoken by the Lord, and confirmed unto us by them that heard Him (Hebrews 2:3–4; 10:26–31).

They were commanded to read and teach to their children the wonderful works of God so they would not forget Him (Deuteronomy 6:7; 11:16–23). Surely we are expected to teach our children and nurture and guide them in the way of Jehovah (Ephesians 6:1–4).

There was much disobedience then and there is disobedience now regarding our responsibility to our own.

They were to make no alliances with the Canaanites of the land because they would become a snare to God's people in leading them away from God (Deuteronomy 7:2–6). Surely we see the principle here which prohibits our making common cause with any false religion or doctrine. The alliances made with the nations about Israel led to their downfall (Judges 2:1–4). Similarly, the Church has been weakened, compromised and overcome in many quarters because God's people have made a league with the denominations (Colossians 2:8; Hebrews 13:9).

The Israelites were prosperous and then forgot Jehovah (Deuteronomy 6:10–16). We have known many men and women to leave the church when they became prosperous. Yet, ironically, adversity is often God's opportunity (James 2:5). This apostasy of the Jews was foretold; we should be forewarned and admonished. Unless we obey the Master's commands we will fall and be lost.

Other things regarding the rebellious son, heathen

abominations and such lessons will help us in our walk here below and make us recognize God demands strict obedience to His laws. Let our lives always conform to His Will.

Joshua

As we continue to study God's Song of Redemption, we come to the book of Joshua. To be sure the notes in this wonderful song of Redemption harmonize and are not discordant.

In the first place, note the name *Joshua* in the Hebrew language is the same as *Jesus* in the Greek. In the seventh chapter of Acts according to the KJV, Stephen calls to mind "the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness" which he notes "our fathers that came after brought in with *Jesus* into the possession of the Gentiles" (7:45). Clearly this is a reference to Joshua leading the children of Israel into Canaan (Joshua 3:11). Therefore, we may view the book of Joshua as the book of possession and "hear" the keynote of Christ in the person of Joshua as a type of our Great Deliverer.

JOSHUA	JESUS
Deliverer (Joshua 6:25)	Deliverer (Romans 11:26)
Strengthened by an Angel (Joshua 5:13-15)	Strengthened by an Angel (Luke 23:43)
Went Before (Joshua 8:10)	Went Before (Hebrews 2:10)
Gave Rest (Joshua 21:44)	Gave Rest (Hebrews 4:8-11)
Fulfilled All God's Promises (Joshua 21:45)	Fulfilled All God's Promises (Acts 13:23)
Must Be Obeyed to Be Blessed (Joshua 22:1-6)	Must Be Obeyed to Be Blessed (Hebrews 5:8-9)

Note this statement: "And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give

unto their fathers and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that he swore unto their fathers; and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass" (Joshua 21:43-45). This truth completely halts the advance of the premillennialist who avers that the land has not been possessed according to God's promise and will yet be the possession of the Jewish people. Joshua, however, settles the question for those who love the Bible, and believe it. God has kept his promise to the Jewish people and Joshua so declares.

In Hebrew 4:7-11 we learn that the rest for which Israel in Egypt, as slaves desired, and for which they sighed, was not given to them by Joshua and Jesus will provide that for all the faithful as we possess the beautiful promised land of the redeemed when Christ comes to claim His own and take them to live with him throughout all eternity.

Another great lesson from the book of Joshua relates the fall of Jericho which sings beautifully of how we by faith receive God's promises after that faith acts in harmony with God's law concerning us (Galatians 5:6; James 2:24; Hebrews 5:9-9). It was not by faith alone that the walls of Jericho fell but by faith after they marched around the walls one time each day for six days and on the seventh day marched around seven times, being led by the priests as they

blew on the ram's horns and the people shouted with a mighty shout —then the gift of God came to them (Joshua 6:2ff.). It was a conditional gift and they received it by faith (Hebrews 11:30). Heaven is a gift, conditioned on our being faithful to God and His laws (Revelation 2:10).

We are told also of the extraordinary person called "Captain of the Lord's Hosts" who came and fought for Israel (Joshua 5:13-15). The Lord will fight our battles with us but we must honor Him in obedience.

In conclusion, in Joshua, the Keynote is possession and surely it is in harmony with the Great Song of Redemption revealed by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles of the Son of God who has spoken to us.

—Harold F. Sharp

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 5

February 3, 2008

The Keynotes of Scripture (4)

Judges

The book of Judges is an interesting book which harmonizes with Christ, the Keynote of the Scriptures, as “the book of anarchy.” The word *anarchy* suggests an improper attitude toward authority, government and the legitimate rulers of the land. The succeeding generations that possessed the land given to Israel manifested a rebellious spirit against Jehovah. They became a nation that did not want God as their King or His Law as their authority and rule (Judges 2:6-17). Consequently, He brought upon them the curses even as He had warned (cf. Leviticus 26:14-24). Our Father will allow us to do things, which are contrary to Him, and then chasten us for our sins and desires contrary to His will (Hebrews 12:5-11).

During this time of Israel's history they were without a chief ruler or “king”. God was ruled through the different judges; however, Israel was not pleased with this arrangement. Finally, their dissatisfaction led them to demand a king (I Samuel 8:4-22). They prospered for a while under their kings, but eventually they were oppressed, led into apostasy and captivity. Some lost their national identity and never again served God (II Kings 17:7-23). Out of this once great nation God recovered only a small remnant from which to rebuild a people

faithful to Him (II Kings 19:31; Jeremiah 23:3-4).

The experience of Israel should serve as a very powerful lesson to the Church today (Romans 15:4). We see many that are not content to have God rule over them through His ordained “judges” (cf. I Timothy 3; Titus 1; I Corinthians 6:4). They are no longer satisfied to be the people of God desiring rather to “be like all the nations” (I Samuel 8:20). This spirit of rebellion is carrying the Church of our Lord further and further into digression and apostasy, many will lose their identity and never come back to the truth (II Thessalonians 2:11). Many will be plunged headlong into final apostasy and their names will be taken from the Book of Life and even the churches will have the candlestick removed (Revelation 22:19; 2:5).

It is difficult to understand that while many of the Judges were great and good men, there were a few that were quite bad which under ideal circumstances never would have been given the rule. Abimelech, a murderous tyrant, is a good example. He was one that encouraged vain and vile men to follow him. Jotham's fable of the trees seeking a ruler (Judges 9:9-20) is an explanation of the times which reveals the truth of the proverb: “like people like priest” (Hosea 4:9). When men seek to leave God out of their work they get the most evil and self seeking

men to rule over them (Isaiah 3:4, 12; cf. II Timothy 4:3-4).

At the beginning of the conquest Israel was commanded to drive out the seven nations of the Canaanites (Deuteronomy 9:3-6); yet, they did not (Joshua 23:5-13). What follows is the sorrowful story of how their enemies subverted the nation of Israel in perverting the worship of God. Their fate is preserved in the Bible to remind us of how dangerous it is not to follow Him who knows by His Wisdom what we need better than we know to ask.

In conclusion consider this catalogue of the judges which categorizes them according to their character and the enemies they defeated.

JUDGE		ENEMY
Othniel (3:9)		Mesopotamia
Ehud (3:15)		Moab
Shamgar (3:31)		Philistia
Deborah (4:1)		Canaan
Gideon (6:11)		Midian
Abimelech (9:1)	X	Canaan
Tola (10:1)		Canaan
Jair (10:3)		Canaan
Jepthah (11:1)		Ammon
Ibzon (12:8)		Ammon
Elon (12:11)		Ammon
Abdon (12:13)		Ammon
Samson (13:1)		Philistia
Eli (1 Samuel 4:18)	X	Philistia
Samuel (7:15)		Philistia

Ruth

In the Song of Redemption, the book of Ruth surely strikes the Keynote, Christ. This book is contemporaneous with some parts of the book of Judges. It is the one bright moment in an otherwise dark time. The story of Ruth is a significant element in fulfilling the Messianic promises God made to Adam, Abraham and Judah (Ruth 4:18-22; cf. Genesis 3:15; 21:12; 49:10). Furthermore, this book unequivocally extends the scheme of redemption to those that were not of Jewish birth, that is, the Gentiles. The Book of Ruth, and Ruth the Moabitess, herself, play a significant role in establishing the lineage of the Messiah (cf. Luke 3:32; Matthew 1:5). Each one brought us one step closer to realizing the promise of eternal life.

The beautiful love story of the book of Ruth is unsurpassed in the annals of men. It begins when the godly woman, Naomi, leaves her native land, as the helpmeet of her husband and finds herself in a land that had cruel trials and hardships. She loses her husband, her sons marry and, sadly, they both die. Here she is left a childless widow with her two daughters in law. One, Ruth, is a true friend and remains at Naomi's side in returning to Canaan.

Naomi came to the Land of Moab and plucked the fairest rose, but did so with a broken heart, and pricked and bleeding hands. Our Savior came to this low world of sin and sorrows and with bleeding hands and a broken heart secured for man the greatest possible gift, the resurrection and eternal life (Romans 6:22-23).

Think a moment about the beautiful vow which Ruth made, and let's compare it to the vow one makes in becoming a

Christian. Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave thee." This thought was surely in our hearts when we came to Christ in answer to His wonderful invitation (Matthew 11:28-30). He has assured us that He will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5-6) and in those dark hours that come we may be left by all others but Jesus is there. We have never lost a friend or a possession that we did not have more by remaining true to Christ (Mark 10:28-31).

Ruth vowed, "Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge." Surely we desire to live where our Redeemer lives, and He has gone to prepare a place for us in the House of God (John 14:3). However, we cannot dwell with Him if we do not follow Him (John 16:10); we need to make certain that one day we will dwell with Him (John 13:33-14:7).

She promised that "Thy people shall be my people." We need the companionship of the people of God. We have fellowship with those who walk in the light as He is in the light. I do need not worry about fellowship. I need to worry about serving Christ as He desires me to serve and fellowship will be a sure result (I John 1:5-10).

Ruth pledged that "Thy God [shall be] my God." Ruth recognized that Jehovah was the one true God. She had been reared in idolatry (Judges 10:6), but had come to have faith like another gentile woman and in-law (Matthew 1:5; Hebrews 11:31). Surely there is only one true God though there be gods many (I Corinthians 8:5). When we know His will, the revealed Word, and follow Him, He is our God. He is the God that Christ served doing the Will of His Father (John 4:34; 6:38, 40).

Then Ruth promised: "Where thou diest I will die." We cannot die apart from Christ (Philippians 1:21-23). Those who die in Christ are at rest from their labors and blessed in His sight (Revelation 14:13; Psalm 116:15). Live with Him, die in Him and be with Him in all eternity.

Then finally, Ruth pledges: "Ought but death part thee and me." Fidelity is what the Lord desires from each of us. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). Ruth pledged to never leave Naomi until death took one or the other. Even so, the Christian once raised to walk in newness of life is committed to do so until Jesus calls Him home to be with Him where there is no more death or dying, tears or sorrow, pain or fear (Revelation 21:4).

Truly Ruth sings the Song of Redemption as it looks forward to Christ with promise and hope.

—Harold F. Sharp

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 6

February 10, 2008

Why Read the Bible?

The Bible has stood the test of time and persecution, yet it continues to be the best seller year after year. One would think that the world would be in better shape than what it is since there are so many Bibles in print (some families own several copies). But that is not the case. There must be some explanation for this seeming inconsistency. One way to find out is to examine the reasons some purchase and/or read the Bible, as well as why it should be read.

Some read the Bible just to be able to say they have read it. One is considered to have a well-rounded education if he has a general knowledge of the Bible. In the English departments at universities portions of the Bible are required reading, but merely as another piece and style of literature—not as the Word of God. “A knowledge of the Bible without a college course is more valuable than a college course without a knowledge of the Bible” (William Lion Phelps). There's a big difference between the books that men make and the Book that makes men.

Others read the Bible because they know their preacher or “pastor” is

going to ask for a show of hands on Sunday from all the daily Bible readers. Prizes are often awarded to those who read it through. In many cases very little is learned when the Bible is read from this motive. The important thing is not that you went through the Bible, but did the Bible go through you?

Some people own a Bible for a status symbol. In spite of the fact that interest in spiritual matters seems to be approaching an all time low for modern society, it is still the “in” thing to display a Bible on the coffee table as a “conversation piece”—provided the conversation is about the beautiful cover and not the contents. It is also “in” for the bride to carry a pretty white covered Bible at her wedding—for “good luck.” Lip service is given to the Bible as a book to live by, but most discussions of it are of a shallow nature (usually to satisfy some curiosity—the answer to which would profit little in many cases). Surely, there is a better reason for owning a Bible than this.

Some read the Bible for argument's sake. Certainly, much of the Christian's life will be spent in controversy if he is

truly doing the will of God. However, this is not to be confused with a love for strife. Every person should want to be right about what the Bible teaches, but not for the sake of winning an argument. The mere desire to win an argument is motivated by pride. A haughty, arrogant spirit is condemned in the Scriptures. “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). Love is not arrogant (I Corinthians 13:4). An argument never yet answered by an unbeliever is a godly life. It is possible to “win” an argument and lose a soul. Sometimes when great men with much Bible knowledge depart from the faith, it is because their knowledge is purely academic. Their hearts are not in it.

Some read the Bible to put something into it. They may read with prejudice, attempting to prove a theory. Some see salvation by faith only in John 3:16. But the idea of “only” is not there. Others see the “rapture” theory in I Thessalonians 4:16-18. They believe the righteous will be raised to meet the Lord while a seven-year period of

tribulation is occurring on the earth for the unrighteous. But the rapture is not there, the unrighteous are not mentioned, and the seven years unknown. John 5:28–29 deals with such a theory and proves it to be untrue. The Psalmist said, “Forever, O Jehovah, Thy word is settled in heaven” (Psa. 119:89). Our Lord did not ask us how the Bible should be written. It is presumption on man's part to tell Him how the Bible should read. “For who hath known the mind of the Lord and who hath been His counselor?” (Romans 11:34).

There are those who read the Bible to get something out of it. It is an inexhaustible mine of treasure. It deals with the loftiest and most sublime questions that a man can raise: “Where did I come from?” “Why am I here?” And “Where am I going?” It answers the most serious questions that could ever cross the mind of a human being, yet it deals with them in simple terms that all can understand. The Bible was not written merely for the critics and philosophers. It touches on a vast number of subjects and covers several thousand years of history, but it is brief when one considers the vast area of subjects with which it deals. It has that ring of genuineness about it (to all fair-minded people) that overwhelms the reader with the evidence that its Author had the total welfare of its hearers in mind. When one reads with this attitude, he is sure to find in it a richly

rewarding experience. Still, the Bible is the textbook of life, not merely a book of texts.

The best motive for Bible reading is to get to someone and that someone is Christ. Concerning the Scriptures Jesus said, “These are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). The Bible is history—*His Story*. The Bereans were commended for they “received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). They were not reading the Scriptures just to say they had read it or to try to put something into it. Their interest was not merely in winning arguments or in status symbols, for “many of them believed.” Their interest was more than the curiosity of the Athenian philosophers. They, as many believers today, regarded it as the “chart of life.” Other books are given for our information, but the Bible is give for our transformation. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul...

Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word” (Psalm 119:7, 9).

The Bible is not only the world's best seller; it is a man's best purchase. However, no one is saved by buying a Bible he does not read, nor is one saved by reading a Bible he does not obey.

—Dick Blackford

[Editor's note: I would like to say a few words about the above article. The Bible was not written to please men but for the leading

of men to please God. There are four passages that were not mentioned in the above article that fit very well with the subject. First, “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free’” (John 8:31–32). Second, “Sanctify them by Thy truth. Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17). Third, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15). Fourth, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work” (II Timothy 3:16–17)].

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 7

February 17, 2008

Lessons from the Prodigal Son

This story about our spiritual family says important things to parents about their own family experiences.

The parable of the prodigal is at once one of the most pensive and disturbing of Jesus' famous illustrative narratives. It connects to the human heart in a way that is direct and arresting. It speaks of losing, but it speaks of winning, too. It speaks of sadness, then gladness, then sadness again. It's very much like life, this parable.

The first lesson to be learned from perusing it is the one Jesus wanted known. It was given in answer to those who had criticized His relationship with the publicans and sinners. "I came to seek and save the lost," He says. That's the initial message of this triptych of parables. However, there are some incidental truths in this account that are very valuable, especially to parents in this age. Read the parable again carefully. Read it aloud. Then please note these things parents can learn from the parable of the prodigal.

The Far Country Is an Enemy of the Family:

Forbidden fruit has always had its appeal. It's the same with the lights of the far country. This lad didn't just get up one morning and decide he was going to "waste his substance with riotous living." It was a process. He had dwelt on its pleasures and contemplated its delights long before he decided to go over there.

We live in an age where restrictions are few and where the far country is not really very far. Its enticements are not discussed because the family is not actually together very much. We need to wake up to the dangers of the culture we live in and warn our kids about its possible encroachments and the ease with which it can tantalize and tempt them and how quickly it can carry them away. It's fine to let out a little rope, but we need to pull on it once in a while, too.

Good Families Can Have Bad Kids:

There is no indication in the parable that the Father's values were ill-defined, or that his restrictions were loose and ambiguous. Actually, the indication is that the rules were strict and the values carefully stated and that's the reason the son wanted to be loose. He felt cramped by the rules, and his fun was hampered by the restrictions. No one knows what causes good families to have bad kids, but one thing is certain: every person has his own will and ultimately makes his own decisions. This young fellow came from a good family; but he wanted something else. He decided what he wanted by himself. And so, a good kid went bad. Why? Who knows? He just went bad because he decided he wanted to.

But if a kid goes bad, it ought to be after we've done all we can. Far more youngsters go bad on account of a lack of restrictions than go bad in spite of them. We should not despair because our

restrictions are thought to be impositions. We should not grow weary because our rules are disdained and our restraints despised by our children. We must keep in mind that love and discipline are always connected and that "whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6).

Bad Kids Don't Always Stay Bad:

This kid went bad—really bad. He "wasted his substance with riotous living," and probably "devoured thy living with harlots." That's bad, folks. Not only that, but (assuming this was a young Jewish boy), he went so bad that he was feeding pigs and was ready to eat the millet they ate. He was about as low as you could get, wallowing about in a pig's sty. But, you know what? He came to himself. That's right, he came to! Furthermore, he remembered where he came from. He knew what to do about his situation. He decided to go home.

It's just so that bad kids don't always stay bad. Some do, that's for sure; but many don't. Instilling high values and good morals is not a waste of time. It's encouraging that sometimes when they're at their lowest ebb, your training and discipline come to the fore. It's then that they remember their upbringing and decide that maybe it wasn't so bad after all. It's then that they come to their moral senses and realize that your

nagging and scolding had a reason. It's when they need to come home that it all begins to make sense. This kid came to himself and he went home.

The Ones at Home Aren't Always So Good Either:

The elder brother apparently had the same rules and restrictions, but he didn't leave home. But that doesn't mean he was a good boy. In fact, his attitude at his brother's return shows that while he was at home, his heart wasn't in the right place. He didn't disobey the rules, but that didn't mean all was well with his soul. How is it that he could not rejoice with the father at the return of his brother? Why did he react as he did? Why was he not pleased to see his brother's return home?

The attitude of the older brother proves one thing: you can be evil in the midst of good surroundings. Just being close to good doesn't argue that you're good. Just looking good on the outside doesn't really argue anything; it's what's on the inside that counts in the ultimate reality.

Don't Give Up:

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." How do you account for that? Simple. His father was continually watching for him. He no doubt had prayed for his return. And prayed. And prayed. He knew what direction he had gone when he left, and he knew that the boy knew the way home, so he just kept on looking. And

looking. And one day he saw him coming.

There is never any give up in love. Love just keeps hoping and hoping, just keeps looking and looking. No matter how long it's been, no matter what has been done, no matter how deep the hurt or how long the anguish, the Father just keeps on looking; and so must we. Notice, I did not say "the father," but "the Father." We may leave Him, but He said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

It's always in order to go home, no matter how far away you've been. Parenting is hard business. I hope this has helped a little.

—Dee Bowman

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 8

February 24, 2008

Chapters & Verses in the Bible

Chapter Divisions

The purpose of the present division into chapters and verses was to facilitate reference. These divisions sometimes, but not generally, ignore logical and natural divisions. Common opinion concerning chapter divisions attributes them to Cardinal Hugo of Saint Cher for use in his concordance to the Latin Vulgate (c. 1240, first printed, with modification, at Bologna, 1479). This opinion rests on the direct testimony of Gilbert Genebrard (d. 1597), that "the scholastics who with Cardinal Hugo were authors of the concordance" made the division. Quétif and Echarde, a century and a half later than Genebrard, ascribe to Hugo only the subdivision of the chapters presently to be mentioned. The better opinion is, that Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1228), made the chapter division to facilitate citation. Before the invention of printing it had already passed from Latin manuscripts to those of other tongues, and after the invention of printing it became general. It has undergone slight variations from the beginning to the present day. Many early printed Bibles, especially Greek

Testaments, besides these chapters retain also the old breves or titloi [titles] noted in the margin. The chapters were at first subdivided into seven portions (not paragraphs), marked in the margin by the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, reference being made by the chapter-number and the letter under which the passage occurred. In the shorter Psalms, however, the division did not always extend to seven. In Psalm 99 it seems not to have been used at all. This division (except in the Psalms) was modified by Conrad of Halberstadt (c. 1290), who reduced the divisions of the shorter chapters from seven to four; so that the letters were always either A–G or A–D. This subdivision continued long after the introduction of the present verses, but in the seventeenth century was much modified, some chapters having more than four, and less than seven, subdivisions.

Verse Divisions, Old Testament

The present verses differ in origin for the Old Testament, New Testament, and Apocrypha. In the canonical Testament they appear in the

oldest known manuscripts, though they were not used for citation by the Jews till the fifteenth century. The earlier printed Hebrew Bibles marked each fifth verse only with its Hebrew numeral. Arabic numerals were first added for the intervening verses by Joseph Athias, at Amsterdam, 1661, at the suggestion of Jan Leusden. The first portion of the Bible printed with the Masoretic verses numbered was the Psalterium Quincuplex of Faber Stapulensis, printed at Paris by Henry Stephens in 1509. In 1528 Sanctes Pagninus published at Lyons a new Latin version of the whole Bible with the Masoretic verses marked and numbered. He also divided the Apocrypha and New Testament into numbered verses; but these were three or four times as long as the present ones.

Verse Divisions, New Testament

The present New Testament verses were introduced by Robert Stephens in his Greco-Latin Testament of 1551. Stephens says in his preface that the division is made to follow the most ancient Greek and Latin copies. But it will be difficult, if not impossible, to

find any Greek or Latin manuscripts whose divisions coincide very nearly with Stephens's verses. Doubtless he made this division with reference to his concordance to the Vulgate, then preparing, published in 1555. This Latin concordance, like former ones, contains references to the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and also to the numbers of the verses of each chapter "after the Hebrew method" of division. This latter, the preface states, has special reference to an *operi pulcherrimo et præclarissimo* which he is now printing, which must mean his splendid Bible of 1556–57, in three volumes., containing the Vulgate, Pagninus, and the first edition of Beza's Latin New Testament. Meanwhile, for present convenience, he is issuing a more modest Bible (Vulgate), with the verses marked and numbered. This latter was his Vulgate of 1555 (Geneva)—the first whole Bible divided into the present verses, and the first in which they were introduced into the Apocrypha. The text is continuous, not having the verses in separate paragraphs, like the New Testament of 1551, but separated by a ¶ and the verse-number. The verse-division differs in only a very few places from that of 1551; and a comparison shows that the concordance agrees rather with the division of 1551 than with that of 1555. The statement so often made that the division was made "on horseback" while on a journey from Paris to Lyons must be qualified. His son asserts that the work was done while on the journey, but the inference most natural and best supported is that the task was

accomplished while resting at the inns along the road.

In other languages the division appeared first as follows: French, New Testament, Geneva, 1552, Bible, Geneva, 1553 (both R. Stephens); Italian, New Testament, L. Paschale (Geneva?), 1555; Dutch, New Testament, Gellius Ctematius (Gillis van der Erven), Embden, 1556, Bible, Nikolaus Biestkens van Diest, Embden, 1580; English, Genevan New Testament, 1557, Genevan Bible, 1560; German, Luther's Bible, perhaps Heidelberg, 1568, but certainly Frankfort, 1582.

In Beza's editions of the Greek Testament (1565–1604) sundry variations were introduced, which were followed by later editors, notably the Elzevirs (1633, etc.); and many minor changes have been made, quite down to the present day.

A very convenient and illuminating "table of ancient and modern divisions of the New Testament," giving the divisions in the Vatican manuscript, the titloi [title], the Ammonian kephalaia [text divisions dating back to the fourth century], the stichoi [line divisions based on syllables], remata [a word count], and the modern chapters and verses, is given in Scrivener, Introduction, i, 68. The titloi, kephalaia and tables of the Eusebian canons are available in such editions as Stephens's Greek Testament of 1550, and Mill's of 1707, 1710. The Greek Testament by Lloyd (Oxford, 1827) and by Mill (1859) give the Eusebian canons. For a synopsis of variations in manuscripts consult J. M. A. Scholz, *Novum Testamentum Græce*, i, Frankfort, 1830, pp.

xxvii–xxix.

The Stephanic verses have met with bitter criticism because of the fact that they break the text into fragments, the division often coming in the middle of the sentence, instead of forming it into convenient and logical paragraphs, an arrangement which has seldom found favor. But their utility for reference outweighs their disadvantage. They should never be printed in separate paragraphs (as in the English Authorized Version), but the text should be continuous and the numbers inserted in the margin (as in the Revised Version).

(The above is taken from an article titled "Bible Text" in the *Schaff–Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*.)

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 9

March 2, 2008

The Keynotes of Scripture (5)

The Books of Samuel

In the books of Samuel we have again, as the other books of the Old Testament, the Son of God as the central point. The theme of these books could well be called the Kingdom Promises.

Note that 1,000 years before Christ, Nathan, the prophet, said to David, "And when thy days be fulfilled and thou shall sleep with thy father s, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish His Kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. And I will be his father and he shall be my son" (II Samuel 7:12-14). It seems that Nathan was talking about Solomon (cf. I Kings 1:30). However, a reference in the New Testament by an inspired man disabuses us of this conclusion. In Hebrews 1:5 the writer says, "I will be to him a father and he will be to me a son" making application to Christ as the Son of God on His throne (cf. Hebrews 1:1). This throne is in heaven and not in Jerusalem (Hebrews 8:1-4). Thus, the reference is to Christ as the expression of God's love

to man, the Keynote of the Scriptures.

Christ was to occupy the throne of David while David was sleeping with his father s. Christ is now on the throne and David is sleeping with his father's. Note that on the Day of Pentecost Peter calls on the witness David. "Brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David; that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ that his soul was not left in hell (Hades) neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses." See the wonderful beauty of this passage, that while David sleeps in the grave with his fathers, that is his body, God would raise His son from the grave to occupy the throne of His father David (Acts 2:22-36)

Many other things of interest are in the books of Samuel. We find the terrible disobedience of

King Saul and how God was displeased with him. We also see the adultery of David and yet many good points in his life. David had his problems as a man but much of the time this mirror revealed the worst enemy he had. The first king was chosen for his physical qualities but the second (David) was chosen for his spiritual qualities. He had personal troubles. He conquered lions in combat, also Goliath of Gath, but could not conquer himself on all occasions. He had domestic trouble. Amnon seduced his sister, Tamar. Absalom killed Amnon for this crime and Absalom is killed by David's army. He had national troubles. His son stole the hearts of the people and led them in revolt and war against David.

Yet the father asked the army to spare the son and when the sad news reached David of Absalom's death He said, "O, Absalom, Absalom, my son my son! I would to God I had died for Thee!" Hear the final charge of the great king as he passes the way of all earth, "Be thou strong and show thyself a man, keep the charge of God to walk in his ways, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest."

To keep the charge of David and hope for prosperity and at the end of the way a home with the redeemed, David looked past the time of his day and finds in Christ the hope for us in the after a while.

The Books of the Kings

Now let's consider the books of Kings and Chronicles together, as they are very closely associated. There are many things that point to Christ in these four books and there are many lessons, but we shall consider only a few.

After the death of David, Solomon, his son, begins to rule over Israel. He is confronted with a very serious decision to make as he is given the choice between riches and wisdom. He humbly chooses wisdom (I Kings 3:5–10) and is given both riches and wisdom, such as men had never before had nor would have afterward (3:11–14). Is there not some similarity between this decision and that of Christ in the temptation (Matthew 4:1–11)?

Solomon was allowed to build the temple according to God's plan (I Chronicles 28:1–20) and Christ builds the church according to divine regulations (Matthew 16:18–19). Solomon was on his throne about 4 years before the temple was started (I Kings 6:1), and Christ was about 4 years in His personal ministry and had ascended to heaven before the church was established (Luke 3:23; Acts 2:1).

Solomon gathered much of the materials out of another kingdom to build the temple (I Kings 5:1–11) and the "lively stones" in the temple of God are from another kingdom

(Colossians 1:12–13). Materials were cut and made to order before being placed in the temple which Solomon erected (I Kings 6:7) and the material in the Lord's church is put in the building according to specifications (Acts 2:36–47). The temple built by Solomon was the greatest building and the most costly the world had ever seen (II Chronicles 2:9), and the church of the living God the most costly (Acts 20:28), the greatest and most sublime institution ever known to the world or to Heaven.

The division of the kingdom occurs after the death of Solomon. Rehoboam is not willing to listen to the advice of the sages of Israel and because of his stubbornness the kingdom is divided (I Kings 12:1–24). When we fail to follow the word of God the church is divided (II Peter 2:1). It is a sad commentary on man that he will not listen to the wisdom of God. Anytime we think we can change the divine pattern in any way it indicates a lack of faith, on our part, in the ability of Jehovah to build a kingdom as He wanted it, to do what He wanted it to do (II Timothy 1:13).

During the division we see the continuing degradation of the Jews until the ten northern tribes of Israel go into Assyrian captivity (2 Kings 17) and the remaining two tribes stay in southern Palestine for a while then they rebelled and went as captives into the land of Babylon (II Kings 25:1–21). It is heart rending to know men will not approve in their lives and actions the ways of God. Today, designing men, men not content

with heaven's revelation, bent on their own ways, cause havoc to the church as did these ancient apostates in Israel.

The apostasy of Jeroboam finally ended in the pollution of the altars with the burning of the bones of the wicked priests on their God-forsaken altars (II Kings 23:16). The apostasies of our day will end in total destruction. All the tears we may shed, and the prayers we may pray, and the fervent pleading of great men who love the souls of the lost will not slack the speed of those who are determined to plunge headlong into practices which are contrary to divine revelation. There is an example filled with foreboding.

—Harold Sharp

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 10

March 9, 2008

The Keynotes of Scripture (6)

Ezra

The book theme of the Book Ezra is the promises of God fulfilled regarding the coming into the land again and the restoration of the Jewish people to their worship, after they had been cleansed from the sins of worshipping idols. At this time they were in a state of misery and desolation. Of course, all of this came upon them as a result of following their own ways and not hearkening to the words of Jehovah. But God had promised that they would be returned to their land. In Ezra we learn that God is not slack concerning his promises as men count slackness, but is longsuffering toward men (II Peter 3:9).

It had been some time since the promise had been made regarding their return, but even though man may have forgotten, God did not forget. God stirred up the mind of Cyrus, king of Persia (Isaiah 44:28; 2 Chronicles 36:22–23), and the Jews were allowed to return (Ezra 1:1).

In Ezra we see the restoration of the altar and the rebuilding

of the temple. The altar, which had been a place for the swallow to build a nest and raise her young because it had not been in use, suddenly is restored to service. The temple is gradually rebuilt. When the foundation was laid the people shouted for joy, but the old men wept because they knew the glory of the first was far above that which would be built (Ezra 3:11–13).

If you will think for just a moment, some of these men and women were very old, and they had been in captivity for 50 or more years in Babylon. Let's suppose they were only 20 years old when they went to Babylon as captives. Now, in their 70's, 80's and 90's with hair snow white, forms bent, wrinkles furrowed deep in their brows, the eyes of these old saints begin to weep. Why, you say! They see the glory of the former passed away. The beautiful Temple that Solomon built had been looted, burned and razed (II Chronicles 36:17–21). The worship of God had departed (Lamentations 2:1–9). They remembered the songs of

praise to God, the altar burning with the sacrifices upon it, and themselves as children with their parents in the splendid Temple. Their loved ones are not there with them. Where are they? They have gone after other gods and departed from the divine pattern of worship. Because of their apostasy all that once was is lost—never to be regained. Decay and sadness are their lot.

Look at the church of the Lord today! See that which Christ loved so much bleeding at every pore before the gazing eyes of an unbelieving community. Men, who once loved, shared and labored together, do not speak. God in the heavens above sees his children departing from his ways and is made to grieve. If some of our fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers and courageous preachers of yesterday were to come back to life today, would they recognize the church? Men who blazed the trail, met the enemy of truth, used the sword of the spirit so capably, have died and that for which

they stood is gone. We need, as Jeremiah of old, to cry for men to return to the old paths and the good ways, walk in them, ask for them and find life in them (Jeremiah 6:16).

Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah is a wonderful book of trials which men encountered when they served the Lord. Of course, the trials, tribulations and mockery suffered by our Lord far surpass any trials that we encounter. Nehemiah is a faithful servant of Jehovah in Babylon who is much concerned about the condition of God's people. It is a tribute to Nehemiah to be so concerned. Do not fear that there is a lack of concern for the condition of the church of our Lord today? It seems that many brethren are now aware that we must start again to build the city of God.

In Babylon Nehemiah was faithfully discharging his duty to the king, but was cognizant of another duty to a greater King. His concern for the condition of Jerusalem and the walls surrounding the city caused him to ready himself for the task ahead. His learning that the walls were fallen down, and decay was surrounding the Lord's worship, caused him to be very sad and he prayed to Jehovah. In his sorrow, the king grants his desire to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls.

Such zeal for God and His worship grieved Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem. There is

always grief among the enemies of Truth when men who love truth start to practice what Truth requires. Every child of God must face these battles in the fight for the Lord.

Their efforts to halt the work began with mockery (4:1-3). There was a time when those of us who are banded together against all innovations of error, faced the ridicule and mockery of designing and promoting men. The mockery and ridicule has not ceased nor will it cease. Nehemiah and the people under him had a mind to work and they accomplished the work for the Lord. If you and I will have a mind to work we can complete the job as the Lord would have it completed.

The next attempt was a proposed fight. The enemies acted as if they were willing to fight for their cause, but when their bluff was called they, as cowards always do, backed down (4:6-8).

We have men who are willing and ready to meet the enemy on the polemic platform anytime, but there are not many who really desire to put their teaching to the test of God's word among the promoting brethren of our day. The time will come when all of them will think best not to debate their cause as did the religious leaders of the day of Christ. When they questioned Christ and were put to shame; it did not take them long to decide they did not help their

cause by questioning Him (Matthew 22:46).

The next attempt at stopping the work came as a plea for Unity. Unity is a fine thing, but we can never have unity short of Truth. Any compromise we make is a defeat for truth. We must not allow the truth for which our Saviour died to be dragged in the dust of error. We are to make no compromise with error, but be ready to firmly stand against the compromises offered by those who oppose Truth.

We can see the life of Christ in the trials which Nehemiah faced. His actions through these trials should encourage us in following His steps. They lead to heaven at last.

—Harold Sharp

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 11

March 16, 2008

“I Did Not Marry a Christian”

Several months ago an article appeared entitled "I Married a Christian." I read the article with great interest and it drove home some very sobering thoughts. As I read the article I could not help but think of what a contrast my own life was, for you see, I didn't marry a Christian.

No one told me of the unhappiness I was due in marrying a non-Christian. At the time I married, my parents were not faithful and neither was I. I can't put the responsibility for my actions on them. I was eighteen years old and knew what the Bible taught on marriage.

Now after having lived with a non-Christian for almost ten years, I have been made aware of how important it is for our young people to marry Christians. These ten years have not made me an expert on the subject, but they have made me realize that I should discourage others from making the same mistake.

When I fell in love with my husband I could not think about those things that could lie ahead. The only thing I knew was that I loved him with all my heart and that no one knew or had experienced this kind of love. Ours was different—I felt there was nothing that could ever come between us that we could not overcome. The love that we had for each other would always be there.

After we were married, I was soon to realize how our attitudes and thinking varied. We rented a small apartment and were soon entertaining other non-Christians in our home. The drinking and dancing were all part of the things I had been taught to abhor. And yet right here in my own home I was consenting to, and becoming a part of, things that a Christian has no business doing. I was getting further and further away from the church. I knew what I should be doing as a Christian and yet I was doing nothing to change. We were happy by most people's standards, but I was miserable.

I knew my husband did not share my love for the truth and he was not serious minded about things like that. I loved him so much and I was learning a hard, cold fact—that love was not enough. I wanted to return to my "first love". We talked about my return to the church and I realized another fact—he had no intention of going with me in spite of his promises (before marriage) that he would. I decided to wait about returning and try to work things out as best I could. In the meantime, we found out we were expecting our first child. I was elated! I also was made aware of the creation of God within me. I was soon to become a mother and have a life truly influenced by me. I was going to get my heart right with God again.

I repented of my sins and started trying to live the life I so wanted to live. It was hard. First, it was hard because I had no encouragement from my husband. Second, we still had all our non-Christian friends in and out. My Christian friends from church came but not too often because my husband openly did not like them. I loved them and wanted them in my home. I needed them. Somewhere about this time was when the hostility began. I was seeing and hearing a different guy from that wonderful guy I married. There was a wall building between us. We both could sense something changing, but didn't know how to handle it. Where was the love that was going to make all this right? Out of love for my husband, I again stopped attending church. I did not attend for months. I was miserable inside again. After the birth of our daughter, I wanted to get started back to church.

My husband's answer was "No". He wanted me to start going to church with him where he went as a child—a denominational church that did not follow God's word. We really had problems there.

I knew the error they taught and I could not worship there. He insisted; I resisted. I then began to try to teach him the truth. He resisted. The next few years were good sometimes, bad sometimes. I was faithful for a while and then unfaithful for a while. When my

faithfulness began to put a strain on my marriage, I would slack off and be unfaithful. My husband became jealous of the church and my time there. He could see no reason for attending every service. We began to have verbal fights every time I started getting ready for a church service. He would say mean and cruel things about the church and about people there. We were constantly "going at each other" about church related things.

Before long the strain was showing in everything. We fought about money, church, drinking, drinking friends, church, how to handle our daughter, church. The list could just go on and on. Here again I stopped attending church.

Three and a half years ago I repented again and started to live the Christian life. I thank God that he spared my life and let me live long enough to get back. There is no turning back for me now. We have three children now and I want more than anything to have a Christian home for them. This presents another problem. My husband and I do not agree on how to bring up the children. I say one thing, he says another. We are both pulling in different directions. He approves of daughters in swim suits, shorts, etc. I disapprove. I believe in teaching them to put God first in their life and to be faithful. He still can see no reason to attend every service and openly overrides me when I insist the children go. Where was the love that was going to work all this out?

Our marriage has deteriorated greatly over these last few years. This "church problem", as my husband puts it, has moved into every aspect of our marriage. We find ourselves fighting over simple things. We both keep things bottled up inside and find that we can't talk things out anymore. I am ill with the children much too often. I know it's because things are not right between my husband and me.

There are periods of time that my husband chooses to sleep on the couch in the den—not because I want him to, but seemingly as a form of punishment to me.

My marriage has reached a disastrous point. My husband has given an ultimatum. I have to make a choice—him or the church. Those of you who are Christians know what a rough decision I had. I, of course, have chosen the Lord. I still love my husband with all my heart and have prayed that God would open his heart to understand the truth. I know I have to remain faithful and do what God has commanded me to do. It looks so dark sometimes and yet I have "to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:4). I'm so weary from being torn between my husband and the Lord.

My husband and I have both realized that we made a mistake. He has said many times that if he had it to do over that he would never have married me. This hurts, but I must confess I wouldn't either. Most couples we know where a Christian is married to a non-Christian say the same thing... "Don't do it!" So many times, the one who is not a Christian pulls the Christian away. In a survey I read not long ago based on 49 mixed marriages, 29 left the Lord, and 21 remained faithful. Of the faithful only 9 converted their companions, 12 have not converted their companions. Another survey stated that 25% of those who contract a mixed marriage leave the church altogether. That is frightening. To our young people I'd like to say that God frowns on mixed marriages. II Cor. 6:14, 15 we are taught not to become unequally yoked together. The damage done is not just to yourself, but to your husband or wife and then to your children. I know that my husband and I have not had the marriage God intended.

We will always be two instead of one in soul and in spirit. Love is wonderful, but marriage consists of everyday living together. There are enough things to contend with as newlyweds without adding a mixed marriage to the list.

My prayer is that this article may in some way cause our young people, or anyone planning to marry, to marry a Christian. I can't do mine over again, but I can teach my children and others how important it is to marry a Christian and to make that home the kind the Lord intended for it to be.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This lovely young woman has been a family friend for many years. But nothing I can say can be as forceful as what she has said. Please learn from her.]

—Jefferson David Tant

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 12

March 23, 2008

True Believers

“True belief” is biblical to the core and calls on disciples to die for the Lord's cause.

“True Believers” is the expression often used to describe followers who believe implicitly in a person or cause. It denotes believers so committed that they will die for their faith. Call them “religious nuts” or “fanatics,” but don't call them weak-minded or cowards.

True believers are not plagued with doubts. Nor are they intimidated by threats. They know no fear, and no consequence for their belief deters them from the course they have set for themselves. They will keep the faith, they will fight any battle, and they will finish what they have determined to accomplish.

True believers are best exemplified in this twenty-first century by many followers of the Moslem faith. They believe in Allah, they are confident that he has spoken through the “prophet” Mohammed and they are dedicated to

leaders who purport to teach the ways of Mohammedanism.

When leaders tell them to strap on dynamite belts and blow themselves to bits in a crowded restaurant or the lobby of a prominent hotel, fly a plane into a skyscraper, or take up weapons of warfare and enter battle, true believers unhesitatingly follow orders—even knowing that they will die.

They follow their leaders because they believe in the cause and in the promises that are set before them. If their leaders promise them a “materialistic” heaven of drinking, partying, and sex, they believe unequivocally. That faith may bring death, but they revel in the goal they seek to accomplish on earth and in the fruit of these earthly promises in heaven.

As detestable as these methods and promises may be, the principle of true belief is biblical to the core. Disciples of Christ are to be men and women of faith, but not the “faith alone” of reformation

theology. It is the “obedience of faith” Paul taught in the book of Romans and James detailed in his epistle to Christians of the Dispersion (Romans 1:5; 16:26; James 2:14-26).

It is a “disciplined” faith of “disciples” who have been called to deny themselves and take up their cross to walk in the footsteps of their Teacher—Jesus (Luke 9:23). As their Master dedicated Himself unto His Father's will even unto death, so they must love not their lives even unto death. They take up their crosses to die both inwardly and physically for the Lord's cause (Galatians 2:20; Revelation 2:10; 12:11).

True believers of Jesus are not called to brandish “carnal weapons” of warfare but to arm themselves with righteousness and truth in a spiritual battle against the spiritual host of wickedness. Their goal is to bring every thought into captivity of obedience to Christ (II Corinthians 10:3-4; Ephesians

6:10-17). No cause has ever been so noble.

True believers are not here to thrust men through with flashing metal swords, blow them to smithereens with explosives or shoot bullets into their bodies. Jesus brought to this world a “sword”—an idea that divides families and communities and nations, a scheme of human redemption that removes sin both through forgiveness and in development of character. It creates a body of people that knows no compromise and fights every false way (Matthew 10:34-39; Colossians 2:8).

True believers of Jesus are staunch, steadfast, and unmovable (I Corinthians 15:58). They commit themselves to a body of truth—the Scriptures; they contend for the authority of those Scriptures; they promulgate the teaching of Scriptures; they fight the good fight of faith by insisting that all men believe and obey the Scriptures (II Timothy 3:16–17; John 8:32; Matthew 7:21; I Timothy 6:12).

True believers of Jesus, however, are not belligerent; they are not unloving and hateful; they have no agenda to destroy antagonists of truth; they live in harmony alongside unbelievers and the disobedient; they let the light of righteousness and holiness shine in love, goodness, gentleness, kindness, and peace that by their good works they may win infidels and

carnal men (Galatians 5:22–23; Romans 12:18; II Timothy 2:24-26; Matthew 5:16).

True believers of Jesus have no promises of material prosperity, physical pleasures, or worldly indulgences to offer prospective believers. They, indeed, look unto a recompense of reward, but it consists of “spiritual” treasures in heaven that know no decay or defilement. Heaven is a home for glorified saints who receive spiritual bodies, a paradise of rest from their struggles and labors in a sin filled world, an escape from sickness and suffering and pain and dying, a fellowship of just and righteous men and women who have been perfected by the grace of a merciful Creator (Matthew 6:19; I Peter 1:3-5; Revelation 14:13; 21:3,4; Hebrews 12:22-24).

The principal issue for every Christian is the decision to believe—truly, actually, really, genuinely. Where this faith resides lives fanatical zeal. Not a fanaticism that is insane, misguided, erratic, and unpredictable. But a zeal that is devoted to God, to Christ, to the Scriptures, and to the life they have called all men to live. Yes, it will seek to teach and convert; it will seek to inculcate obedience to truth; it will compromise with no other way—be it Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, or Mohammedanism. And, yes, true believers will die for this cause, but not in the murder and destruction of others.

They will live peaceably with all men, but with the understanding that truth matters and that truth is found in the life and teaching of Jesus the Messiah as taught in the Bible (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 8:4).

True believers of Jesus believe that He is “the Way, and the Truth, and the Life”—and that there is no other way to the Father but through Him in His Church. They will zealously follow Him and devotedly defend Him—even unto death (John 14:6; Ephesians 5:27; I Corinthians 15:24)!

—L. A. Stauffer

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 13

March 30, 2008

Earth Shaking Praying

Acts 3 and 4 tell the story of Peter and John's arrest. They had gone to the temple at the hour of prayer and had healed a man. They began to preach to the crowd that gathered following the healing and were arrested. They were questioned as to where they got the right to do these things. Peter told them about Jesus. The Jewish leaders threatened them, warning them not to preach in the name of Jesus and let them go. Peter and John went back to their brothers and sisters in Christ and together they all prayed (Read now Acts 4:24–31).

After the arrests and threats, the natural thing for the believers is to call on the Lord. These early church leaders did just that. When it was all said and done, the place where they were was shaken. This was, literally, earth shaking praying. In looking at this prayer, we can see some things earth shaking praying is not.

It Is Not Selfish

The remarkable thing for me is that there is no complaining to God about these events. The apostles do not whine that this was not fair. They do not wonder "why us?" at their treatment. Instead of feeling sorry for themselves, they seek boldness to be willing to endure this sort of opposition.

These men do not even ask God to stop their enemies. They don't ask God to remove the obstacles and persecution. They simply seek God's strength to face the troubles that were to come. They don't complain about the sin that caused all this, they just ask to withstand it in faith.

Power praying is not self centered. It does not whine to God about how unfair life is. It does not blame circumstances or events for the miseries of life. Instead, this kind of praying is full of faith and seeks God's power to stand up to circumstances and events.

It Is Not Shallow

As these Christians pray, they go over God's plan to save the world. They remind themselves that everything that happened to Jesus was according to God's pre-arranged plans. That is, none of it was an accident. And in spite of the evil of men around them, God still accomplished His plan.

This must have encouraged them as they considered the opposition they faced. If God could work His plan through Jesus in spite of persecution, then God can work His plan through them, in spite of threats and arrests. These men go deeper into God's sovereign plan in order to build up their faith.

Powerful prayer is never shallow. It never deals with just light, surface things. While we might pray that way in our daily prayers (for food, health, clothing, etc.), earth shaking praying always goes deep into God's will and trusts His sovereign ways to be successful.

It Is Not Scared

If I had been unfairly arrested and unfairly tried—and I had to spend a night in a jail cell—I think I might be just a little frightened. I probably would have been anxious or nervous. I suppose my family would have been worried. These kinds of events can easily scare people and create uncertainty.

However, when these men gathered to pray, they showed no signs of fear. Whatever inner feelings they had, in their prayer, they asked to be bold. They sought God's help to make them speak out all the more, in spite of whatever threats and intimidations might come at them. They showed no signs of fear.

Fear implies we do not trust God enough. Fear says God is not big enough to handle the particular thing (or things) that frighten us. So, earth shaking praying is never fearful. It is a prayer of great faith that seeks energy to do God's will

in all situations. These men had every right to complain, to be frightened, to simply seek God's protection and safety. Instead, they prayed in faith, not fear. They prayed without self-pity and they went deeply into God's will to gain confidence. With all that, no wonder they prayed for boldness!

We have seen what earth shaking praying is not, now notice what it is.

It Is Scriptural

Repeatedly these men quote Scripture in their prayers. They quote from the Psalms and Exodus. All of this in order to remind themselves of God's sovereignty in all matters. I don't think they are reminding God of things He has forgotten. Instead, they are building up their confidence in what God has promised so they can be what He wants them to be without backing down.

It is still a powerful process when we pray reminding ourselves of God's promises. To quote Scripture in a prayer can have a wonderful effect on people. This is especially true when we are facing events over which we have little or no control. The apostles were threatened and warned. They turned to a prayer full of God's power and authority to remind themselves that God was in charge. We too can pray like that, reminding ourselves of God's grace, His mercy, His love and on the list can go.

It Is Sure

This prayer is full of faith. In every phrase and in each section, these men pray with a confidence that God will hear, that God is in charge, and that God will accomplish His will through them. They pray, sure that God is listening and will respond. So, it is

not a big surprise at the end of this prayer when God does respond in a powerful way.

This is how we should pray all of our prayers. We should pray with the full assurance that God is listening. We should pray with confidence that God is in charge of our world. We should pray, knowing, not wishing, that God will respond to an unselfish, unfrightened prayer.

It Is Successful

At the end of this prayer, God shakes things up. He sends an earthquake to encourage them. God wants these faith-filled believers to know He values this kind of trust. He wants them to know He values this kind of prayer.

God will still hear our prayers. When we give up on shallow, selfish, insecure prayers, God will honor us. When we pray with confidence in God's words, with assurance He will listen and answer, we will begin to see things shaken up around us as well.

Some Will Be Shaken

When Christians come together to pray like this, God moves among them. While the days of miracles are passed, God still moves in the world and works on behalf of His people. When we pray with confidence, the same God who shook up that room with an earthquake, may shake up your world in some way as well.

Imagine how churches could reach out more, could minister more, if they prayed these kinds of prayers.

When believers are facing hardship or opposition, they should pray like this. When believers are nervous or unsure, they should gather together to pray like this. In fact, when God's

people pray like this, you can be sure things will be shaken up.

Some Will Be Rattled

This kind of praying does frighten some people. They are worried about getting too emotional. Or they are worried they might offend God by praying like this. And, sadly, when God does move in our world, there are those who run and hide, fearful of His presence. And, the truth is, God answered this prayer in Acts 4. He made them bold, but the opposition became more severe. When we pray unselfish prayers, God will answer. Some will be moved, others will merely be rattled.

Let us restore the notion of God's people praying like this. And, as we call on the Lord, let us watch to see how He shakes things up.

—David Thurman

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 14

April 6, 2008

The Sale & Consumption of Liquor Is A Moral Issue

Does the Bible Approve of Drinking Wine?

The word "wine" in the Bible (and so defined in the dictionary) is a general word including (1) fresh juice of the grape, (2) intoxicating juice of the grape, and (3) intoxicating liquors made from dates, barley, etc. The original language differentiates between these "wines." God absolutely condemns the drinking of intoxicating wines. Non-intoxicating wine (grape juice or grape drink) is approved.

How does the Bible distinguish between the kinds of grape wine, all of which are translated "wine"? The Hebrew word *yayin* is a very general term, including every species of wine made from grapes (Nehemiah 5:18). It includes (1) the juice in the cluster (cf. Jeremiah 48:33; 40:10; Isaiah 16:10); (2) the juice freshly extracted (Exodus 22:29); (3) a boiled wine or syrup to be thinned with

water (Proverbs 9:2,5); (4) fermented wine (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-32); and (5) a mixed wine made by adding drugs (Proverbs 23:30; Isaiah 5:22).

The fresh juice in the Hebrew language is *tirosh* (cf. Isaiah 65:8; Joel 2:24; Proverbs 3:10). A fresh wine descriptive of the juice with the lees, as in the winepress, is *chemer* (Deuteronomy 32:14; Isaiah 27:2). A new wine is *asis* (Joel 1:5; Amos 9:13). In addition to fresh juice, the Jews boiled juice into a syrup called *sobeh* (Hosea 4:18; Isaiah 1:22) which when diluted with water made a grape drink. These "wines" are approved.

The intoxicating *yayin* included *chamar*, a drink containing drugs (Psalms 75:8; Daniel 5:1-2, 4). *Shekar* is the "strong drink," intoxicating liquor made from sugar-fortified grape juice, barley, dates, etc. It is absolutely condemned (Proverbs 20:1).

When we realize that the intoxicating wines and liquors

of that day were absolutely condemned as beverages, with a comparatively low alcohol content, how much more "raging" are the high proof liquors of today!

Can it be fairly said that God approves of drinking "wine" without distinguishing between the kinds? No! To assume that God approves of drinking *shekar* when He approves of *tirosh* is fallacious. Those who do so are guilty of the fallacy of equivocation. If one does so without the facts, he is guilty ignorantly. If he knows Bible (original) language, and does so, he is guilty of gross dishonesty.

The Condemnation of Intoxicating Wines

The Bible states that drinking perverts judgments, weakens restraint against illicit acts, makes one foolish, reduces to poverty, causes one to turn from God, etc. God says, "Wine is a mocker; strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby

is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1). He pictures the intoxicant as personified and the effects contributed to it. False teachers ignore the syntax of the language and pretend that the drinker deceives himself, and not the liquor as the thing that does the deceiving! God states, however, that the intoxicant itself is a mocker, and raging, and deceives: the drinker looks to it for strength, etc., and is mocked, made to look weak and foolish.

Is it just the excessive drinking of alcoholic beverage that is wrong? No! Drinking of intoxicants itself is wrong. God commands His people to be "sober" (*nepho*) which means "to be free from the influence of intoxicants" (*Dictionary of New Testament Words, W.E. Vine*).

How can one be "free from the influence of intoxicants" and drink intoxicants (I Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8; I Thessalonians 5:6-8)? Paul says, "be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). The word "excess" (*asotia*) means riotous living (see: translations other than the KJV). God would have us filled with the Spirit—not spirits—not filled with wine!

Objections Considered

How could the Jews drink non-intoxicating wine without refrigeration? They had a means of preservation. Cato in *De Agri Cultura* gives a recipe (*New Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*). Besides, they had

sobeh, the grape drink of grape syrup and water.

Didn't Jesus approve of drinking intoxicants by turning water into wine? The word "wine" in John 2 is the Greek *oinos*, which corresponds to the Hebrew *yayin*. It could not be the intoxicant since God condemned these in the law under which Jesus lived (Habakkuk 2:15). Jesus was not lawless! If Jesus made an intoxicant, this case would prove excessive drink, not moderation. This cannot be!

Jesus was called a "winebibber." Does this not prove that He was a social-drinker? The enemies of God called Jesus a "winebibber." It was just as untrue as their accusation that John had a devil! (Matthew 11:18-19).

Timothy was told to drink wine—could it be wrong? Again we do not know what kind of *oinos* is under consideration. In either case, however, it was a "little" for medicinal use: "for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23).

Isn't intoxicating wine good because God created it?

Alcohol per se is good, i.e., has good uses. But as with drugs, this use is not in human consumption.

Can we legislate morality? No, laws do not make one moral, but they can restrain immorality. Laws against prostitution will not make a whoremonger moral, but they will convict him of immorality

and restrain others who otherwise would be encouraged to be immoral. The same can be said of drugs, theft, murder, etc. Because laws per se will not change the immoral, this is not justification to ignore God's moral law.

Can one vote to legalize the sale of alcoholic beverages without being immoral himself? No! This is a moral issue. Not only are the ones who drink liquors guilty but they also who "have pleasure"—consent, give hearty approval—"in them that do" this or other sins (Romans 1:31).

—Gene Frost

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 15

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The Transgression

Satan Tempts Eve

What form the serpent then had, we know not; but he must have been upright, for the curse placed on him required him to go upon his belly. He was not repulsive in appearance else Eve would have avoided him. He was subtle, that is, sly, cunning, crafty, more so than any beast of the field.

He would, of course, come to Eve in a friendly way, and not as an enemy—not letting her know that he was seeking her downfall. No schemer advertises his real purpose. He must first get the good will of his intended victim; this he can usually do by flattery and appearing to be greatly interested in whatever is of interest to his victim.

When Satan had secured Eve's attention, he asked her if God had prohibited their eating of any of the fruit of the garden, insinuating that such prohibition was a reflection on them. Perhaps Eve felt a little ashamed to acknowledge that God had restricted their liberties. They must not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge on penalty of death.

Then the devil took square issue with Jehovah, and boldly affirmed that Jehovah knew that eating that fruit would not cause death and that eating it would make them as God, "knowing good and evil." Satan wanted her to get the notion that God was holding them in ignorance, because he did not want anyone else to be as wise as he. Of course, eating the forbidden fruit did not make them as wise as God; but eating it did enable them to know good and evil, as is shown by the fact that God later said, "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." There was therefore enough truth in what the devil said to make his statement a most deceptive lie.

Sin and Shame

In addition to any distrust in Jehovah that Satan created in Eve, the fruit of the tree of knowledge was made to appear very desirable as a food. She saw that the fruit was good for food. So far as we know this effort to get Eve to eat the fruit might have gone on at intervals for days. The fruit was also a delight to the eyes. Everybody likes to see beautiful fruit, and

its beauty creates a desire to eat it. And most people like to be wise. Everything about that fruit presented a strong appeal. For the moment it was to Eve the most desirable thing in the world. The only thing to hinder her from eating that fruit was her respect for the word of God and her fear of the consequences of eating it; but Satan had almost, if not altogether, destroyed these restraints, so much so, at least, that she was now willing to follow the serpent's leading. Hence, "she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat."

Eve was deceived; Adam was not. "And Adam was not beguiled, but the woman being beguiled hath fallen into transgression." (I Timothy 2:14.) Adam had not believed what the devil said; his act seems to have been a deliberate transgression of God's word, in so far as a man can act with deliberation in the face of strong persuasion. It is certain that he was influenced by her to eat, for the Lord said to him, "Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten

of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake" (v. 17).

Conscious of Their Guilt

Their eyes were opened. This does not refer to their physical eyes. They had not been blind previous to this, for it is said that Eve saw that the fruit was a delight to the eyes. Their eyes were opened in the sense that they came to see, or realize, their guilt—realize the sin of what they had done. They also became self-conscious, and felt the shame of their nakedness; and in their feeling of shame for their nakedness they sought to hide their nakedness by making clothing of fig leaves. They also felt afraid for Jehovah to see them, and sought to hide themselves from him. They did not know that it was impossible to hide themselves from Jehovah (Psalm 139:12; Jeremiah 23:24; Hebrews 4:13.). Hence, sin not only separates people from God, but seems also to create in them a desire for that separation.

Excuses Made

Sin produced a new feeling in Adam and Eve—they were afraid of Jehovah. When he called Adam, he came out of his hiding place, and confessed that, on account of his nakedness, he was afraid and hid himself. To bring out a further confession the Lord said, "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" Adam made a sort of confession with an excuse as a defense. In so doing it seems that he

blamed both Jehovah and the woman for what he had done: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat," as if to say, you gave me a woman, and she got me into all this trouble. When the woman was questioned, she also made a sort of confession with an excuse as a defense: "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." Instead of freely and openly confessing their sins, and pleading for mercy, they both sought to justify themselves by shifting the blame to others, their descendants are much like them. So few people will openly and freely confess a sin, self-justification is an evil from which even few Christians escape. If they make any sort of confession, they are inclined to try to make it appear that their sin was caused by what someone else did.

We need to learn that a confession with defense is no confession at all. If a person has sinned, he has sinned; and it does not lessen his guilt to try to lay the blame on someone else or on circumstances.

Some Reflections

Sin is not a part of human nature, for Adam and Eve were as human before they sinned as after.

We do not inherit Adam's sin, but we do suffer its consequences. In many ways we suffer the consequences of the sins of other people. And we enjoy many blessings because of the good deeds of others. "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Corinthians 15:22.). We die through no fault of our own,

and so we are to be raised from the dead through no righteousness of our own.

Adam and Eve gave up the delights of the Garden of Eden and the blessings of daily communion with God, and plunged the world into suffering and death, for the fleeting pleasure of eating the forbidden fruit. Hence, in sinning against God, they also sinned grievously against themselves and their posterity.

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Words of Life

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April 20, 2008

Cain & Abel, a Contrast

Two Sons Are Born

It seems that Cain and Abel were the first children born into the world, though it cannot be definitely proved that these were the first children born in this new family. Adam Clarke expresses the opinion that Cain and Abel were twins, but his reasoning seems to be inconclusive.

However, it seems certain that they had so advanced in years as to reach maturity when Cain killed Abel. Both had established themselves in occupations. "And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."

Offerings Brought

Where did Cain and Abel get the idea that they should bring offerings to Jehovah? Did they get the idea from Adam? Nothing is said about his making any sacrifices, though he probably did. If so, where did he get the idea? They could not have reasoned out that sacrifices would be pleasing to Jehovah; nor is it likely that they had any natural desire to part with what they had. Apparently both brought their sacrifices at the same time; it is not likely that

both by their own processes of reasoning would have reached the same conclusion at the same time.

If Jehovah had said nothing to them about making sacrifices, why should he reject Cain's and be pleased with Abel's? Besides, it is plainly stated in verse 7 that Cain had not done well, but had sinned, in making his offering, and a statement in Hebrews 11:4 makes it even more certain that the offering of sacrifices had been commanded; there it is stated that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith. This shows that he had confidence in God, and showed it by doing what God said.

Faith comes by hearing. The one who believes in God will do what he commands. We cannot please God without faith. "And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him" (Hebrews 11:5-6.). It is not enough that we believe that God is. Both Cain and Abel did that, and both brought offerings to him; but Cain had confidence in himself—he thought he could manage his

own worship in his own way; Abel had confidence in God—he believed that God's way was the best. Any effort to change God's way shows a lack of faith in God—it shows that such a one has more confidence in self than he has in God. Cain was therefore guilty of changing God's order to suit his own convenience. Anyone who does that is not really obeying the Lord at all—he is merely trying to serve God in his own way.

The reference in Hebrews shows that Abel offered gifts: "God bearing witness in respect of his gifts." His action is a lesson to us—"through it he being dead yet speaketh." And so what Cain did is also a lesson to us—he did a part of what God commanded, and decided that the rest was nonessential. In that respect many are like him today—men who think it is not necessary to be so particular about doing what God says, just so you believe in him; and they thereby prove that their faith and obedience are as defective as was Cain's, and like him they are much opposed to those who claim that God's will must be followed. Cain evidently expected, with no sort of doubt

in his mind, that God would accept his offering, and was very angry when Jehovah did not accept his offering.

Cain Kills His Brother

Cain's behavior shows how greatly disappointed he was when the Lord did not accept his offering; even though he was not rendering complete obedience. He was full of wrath, the more so perhaps because he had no one to blame but himself. His case shows how men can render a partial obedience, which is no obedience at all, and yet deceive themselves into full confidence that the Lord will be pleased.

Isaac Leiser, a learned Jew, gives this translation of verse 7: "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door; and unto thee is its desire, but thou canst rule over it." Here is the principle of all acceptable worship or service—"If thou doest well," and a man is not to be his own judge as to when he does well; if so, Cain would have been accepted. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes" (Proverbs 16:2). "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes" (Proverbs 21:2). But, God is to be the judge, and his plan, not ours, is to be the standard of judgment. If a man does well, if he does the will of God, he is acceptable to God; if he does not do well, "sin croucheth at the door." "In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:35).

But what the Lord said to Cain did not mollify his feelings. He was really angry with Jehovah,

and took out his spite on Abel. John tells us that "Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). Too often, men become angry at what God says, and take out their spite on others; usually it is the man who speaks for God. Murder was in Cain's heart. If Abel was God's favorite, then he would get even with God by killing his pet!

Sentence Passed

Cain quickly learned that he could not hide his crime, or deceive God with a lie: "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."

God's sentence was severe, but not too, "And now cursed art thou from the ground, which hath opened its mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand." Cain was a farmer, and now no matter how hard he worked the land would not produce—"when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee its strength...A fugitive and a wanderer shalt thou be in the earth."

The language of Cain indicates that he feared for his own life at the hands of another seeking vengeance. In His mercy "Jehovah appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should smite him." What that sign was we are not told; but it advertised him as a man, who, without the sign, would be a proper subject for the avenger of blood.

Some Reflections

Sometimes people are famous for something that is no credit to

them. Cain is famous as the first murderer, a fratricide. There is nothing to his credit. Being wrong in his worship—his religion—led to the slaying of his brother. There is always an antagonism between the right and the wrong. The right cannot compromise with the wrong; to attempt to do so is to surrender to the wrong.

Faith in God means more than to believe that he is; it is to believe also that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him; it is therefore to have confidence in him. A man will have confidence in something if it is only himself. That was Cain's trouble. Abel had confidence in God, and therefore did what God said.

—R.L. Whiteside

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Words of Life

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Noah Was Saved

Noah & His Ancestors

By a simple calculation on the lives of the patriarchs it will be seen that Adam lived to see the ninth generation, living fifty-six years with Lamech, Noah's father, and died only one hundred and twenty-six years before Noah was born. Adam and Noah were contemporary with six of the patriarchs—Adam, the first part, and Noah, the last part, of their lives. They were Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Methuselah, and Lamech. Methuselah died the very year of the flood. Noah was contemporary with his father five hundred and ninety-five years; with Methuselah, his grandfather, six hundred years; with Jared, his great-grandfather, three hundred and sixty-six years; with Mahalalel, two hundred and thirty-four years; with Kenan, one hundred and seventy-nine years; and with Enosh, eighty-four years.

Again, Shem, Noah's son, was contemporary with Lamech ninety-three years; with Methuselah, ninety-eight years; with his father, four hundred and forty-eight years—ninety-eight years before the flood and three hundred and fifty years

after it; after the flood, with Abraham, one hundred and fifty years, and with Isaac, fifty years. Jacob, Isaac's son, was contemporary with Abraham fifteen years, and with his own son, Joseph; and Joseph died only forty or fifty years before Moses was born.

Thus we can easily see how Methuselah could have learned all the account of the creation and the fall of man from Adam; Noah, from Methuselah. Then there were but few links between Noah and Moses. How easily the wonderful story of the creation, also the flood and the beginning of new life on the earth after the flood, could have been handed down to Moses. Still, he wrote by inspiration.

The Great Flood

Jesus and the apostles bear testimony to the flood (Matthew 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–27; Hebrews 11:7; I Peter 3:20–21; II Peter 2:5; 3:5–6). Various nations have traditions or preserved records of a flood. It stands as evidence of God's justice, and is held up as a warning against sin. Like a lighthouse in the darkest night, Noah stood above the flood of depravity which swept over the race at that time.

That generation out of which only eight were saved must have been very wicked indeed. The Bible account of this great wickedness is brief, but comprehensive (Genesis 6:1–8). The earth was filled with violence. On account of this wickedness God determined to destroy man and beast. “And it repented Jehovah that he had made man.”

“But Noah found favor in the eyes of Jehovah.” He “was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations,” and “walked with God,” as Enoch had done. Jehovah commanded Noah to build an ark of gopher wood. This wood is mentioned in no other place in the Bible. Some suppose it to have been a cypress; others, cedar or pine. We cannot tell. The length of the ark was three hundred cubits (about 450 feet); the width, fifty cubits (about 75 feet); and the height, thirty cubits (about 45 feet). It had lower, second, and third stories, with “rooms” (or “nests”); it was pitched both within and without; it had a door in the side, and a window.

Into this ark Noah was commanded to take his family

and a male and female of all unclean animals, and "seven and seven, the male and his female," of clean animals fowls after their kind, cattle after their kind, and of "every creeping thing of the ground after its kind," "to keep them alive," and food for himself and the animals.

God is long-forbearing toward the wicked. His long-suffering "waited in the days of Noah." He extended the time one hundred and twenty years, and exhorted the people to repent (Genesis 6:3). His long-suffering now with the wicked world is to be accounted salvation—"not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (II Peter 3:1-15).

But the flood did come, and so will "the day of the Lord." When Noah had done according to all that God commanded him," and he and his family had gone into the ark, with all the animals, "Jehovah shut him in." Then the door of mercy was shut against the world. So at last the Lord will shut all his children in and shut all sinners out.

A Lesson on Faith

Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" (II Peter 2:5), and was not popular, for that reason, with the people. He was a man of great faith. It required strong faith and great courage to resist the corruption of his time. "By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is

according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7).

This action of Noah is given as an illustration of the principle: "Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1.) Noah feared God, and in reverence obeyed him. Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Noah had never seen a flood; there had never been one; the experience and wisdom of the world were against it; it seemed to all impossible.

Unbelievers and wicked scoffers may have ridiculed the idea, but Noah believed God. He knew by faith that it would be even as God had said. He showed his faith by making just such preparation as God directed. He built the ark according to God's plan and specification. Thus by faith he "prepared an ark to the saving of his house."

God saved Noah (II Peter 2:4-5), the ark saved Noah (Hebrews 11:7), the water saved Noah (I Peter 3:20), faith saved Noah (Hebrews 11:7), and Noah saved himself in preparing the ark.

So God saves men today from sin; he saves them by his grace through faith, which, like Noah's faith, obeys him. "For ye are all sons of God through faith, in Christ Jesus for as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27). "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16). "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). "The long-

suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water: which also after a true likeness doth now save us, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (I Peter 3:20-21).

By faith Noah did something to be saved, and that was just what God directed; he built the ark by divine direction and according to the divine pattern. By faith now people must submit to God, must do just what he commands. Jesus is "unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation." (Hebrews 5:9).

—E. A. Elam

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Words of Life

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May 4, 2008

Abraham, the Friend of God

Making a simple calculation from the ages of the ancestors of Abraham in Genesis 10, it will be seen that over four hundred years elapsed between the salvation of Noah from the flood and the call of Abraham. "Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years" (Genesis 9:28), and died two years before Abraham was born. Terah was Abraham's father, and was one hundred and thirty years old when Abraham was born, because he was two hundred and five years old when he died (Genesis 11:32), and Abraham was then 75 years old (Genesis 12:4; Acts 7:4).

After the flood the world was populated by the three sons of Noah (Gen. 10), Abraham being a descendant of Shem. Genesis 11:1-9 gives an account of the confusion of tongues at the tower of Babel and the dispersion of the people "upon the face of all the earth." The remainder of Genesis 11 gives the genealogy of Abraham. He was the tenth generation from Noah. He was born in "Ur of the Chaldees."

Abraham's Character

Abraham was one of the greatest men and his character is

one of the grandest and noblest of all history. His father and kindred were idolaters (Joshua 24:2, 14-15). God separated him from his father's house that the worship of the one true and living God might be kept pure.

He was called "the friend of God" (James 2:23) and God's "friend forever" (II Chronicles 20:7), of whom God said, "Abraham my friend" (Isaiah 41:8). Similarly, Jesus calls his disciples "friends" (John 15:14).

Abraham is called "the father of us all" (Romans 4:16) because "if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

His name was changed by the Lord from "Abram" to "Abraham" because this name means "father of a great multitude" (Genesis 17:4-6).

"Abraham's bosom" designates the place of rest for the faithful at death (Luke 16:22).

Abraham was all this because of his great faith in God and his obedience to God's will; yet he was a human being and made mistakes. He did not at first separate himself from his kindred and his father's house as completely as God directed;

for, while he left Ur in obedience to God, he took his father and brother and Lot, his nephew, with Him. He was detained, it seems, five years at Haran, until the death of Terah, when God again called Him to go into Canaan; and yet he still took Lot with Him. Finally, he separated from even Lot. God then renewed his promise: "And Jehovah said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from Him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if any man can number the dust of the earth, then may thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it; for unto thee will I give it" (Genesis 13:14-17).

Twice Abraham lied about Sarah. She was, as he explained, his half-sister.; but she was also his wife, which fact he hid, and in concealing it left the wrong impression, and, therefore, lied; also by his conduct in this

matter, but for the intervention of God, he would have brought upon himself and Sarah the very trouble he desired to avert (Genesis 12:14-20; 20:1-18). From this we learn that to tell only a part of the truth and to withhold the rest in order to make a false impression is to lie, and that to speak the truth is always right and best (Ephesians 4:25).

God was patient with Abraham, gentle and kind toward Him, and led Him on into full and complete obedience. Thus, he developed a wonderful character. God is merciful toward all and patient with all who are striving to serve Him, although they may make mistakes. God requires of us now to "take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17), to do "righteousness, to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:17). Let us strive, work and pray to form such a character.

Blessed with Faithful Abraham

In obedience to God, Abraham gave up his fertile country, home, and kindred. God promised to reward this great faith: to make Him a great nation; to bless Him; to make his name great; to make Him a blessing to others; to bless those who blessed Him; to curse his enemies; and, the greatest of all, to bless the families of the earth through Him.

God blessed Abraham personally "in all things" (Genesis 24:1). His name is greater than that of any earthly king, emperor, ruler, or warrior. God blessed Abraham's friends.

It is a great thing to be a friend to a friend of God, and to have such a man for a friend. God did not arbitrarily bless Abraham or curse his enemies. His enemies, by their wickedness, brought God's displeasure upon themselves. God is no "respector of persons."

God said of Abraham: "For I have known Him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after Him that they may keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that Jehovah may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of Him" (Genesis 18:19). If Abraham had not obeyed God and had not trained his children to do the same, God would not have blessed Him.

God said: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:18; see also Genesis 26:4-5). God made this promise to Abraham *after* his great faith and obedience offered up Isaac. Jehovah called Abraham through the angel and said: "By myself have I sworn, saith Jehovah, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Genesis 22:15-18). Christ, is the promised "seed," through whom all nations are blessed (Galatians

3:16). The offer of the forgiveness of sins in Christ is the great blessing that all men have received through the faith of Abraham (Acts 3:25-26).

Abraham is a glorious example of faith; his example clearly demonstrates what faith is, and shows the power of faith under the most severe trials. He is called "faithful Abraham" (Galatians 3:9) and "the father of all them that believe" (Romans 4:11; Galatians 3:29). By faith he accomplished things at which human wisdom alone would stagger. By faith he obeyed, relying upon God for guidance and trusting Him for the fulfillment of every promise. He did not question God's ability to fulfill His promises but trusted God to do all that He promised to do.

—E. A. Elam

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 19

May 11, 2008

Abram Rescues Lot

Abram at Mamre

“Abram” means “exalted father.” His name had not yet been changed to “Abraham,” “a father of a multitude.” He is called “the Hebrew” (Genesis 13:1–16). This is the first occurrence of this name in the Bible. It occurs later in Genesis, many times in Exodus and other books in the Old Testament, and a few times in the New Testament (Acts 6:1; II Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:5).

“Heberite” means “descendant of Heber” (Numbers 26:45). Heber was the son of Selah, who was the son of Arphaxad, who was the son of Shem, from whom, sprang the Hebrew race. He is called “the father of the children of Eber” (Genesis 10:21, 24; 11:14-26). “Hebrew” seems to be “used as a patronymic, denoting the descendants of Heber; however, it may refer to the fact that Abram came from beyond the Euphrates River to enter Canaan. Adam Clarke notes,” the word of which ‘Hebrew’ is a translation comes from another word whose meaning is ‘to pass over, or come from beyond.’” But it seems far more significant to

trace the origin of “Hebrew” to Heber, from whom Abram descended, even if Heber did precede Abram by several generations.

Abram lived “by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite.” Mamre owned the land, and he and his brothers, Eshcol and Aner, were confederate with Abram. A large oak twenty-three feet in circumference standing in the area is by tradition said to be the oak of Abraham. This place is also known as Hebron (Genesis 13:18) and lay about twenty miles south from Jerusalem. There, in the cave of Machpelah, Abram and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah were buried (Genesis 49:30–33).

Abram & Lot Contrasted

Lot was actually the son of Abram’s brother (Genesis 12:5). At that a nephew was sometimes called a “brother.” “Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold,” and continued to increase in riches. He also had servants, camels, and asses. (Genesis 24:35.) He had three hundred well-trained men, besides other servants. Where Abram camped must have looked like a town of tents.

Lot was not poor. He also had “flocks, and herds, and tents,” and great substance, and herdsmen. This is the first mention in the Bible of riches; and we see their danger demonstrated. Prosperity often tests one’s faith and character just as poverty (Proverbs 30:8–9). Riches honestly gained are not wrong within themselves; poverty itself is not a virtue. All depends upon the use one makes of riches or poverty.

Riches were a blessing to Abram and a curse to Lot. Riches furnished Abram an opportunity to show his generosity and lofty spirit; Lot, his low and selfish spirit. Abram’s faith triumphed and Lot’s selfishness triumphed. Abram’s victory led him to still greater achievements and fuller blessings, while Lot’s selfishness led him into greater sins and deeper troubles (Luke 12:15; I Timothy 6:9).

Abram’s course from beginning to end demonstrates the principle that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:28-35), and that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong (I Corinthians 1-8).

Lot Reaps His Sad Sowing

The well-watered plain of the Jordan, and, later, the wealth, luxury, and prosperous ease of Sodom, appealed to Lot. He pitched his tent as far as Sodom, and made that wicked city his home.

The wickedness of Sodom distressed him; "for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing their lascivious life, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds" (II Peter 2:8). He had religious life enough to be distressed over the sins of Sodom. Some have not that much now. Still, he saved no one.

Contrast Abram's course with that of Lot. Abram rescued Lot; Lot rescued no one. Contrast Abram's prayer in Genesis 18:23-33 with that of Lot in Genesis 19:18-20. Abram prayed for Lot and the salvation of Sodom, and Lot prayed for himself. One's disposition and heart's desire are shown in his prayers. Lot not only failed to convert any of Sodom, but he failed to influence over his own children (Genesis 19:13-14). When children see their parents wholly absorbed in worldly affairs, they soon learn to think that there is nothing as important as "business." Lot, doubtless, did not intend for his daughters to marry men of Sodom. Lot went to Sodom seeking wealth and worldly greatness; he separated himself from God's people and associated with the wicked in order to gain these things. He lost all for which he went to Sodom—his flocks and herds, his earnings and home, his wife and children. He lost first by

war and then by the destruction of Sodom. He escaped with his life only—a poor, forlorn old man, broken down, homeless, and friendless. Even then the angel had to snatch him from the doomed city. He did not plunge into this great loss and into all this trouble and misery at one mighty bound, but went into it gradually. He first "looked" that way. Attracted by the pleasant view, he started in that direction. He dwelt in "the cities of the Plain" a while, and then "moved his tent as far as Sodom." People now move gradually toward great sins or gradually toward destruction.

Abram's Pursuit

One man that escaped capture told Abram the result of the battle, and, that Lot, all his goods, and his family had been taken captive by the plundering kings. Taking his own trained men and accompanied by Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre and their men, Abram pursued the four kings to Dan, a town in the northern end of Palestine.

At Dan, Abram judiciously divided his forces and attacked the enemy by night. The men were divided, in all probability, to make the attack on different sides of the enemy at the same time and at night so that the small number of Abram's men might not be discovered. It is apparent that God was with Abram. Melchizedek declared that God delivered him from his enemies (14:20). Having smitten these kings at Dan, Abram pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand, or north, of Damascus. There the slaughter was complete. Abram "brought back all the goods" of all that country, Lot and all his

goods, also the women and the people.

Abram's magnanimity and lofty Spirit prevail again at his return. Abram told the king of Sodom that he had lifted up his hand to "God Most High" that he would not take "a thread" or "shoe latchet" or anything that belonged to him, lest he should say he had made Abram rich. He would have nothing except that which his men had eaten and the hire of the men who went with him.

In different ways God made Abraham a blessing to others; and this independent, generous, and lofty Spirit is one of the ways. Such a man now is a blessing to any community in which he lives.

This was a great rescue as well as a great victory.

—E.A. Elam

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 20

May 18, 2008

Melchizedek, King of Salem & Priest of God

Among those persons whom the Scriptures offer as typical of the Christ there is Melchizedek to prefigure the priestly character of the Son of God. He is a remarkable person especially in is in the light of the few passages which mention him.

Who Was Melchizedek?

“And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine (mark that), and he was the priest of the most high God; and he blessed him, and said: Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the most high God, which bath delivered thine enemies into thine hand, and he gave him tithes of all.” (Genesis 14:18).

“The Lord bath sworn, and will not repent; thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Psalm 110:4). This last passage is quoted by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews no less than three times in the fifth and sixth chapters of that epistle, and in the seventh he breaks out into one of the most eloquent descriptions of Christ’s priesthood compared with that of Melchizedek, in the relation of type and antitype, that can

possibly be conceived. We can here only glance at a few prominent items in the chapter.

Ours a Better Priesthood

Who Melchizedek was, we have no certain means of knowing; for it must be borne in mind that this name is official rather than personal, meaning “king of righteousness.” Whoever he was, we may gather from what is said of him in the passages quoted, the following: (1) He was a remarkable person; (2) a type of Christ; (3) he lived two thousand years before the Christian era, (4) and united in himself both the regal and sacerdotal functions—he was king of Salem, as well as priest of the most high God.

In the patriarchal age the head of each family was its priest by a divine right, but Melchizedek stands out rather as a high priest, and as such he is related to our high priest. Christ is not simply a priest, but he is “the high priest of our profession.” The epistle to the Hebrews was written to prove the superiority of the new over the old economy. This is the central issue, and it gives shape and color to everything said in it.

Now, in carrying out his design, the apostle shows that our priesthood is after a better order than that of the Jews; ours is after Melchizedek, theirs after Aaron. The former is a royal priesthood, the latter is not. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and hence was greater than Abraham, for “the less is blessed of the greater.” But Abraham was confessedly greater than Aaron, and therefore the prototype of our priesthood is clearly greater than the great high priest of the Jewish nation. Not only so, but Aaron paid tithes to Melchizedek in Abraham, “for he was yet in the loins of his progenitor” when the priest met the patriarch returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him, and received a tenth of all.

Without Beginning or End

This high-priest of the patriarchal age, as such, had no pedigree; we know not who his father and mother were; we know not the beginning of his days or the end of his life. His descent is not given. The Scriptures are as silent on all these points, and purposely so in order to fulfill the requirements of a most

significant type. This illustrious man was, then, "without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually."

A Universal Priest

Melchizedek did not, like Aaron, officiate for one people; he stood before God for the race, for all who came to him for his ministrations. Even so, Christ offers his sacrifice for all who will come to God through him. He takes away the sin of the world. Were we dependent on the Aaronic system alone for our ideas of Christ's office, there might be found some apology for the theology that makes our Savior offer himself for an elect few. No, he is the priest, and his sacrifice was made for his church; but, then, all who hear may come and enter his church. The offer is as wide as the ruin of humanity and as tender as his bleeding heart. Christ has a universal priesthood, and all may come to his atonement who feel its need and will accept its benefit.

An Eternal Priesthood

As the typical priesthood of this grand order was never abolished, as he abides a priest forever, so our Anointed, the antitype, is an eternal high priest; death does not come to end his generous ministrations on our behalf. He was made a priest according to the power of an endless life. "He ever lives to intercede for us?" This is, or ought to be, our comfort. We shall soon die, but our tender and merciful high priest ever lives, and will reappear at the

end of the world without a sin-offering to the salvation of his people.

A Royal Priest

He is also a royal priest; this was not Aaron. He wears a crown as well as a miter, a scepter as well as a crosier. He unites in himself all royal dignities and glory, and all holy and pure affection. His kingly bearing is tempered with condescension and kindness. He sits upon a throne which has been sanctified with blood. His palace is also a temple, and while we honor him as our sovereign, we worship him as our Savior. Language fails to express the admirable adaptation of Christ's offices and work to all our wretched necessities—his sympathy with us in all our heartbroken sorrows.

Communion with Him

Melchizedek brought forth bread and wine, gave to Abraham, and blessed him; and at the mention of these does not every Christian heart turn instinctively to the feast where Jesus alone presides, and refreshes his weary ones in the battles of life, returning with the honors of victory from hard-fought fields. He does indeed give us bread and wine and blesses us. Who but he has the bread of life? Who but he, the wine of refreshment and the oil of joy? The ancients always made a feast on sacrifice, and so we must understand this meeting of Melchizedek and Abraham, and so we in breaking bread with our Lord and one another, are making a feast on sacrifice.

If the reader is not wearied, and has not before, let him now read the 7th chapter of Hebrews; let him give himself to calm reflection, to deep meditation on that masterly vindication of Christ's priesthood as superior to the Aaronic and the antitype of that of Melchizedek.

We never knew what force internal evidence had, what beauty the Bible possessed, and what delight its study afforded, till we gave self to an investigation of Old Testament types.

—Lard's Quarterly

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 21

May 25, 2008

Hospitable Abraham

After Abram's return from rescuing Lot and while he feared the return of the enemy, God gave to him one of the best and greatest promises ever made to men: "Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward" (Genesis 15:1). This is a double promise. God would protect him from his enemies and reward him exceedingly. God could overrule the nations of the earth and protect Abraham from all evil and shield him from all harm. The greatest reward of all is God's love, God himself, and finally the "heavenly" country of joy and peace.

As yet Abraham had no child of his own, he asked Jehovah: "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" Jehovah then said that one begotten by Abram himself should be his heir (Genesis 15:4.) Jehovah promised to make Abram "a great nation" (Genesis 12:2), and to give that land to him and to his "seed forever" (Genesis 13:15); but how could that be, when Abram was childless?

Jehovah then brought Abram out of his tent and under the shining stars, and said that his descendants should be as innumerable as the stars.

Abram believed in Jehovah, and, therefore, believed that all this would come to pass. The faith that Jehovah would do that which He had promised, in the face of seeming impossibilities was counted unto Abram "for righteousness." It was right to believe this, and this faith led Abram to do all that which Jehovah commanded him to do, even later on to offer up Isaac upon the altar (James 2:22, 23).

In Genesis 17 Jehovah changes Abram's name to *Abraham*. His former name meant "exalted father" and his new name meant "father of a multitude." This name change was appropriate considering the terms of the covenant, the promise of the birth of Isaac, and the promises given concerning Ishmael.

Angels Entertained

Later the Lord appeared to Abraham "by the oaks of Mamre," as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day, that is, at noon. This is the time of the day in the hotter climates when work ceases and men rest until the sun begins its descent in the sky mollifying the fierceness of its rays. However, Abraham does not hesitate to

run to his prospective guests and invite them to turn aside and enjoy his hospitality. He seems to have singled out one of the three strangers as plainly more august than others, and so addresses him, in the single number as "Lord;" but his salutation does not imply the recognition of deity. From this circumstance we learn that God appeared to men through the angel of his presence (cf. Isaiah 63:8-9; I Corinthians 10:4).

These men are strangers and unknown to Abraham at this moment (cf. Matthew 25:35; III John 5). Nevertheless, he pleaded that they turn not away from him. What a contrast this is to our own day when hospitality is viewed as a personal burden and necessity rather than a joyous privilege (Philemon 4; Titus 1:8; I Peter 4:9; I Timothy 3:2).

Abraham entertained hospitably these three persons, whom he supposed at first to be men, just as Lot later entertained the two that came to him in Sodom (Genesis 19:1-3). Is it any wonder that the Scripture says "Forget not to show love unto strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2.) It is

right to treat all courteously and kindly. If they turn out to be angels, we will have nothing to regret in our treatment of them; if they prove to be unworthy of our treatment, we have lost nothing, but have preserved our hospitality and kindness. Christians are kind, courteous, and hospitable toward all.

These verses present to us the generous manner of hospitality practiced in Abraham's time. In saying, "My Lord," Abraham addressed his guest with respect. Every man, whether known to us or not is entitled to courtesy and dignified respect (Deuteronomy 10:18; Exodus 22:21; 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Job 31:32; Psalms 146:9; cf. Luke 10:33-34).

We know something of the necessity of washing feet (Genesis 19:2; 24:32; 43:24). It was a humble service and that of a servant when performed for one by another. When David sent for Abigail to become his wife, she said: "Behold, thy handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my Lord" (I Samuel 25:41). John the Baptist said of Christ: "The latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose" (Mark 1:7). In humility and as the servant of all, Jesus washed his disciples' feet and said: "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, A servant is not greater than his Lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him." (John 13:1-17.) This is a great and beautiful lesson on

humility. Since there is no general necessity now as there was then for washing feet as one comes in from a journey, humility and hospitality should be shown in ways now calling for them, and, when necessity requires, in washing or bathing the feet of others. This was the first act of hospitality offered to the strangers by Abraham.

The second act of hospitality was to offer rest under the shade of the tree. Notice that this is where Abraham himself had been sitting. However, he feels the demands of hospitality so strongly that he relinquishes his place of comfort to strangers, runs and hurries about to kill a calf and stands at their ready to wait tables for them.

The third act of hospitality was a bountiful meal, that they might be refreshed and strengthened for their further journey.

Abraham did not set before them a meager meal when he was able to provide better. Good manners requires one accept what is set before him (Luke 10:18; I Corinthians 10:25; I Timothy 4:4). However, a hospitable person provides generously from the very best that he has (I Peter 4:9, 11; cf. Proverbs 9:1-5).

Hospitality Is Blessed

The intervening verses (18:9-15) repeat the promise already made to Abraham in Genesis 17:15-17. Sarah would become in her old age the mother of a son. At that time "Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?"

In the tent Sarah heard this promise repeated to Abraham. She "laughed within herself" at the good news, and said: "Shall I of a surety bear a child, who am old?" The Lord reproved her, saying: "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" Sarah, then, denied having laughed because she was afraid. When Isaac was born, Sarah said virtually: "Who would have thought it?" She said: "God hath made me to laugh; every one that heareth will laugh with me" (Genesis 21:6-7). "Isaac," the child's name, means "laughter."

Abraham and Sarah were rewarded for their faith and their hospitality. Their willingness to entertain strangers brought God's messengers and news of a great blessing.

—Elam's Notes

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 22

June 1, 2008

Abraham's Intercessory Prayer

Jehovah said, "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great." People are very wicked indeed when God in mercy, for the good of mankind, must destroy the cities or countries in which they live. So it was with Sodom and Gomorrah. Some of the sins of these cities were the most depraved crimes which ever disgraced criminals. "Now the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners against Jehovah exceedingly" (Genesis 13:13). Peter speaks of them as "lawless," "lascivious," "wicked," and "ungodly" (II Peter 2:6-8). Warning Jerusalem, God says: "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and prosperous ease was in her and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good" (Ezekiel 16:49, 50).

These things are warnings to us. We should put far from us all haughtiness, pride, and worldly ambition. By these many fall today. Idleness and "prosperous ease" are quite dangerous yet; covetousness is still the curse of thousands. Lasciviousness is a crime before God, which He most strongly condemns and of which the men of Sodom were guilty in

the most unnatural way (Jude 7). Thus the name "Sodom" is a synonym of sin and shame (cf. Deuteronomy 23:17; I Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; II Kings 23:7).

Abraham Draws Near

The angels that had visited Abraham in Mamre "rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom." As they were departing "Abraham went with them to bring them on the way;" by which he continued to demonstrate hospitality and kindness (III John 5-6; cf. Romans 15:24; Acts 21:5). However, Abraham knew nothing of the approaching judgment upon Sodom.

A man does not reveal to another his plans and purposes unless he has great confidence in him (Proverbs 25:19). Jehovah affirms His confidence in Abraham as He remembers His pledge to make a great nation of him knowing that he would command his children and household after him so that all Jehovah's promises might be fulfilled. Abraham controlled his children and his household. Besides Isaac and Ishmael, Abraham was the father of six other sons (Genesis 25:1-2). He also had many servants in his household (Genesis 14:14) for whom he was responsible to teach and train. He had to do this without the help schools, colleges,

universities, preachers, prophets, religious newspapers, magazines, and books. It was a one man job at which Jehovah knew that Abraham would succeed. Having such great confidence in him God would not hide His intent to destroy Sodom.

This also proves that God did not arbitrarily bless Abraham and curse his enemies. Abraham believed God, obeyed God, and taught his household after him to obey God. Had Abraham not done this, God would not have blessed him; and had his children not obeyed God, he would not have blessed them. God does not arbitrarily bless or curse people today. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap, for he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life." In due season all will reap what they sow (Galatians 6:6-10). When people love God—that is, obey him and work according to his directions for the accomplishment of his purposes—He overrules all things for their good in time and eternity. If they do not do this, they bring upon themselves the fearful consequences of disobedience.

While "the men" went on to Sodom, Abraham "stood yet

before Jehovah." He not only stood, but he "drew near." He was greatly concerned because He loved Lot, and he loved righteousness. He humbly approached Jehovah in a reverential manner. And though Jehovah was present before him in the angel, he still drew near in heart. Let us learn to draw near to God in heart (James 4:8; Hebrews 7:19; 10:22; Psalms 73:28).

Jehovah did not hide his plans from Abraham because of his righteous character, and being such he enjoyed this great privilege of approaching Jehovah to plead with Him.

Abraham Pleads for Mercy

Abraham asked: "Wilt thou consume the righteous with the wicked?" He was pleading for Lot, whom Peter calls righteous (II Peter 2:7), and for all like him in Sodom. By this question Abraham means that the Lord will not destroy the righteous with the wicked; and since that is true, he has some foundation upon which to base his petition. "Do men gather grapes of thorns?" is rhetorical and means they do not gather grapes of thorns. So the question in verse 25, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" means that he will do right. Abraham accepted that fact and could pray in faith and hope.

God will not slay the righteous with the wicked (Ezekiel 18:20). His judgments are righteous; He "will render to every man according to his works" (Romans 2:4-11). "He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:31). Yet, God is the Judge, and not man. We do not always see as God sees, and we do not always judge according to His standard.

God answered Abraham's prayer (18:24). He was more anxious than Abraham to save Sodom (I Timothy 2:4). God never destroys

a city or a nation so long as there is hope of its recovery (Jeremiah 18:8; 26:3). When there is no hope, and it becomes necessary for the good of mankind, in mercy He will destroy it. A city falls because it is not fit to stand; a nation is overthrown because it is not fit to live. God would not destroy the city for fifty righteous persons, because, if so many were found, there would be some hope of saving others. The righteous are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). God "is long-suffering...not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9, 15).

God knew the condition of Sodom; but he led Abraham on, step by step, in humility, earnestness, and importunity. Abraham felt more and more his unworthiness as he drew nearer to Jehovah, and for this he was heard (I Peter 3:12; 5:5; James 4:6). "But dust and ashes" is a figure to illustrate Abraham's sense of unworthiness and humility. When men are in earnest and seeking great favors of God, they humble and prostrate themselves before him.

Abraham was encouraged in every petition by the grace of God to proceed further. If God found forty-five, even forty, righteous persons there, He would not destroy the city. As Abraham rose higher in faith and hope, he saw more of God's mercy and goodness; yet he would not offend Jehovah by presumption. If Jehovah would permit, he would speak further. Abraham pleaded for thirty righteous persons, then twenty, and if Jehovah would permit he would speak but once more for ten. And, for only ten Jehovah would spare the city.

His Prayer Answered

An intercessory prayer is a petition for another. Abraham was praying for others on this occasion. His prayer came as near to being an unselfish prayer as could be made by man.

Many times our prayers are rooted in selfishness and lust which explains why they go unanswered (James 4:2-3). We must learn to pray for others and their needs (James 5:16). Yet, this does not mean that we should not pray for things we need; in fact, we are taught to do so, to even pray for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11). But as we pray, we need to do so trusting in God to supply what is best. Abraham's prayer was answered beyond what he even dared to ask which confirms God is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

—Elam's Notes

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 23

June 8, 2008

Questions about the Abrahamic Covenant

God made more than one covenant with Abraham. The first may be called the Seed Covenant as recorded in Genesis 12:1-3 and in other portions of the divine record. It gave to Abraham the promise that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,” a promise which is fulfilled in Christ as the seed to whom the promise was made (Galatians 3:16-19). There is another covenant that God made with Abraham that may be called the Land Covenant which offered to Abraham and his seed all the land of Canaan (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:18; 17:8). A third covenant that God made with Abraham may be called the Covenant of Circumcision. It required all the males of the Jews to be circumcised (Genesis 17:9-14).

The questions I shall endeavor to answer have in view the second of these—the Land Covenant. But, in many respects, the answers will apply with equal force to the Seed Covenant and the Circumcision Covenant.

The Questions Answered

Is the Abrahamic Covenant a law or a promise? The land covenant which God made with Abraham involves both law and

promise. In Acts 7:5 Stephen referred to this covenant made with Abraham and declared that God “promised that he would give it to him for a possession and to his seed after him.” And Paul in Hebrews 11:9 referred to Isaac and Jacob as being “heirs with him of the same promise.” The same verse also calls it “the land of promise.” So these statements all show that a promise was involved in the covenant made with Abraham concerning the land.

But in I Chronicles 16:16-18 it is referred to as “a law.” Notice carefully the reading of it: “Even of the covenant which he made with Abraham, and of his oath unto Isaac; and hath confirmed the same to Jacob *for a law*, and to Israel for an everlasting covenant, saying, ‘Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan.’” This is definite. It pertains to the covenant concerning the land of Canaan. This covenant was first made with Abraham; it was given to Isaac by an oath; and was “confirmed unto Jacob for a law.” Hence, the elements of both law and promise are included in this covenant.

Is the Abrahamic Covenant a unilateral or bilateral agreement? The land covenant made with Abraham may be

said to be both unilateral and bilateral, depending on the angle from which you view it. It was unilateral in the sense that it was made or arranged by one—God himself; but it is bilateral in the sense that it concerns or obligates more than one—God as the giver and Abraham and his seed as the recipients. This can be easily and definitely seen by reading the passages in Genesis already mentioned.

Is the Abrahamic Covenant conditional or unconditional?

This covenant made with Abraham involved conditions—hence, it was a conditional covenant. The mere fact that no conditions are mentioned when first the covenant is revealed does not prove that no conditions were implied.

When God made with Abraham the Seed Covenant in Genesis 12: 1-3, no conditions are mentioned as necessary on the part of the multitudes to be blessed through him. It definitely states: “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” In Genesis 18:18; 22:18 and 26:4 we have this promise repeated with no mention of conditions. Yet I do not believe that any will claim that this proves it an unconditional

covenant, for when we turn to the New Testament and find the promise being fulfilled we learn that conditions were implied. Paul declared in Galatians 3:26-29 that it involved the conditions of faith and baptism and said: "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Being heirs "according to the promise" made to "Abraham's seed" depended on an "if," that is, "if ye be Christ's." And being Christ's depended on being baptized into him by faith. So this covenant was a conditional covenant although no conditions were mentioned when it was made known.

Just so it is with respect to the land covenant. The children of Israel who continued to rebel against God were not allowed to enter the land. When the ten spies brought back the evil report concerning the land to be inherited and caused a large portion of Israel to determine to make them captains and return to Egypt, thus provoking God in the wilderness, God said: "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: but my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it" (Numbers 14:22-24). So these men were shut out of their inheritance because of disobedience, and

such would not have been so if no conditions had been implied.

But perhaps God had not promised the land to this particular group. Oh yes, he had, for he said in Numbers 14:30 to them: "Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein," save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. Then he added: "But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which he have despised." So the oath was made to them that they would dwell in the land but by rebellion they despised the land and forfeited their right to it. And so God said to them: "Ye shall know my breach of promise" (Numbers 14:34). His purpose was altered concerning them because of their rebellion against him. All this shows that entrance into that land was conditional; otherwise there would have been no "breach of promise."

Furthermore, the land was to be given to the seed of Abraham "forever" (Genesis 13:15). Or, in other words, it was to be given to them for "an everlasting possession" (Genesis 17:8). But this part of the covenant was also conditional. Whether they remained in the land depended upon their obedience to God, for Moses said to them: "When thou shalt beget children, and children's children, and ye shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke him to anger: I call heaven and earth

to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed" (Deuteronomy 4:25-26). Likewise, if they would not obey the voice of the Lord, he said: "And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to naught; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it" (Deuteronomy 28:63).

—W. Curtis Porter

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 24

June 15, 2008

Questions about the Abrahamic Covenant (2)

Who were the “fathers” Joshua refers to in Joshua 21:43–44?

Joshua said: “And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which he swore to give unto their fathers.” So “their fathers” were the ones to whom he swore to give the land. Who were they? Referring to the same oath and promise Moses said: “I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the Lord swore unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.” Deuteronomy 1:8. This ought to settle it. Moses said their “fathers” to whom he swore to give the land were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I take it that he knew what he was talking about.

Were the Israelites under the leadership of Joshua given the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession under the terms of the Mosaic Law Covenant? The Israelites under the leadership of Joshua were under the restrictions of the Mosaic Law when they inherited the land, for they received the land in the Law dispensation; but the land covenant was made with Abraham before the Mosaic Law was given, and they inherited the land under the terms of that

covenant. But terms implied in that covenant were revealed through Moses, as has already been shown, just as terms of the Seed Covenant have been revealed through the apostles of Christ. The promise of the land covenant was not fulfilled independent of the Law just as the promise of the Seed Covenant is not fulfilled independent of the gospel.

When will Moses receive his “heritage” (Exodus 6:8)? This text says: “I will give it you for an heritage.” Whatever “heritage” Moses had in the land of Canaan was forfeited by his disobedience at the waters of Meribah when he failed to sanctify God in the eyes of Israel (Numbers 20:7-13). Because of this transgression Moses was not allowed to enter Canaan. Deuteronomy 32:51–52. And there is no more reason why he should have a future heritage in the land than there is for the Israelites who rebelled and were overthrown in the wilderness. But if you will look closely at Exodus 6:8 you will see that it says nothing about the heritage of Moses anyway. In the statement, “I will give it to you for an heritage,” the pronoun “you” does not refer to Moses but to Israel as a people. This

can be easily seen by reading the context. Read it emphasizing the pronoun *you*. “Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring *you* out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid *you* out of their bondage, and I will redeem *you* with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: and I will take *you* to me for a people, and I will be to *you* a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth *you* out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring *you* in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it *you* for an heritage: I am the Lord.” So the heritage was the heritage of Israel; not merely the heritage of Moses. Of course, Moses was a part of Israel, and the promise was to him just as it was to any other Israelite; but it was not a special promise to Moses.

Does the word “land” in Acts 1:4 and Hebrews 11:9 have reference to the “land” of Genesis 15:15 and 11:8? Yes. Stephen in Acts 7:14, speaking to the Jews of his time, referred to it as “this land, wherein ye now dwell.” That was the land of Canaan. It is called the “land

of promise" in Hebrews 11:9. This is the same land mentioned in Genesis as being promised to Abraham and his seed.

What does the word "promise" in Hebrews 11:13, 39 refer to? In Hebrews 11:13 the word is "promises," not "promise." "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." The promises of this verse evidently have a spiritual significance and cannot be made to apply to the land promise. The following verses show a desire for a heavenly country which they entertained. They were looking for that and "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." And the promise of Hebrews 11:39 was the promise of the Messiah and the work which he would accomplish as the following verse indicates: "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." They died in faith, not having received this promise.

Please present explicit proof that Abraham and the other ancient worthies mentioned in Hebrews eleven were ever promised admittance into the spiritual realm of heaven. In Hebrews 11:10 Paul said that Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." This cannot refer to any city on earth that has been built by man. So it must have to do with a city in "the spiritual realm of heaven." And unless he had been promised something of this

nature how did he know that there was a city of this kind for which to look? Also Hebrews 11:16 says: "But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city." So there is a city in a heavenly country which God has prepared for them. It is not an earthly city, nor an earthly country. It therefore must pertain to the spiritual realm of heaven. The Old Testament promise to the Jews that they would return to Canaan was made before the Babylonian captivity, or during the Babylonian Captivity, or before the restoration from Babylon had been completed. Hence, a return to the land has been accomplished since those promises were made. There is not a promise in all the New Testament that the Jews will ever inherit the land of Canaan.

Does not the apostle Paul declare that Abraham and his seed were given the promise that he should be heir of the world in Romans 4:13 indicating that they are promised "the land of the world" for their inheritance? That is more territory than I knew a Premillennialist would be willing to include. If that is the meaning of the passage, then why argue anything about gathering the Jews to Canaan in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham? The land of Canaan is only a very small part of the world. Hence, it would not be necessary for the Jews to return to Canaan in order for the promise to be fulfilled. This position would demand dispersion of the Jews, a scattering, not a gathering. They

would have to be in every land beneath the sun or the promise would fail. The promise made to Abraham, as mentioned by Paul in Rom. 4:13, is not a land promise, but is the promise that all nations of the world would be blessed through him, as the connecting verses clearly show. The land promise has been fulfilled. Joshua said it had all been fulfilled and not one thing had failed (Joshua 21:45). I believe he told the truth.

—W. Curtis Porter

[Editor's Note: The above article was written from the perspective of answering the common premillennial claims that a promise made to the Jews entitles them to perpetual possession of the land of Palestine. This article was written in 1944 when such speculation was determining American foreign policy. The arguments are still valid and the folly of the policy evident.]

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 25

June 22, 2008

The Works of Abraham

No one word has given denominational preachers more difficulty than the word “works.” This is especially true in regard to Abraham.

Most have the greatest difficulty in reconciling Romans 4:1-6 with James 2:20-24. Both Paul and James mention Abraham and one says he was justified by works and the other says he was not justified by works.

The solution to the problem is simple. They must each be considering different kinds of works. In order to make this clear the texts must be observed closely or one will be led into error.

Works to Be Seen of Men?

Most denominational preachers will affirm that the works of James are works done in the presence of men. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The men that traveled with Abraham were left at the foot of the mountain (Genesis 22:5). Only Abraham and Isaac went upon the mountain where the sacrifice took place. Therefore, it follows as the day follows

the night that this justification was not in the presence of men because no men were present.

Boasting & Glorifying

Let us observe the two texts. First, Romans 4:1-6, “What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justified the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”

Observe the following within the above text. Paul speaks of believing and working as though they are incompatible. In this text indeed they are. He tells us this work would lead Abraham to “glory.” This is from *καύχημα* (kow'-khay-mah) which denotes a ground for boasting (*Vine's Expository Dictionary*, p. 484; *Thayer's*

Greek-English Dictionary, p. 342).

Notice that the works under consideration in Romans 4:1-6 cause one to boast, which is incompatible with belief. Also notice that it is a work which would eliminate grace and put God in debt to us. What kind of “work” could do this? It must be a meritorious work, one by which a reward is earned and a debt is incurred (Philippians 3:9; Ephesians 2:8-9). Only sinlessness can bring that kind of obligation upon God (Galatians 3:10-12).

However, no man stands before God as sinless, not even Abraham (Romans 4:2; cf. Genesis 12:13).

This type of work would eliminate the need for justification altogether since one would have no sins from which to be justified. However, we know that this is not the case (Romans 3:23).

Perfecting Works

Now, let us consider the other text, James 2:20-24. “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that

faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith. Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."

Now let us compare this text with the one in Romans. First, in this text faith and works are completely compatible. As a matter of fact, James says, "By works was faith made perfect." Also note that the word "glory" or "boasting" is not found in James 2. This means that this "work" is not the same kind of boastful work of Romans 4, or Ephesians 2. You will also observe that nowhere in James 2 is grace eliminated and debt mentioned.

This means that the works of James do not eliminate grace or put God in debt to us.

Now the following facts are quite noticeable. First, the works which save are the works which are done in obedience to God's commands. They "perfect" or "complete" faith. This is confirmed in the example of Abraham offering Isaac. Why did he offer Isaac? Was this Abraham's idea? Was this a work of his choosing or design? Was it something he could do and then brag or boast about it? Certainly not! He obeyed (worked) and was

justified by this act of faith (obedience) which is called "works."

Did he brag or boast about this obedience? Certainly not. The application to people of today is simply this. We have certain commands in the Bible. When we obey (work), this does not eliminate grace or motivate or legitimize boasting.

For example, we are commanded to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). When one goes down into the water and obeys his Lord, does he come up bragging and boasting about it? Certainly not. I have baptized many people and I have never had one to come up bragging, glorying and boasting. Imagine if you can, Abraham offering his son Isaac and then boasting about his obedience to the command of God.

The boasting works of Romans 4 could not be the humble works of James 2. Think it over.

—Ward Hogland

Think About It

"Just because something is better than worse does not mean that it is good."

Think about that a moment and ponder the consequences. How many times have we tried to justify our conduct and our character on the basis of its being "better than" something else?

I suppose you could prove alcohol intoxication is "good"

since it is "better than" heroin addiction. I reckon that would make adultery "good" because it is "better than" murder. Laziness must rate pretty high since it is obviously "better than" stealing.

Such thinking is a subjective rationale for justifying wickedness. The prophet Isaiah bemoaned the fact that many in his day called evil good and good evil. Paul warned us that evil men would wax worse and worse. When they do, the rest of us look pretty good by comparison, but in reality *some are bad and others are just worse.*

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 26

June 29, 2008

Redemption: The Theme of the Bible

The grand theme of the Bible is *redemption*. The dictionary defines redemption as “to liberate by payment; to free from the bondage of sin.” W.E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines *εξαγοραζω* as “denoting to buy out, especially of purchasing a slave with a view to his freedom”—found only in Galatians 3:13 and 4:5 of the work of Christ. He also defines *λυτρον* as “to release on receipt of ransom.” This word, in various forms, is the most often used to describe this aspect of the work of Christ in the New Testament (cf. Titus 2:14; I Peter 1:18).

Redeemed by the Blood

Redemption and the blood of Christ are inextricably tied together in the Scriptures. Like a scarlet thread interwoven throughout a great tapestry, so is the blood of Christ connected to the story of redemption. Paul emphasizes the significance of the blood of Christ with these words: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ...in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,

according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:3, 7).

Not until we learn that man is in bondage to sin and that God has purchased our freedom by the death of His Son (Revelation 5:9) will we ever make any real progress in understanding the Bible or applying it to ourselves unto the transformation of our spiritual condition. Only as we appreciate the grand theme of the Bible and view the overall presentation of it will we properly fit together the bits and pieces. Limited perception is, no doubt, in part traceable to a failure to see the continuity of the Bible’s theme.

The Sin Problem

Adam was the occasion of the entrance of sin into the world (Romans 5:12). The result has been that condemnation has come upon all men in that they have followed their first parent and sinned (Romans 5:18). Therefore, every accountable, human being is under the same condemnation and stands in need of redemption.

Sin is transgression of God’s law (I John 3:4). Adam’s disobedience in Eden was rebellion against God’s law (Romans 5:14; cf. Genesis 3:1–6). “The LORD God commanded

the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16–17).

This commandment was rejected by Adam and Eve in favor of the serpent’s lie, “Ye shall not surely die.” The result of their choice was alienation, separation from God. Adam and Eve died that very day when they were put out of the Garden losing their fellowship with God (Genesis 3:8, 23–24). By our own sin the same consequence has come upon each one of us (Romans 5:14, 18).

God having created man with will, the power of choice, has provided for the free exercise of will. This posed a problem. How could Divine Law be upheld, justice vindicated, and at the same time, how could the rebellious heart of humanity be touched and man reconciled (Romans 3:23–27)? Punishment alone was not the answer. What then? Only an extraordinary manifestation of love could provide the solution. To this end Jesus spoke of His coming in the context of God’s eternal plan for

man's redemption: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The terrible consequences of sin have been overcome by Jesus Christ at Calvary (Romans 5:19).

Oh! Wondrous Love I See

This incredible demonstration of Divine Love magnifies God's law, demonstrates God's mercy and goodness, opens the way of redemption, and allows for freed exercise of the human will. It provides an option. Man is free to either accept or reject it.

Thus, redemption is "the eternal purpose of God," it is the "mystery of his will" kept secret until finally revealed "unto the apostles and prophets by the Spirit." "Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Ephesians 3:5). God's purpose was to send Jesus in the fullness of time, establish the church, publish the gospel, redeem and reconcile the whole world (II Corinthians 5:19).

A First Glimpse of the Plan

We have come to refer to the first 2500 years of biblical history as the age of Patriarchy. One has to read but three chapters into the book of Genesis until he is given first hint of God's eternal purpose. The gospel, "good news of salvation", is glimpsed for the first time in Genesis 3:14-15. A "veiled" reference admittedly, but obviously envisioning divine purpose as the "germ" of every future prophecy concerning Messiah is recorded. The forces

of evil would indeed bruise the "heel" of the seed of woman but in so doing a more severe wound would be inflicted to the "head" of the serpent. The "seed of woman" is a reference peculiar to Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). Thus, in this prophecy we are conducted to the consummation of God's purpose in and through the death, burial and resurrection of the Son of God. Bruised in death, but in overcoming death, hell, and the grave through resurrection, a mortal wound is inflicted upon Satan and through the blood there shed, a way is paved and payment made for the redemption of mankind. Here indeed is the climax of the plan foreordained but hidden until revealed in the gospel. "But with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (I Peter 1:19-20).

In this first age of human history, sacrifice was a positive institution. The first of record concerns Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-12). Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering, Abel brought of the firstling of his flock. "And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering." Why? Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Since "faith comes of hearing and hearing by the word of God" we must conclude Abel offered according to God's direction (Romans 10:17). Therefore, his sacrifice was typical of the ultimate blood offering, the death of Christ,

and began a continuous line of sacrifices pointing to it.

Every sacrifice from the first to the last in the Old Testament economy, as respects purging and sin pointed to Christ, to the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). By these animal sacrifices the peculiar sanctity of blood is established in the Old Testament (Leviticus 17:11; cf. Genesis 9:4). The type is sanctified till the anti-type, the shadow till the substance materializes. As Paul wrote: "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (Hebrews 9:23).

—adapted by Jeff Asher from
Searching the Scriptures

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 27

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Redemption: The Theme of the Bible (2)

Redemption in Purpose

The initial article of this series stressed the eternal purpose of God, identifying the grand central theme of the Bible as redemption. Sin was introduced into the human family, via Adam and Eve.

Adam disobeyed God; this act of sin alienated him from God.

This is always the result; mankind is "alienated" becoming "enemies in your mind by wicked works" (Colossians 1:21). The fact of sin in Adam's case alienated him from his Creator, and it is the fact of sin in every son and daughter of Adam that results in personal condemnation (Romans 5:12).

It is God's purpose to overcome this tragedy in Jesus Christ (Romans 5:18; John 3:17). He being unwilling that man be forever lost, conceived an extraordinary expression of love that would vindicate divine justice and touch the rebellious heart of humanity affecting reconciliation. To this end it was God's eternal purpose to send Jesus in the fullness of time to publish the gospel and reconcile all things unto Himself (Ephesians 2:11-17).

Growth of the human family brought the development of marked wickedness identified in the circumstances leading up to the flood (Genesis 6). God decreed the destruction of the unrighteous and the salvation of the righteous. Noah was saved by obedient faith (Hebrews 11:7) in the building of the ark according to divine instruction. Peter refers to it as a salvation by water and makes it typical to the obedience which leads to baptism for the remission of sins: "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 3:21).

Redemption in Promise

The emphasis upon the purpose of God which underlies the first eleven chapters of the Bible gives way to the gospel in promise with the opening of the twelfth. The initial statements record the selection of a single family through whom God will consummate His eternal purpose to redeem sin cursed mankind. With the promise to Abram, "I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing" (Genesis

12:2), God's plan develops through Abraham's seed.

Type and prophecy revealed the budding of the plan that was to blossom in Christ and shed the sweet fragrance of love and mercy upon all. It is thus that the Old Testament helps to establish the New Testament.

From the call of Abram, one family of peculiar sanctity is the object of the inspired record.

This does not admit the remainder of the human family without the knowledge of God for such is not the case. However, vanity and foolishness becoming the rule, there was produced a darkened heart and depravity became the rule of life (Romans 1:19-22).

The life of the patriarch Abraham is fraught with tests of faith, the more memorable of which is the case of Isaac (Genesis 22:1-14). The command to offer the son of promise can only be viewed as a supreme test of faith which brings a thrill to our hearts. We, through faith's eye, walk with Abraham to the designated place, pick up every stone in the building of the altar, select every stick of wood for the fire. Isaac's question, "where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" is faintly

heard through the ears of faith. "God will provide" is the answer, and He did. In the sparing of Isaac there is a typifying of the ultimate hope, resurrection, in figure (Hebrews 11:17-19), along with continuity in the development of the promise.

Subsequent history involves us with Isaac, Jacob, Joseph's betrayal and their descendents arrival in Egypt. Moses graces the pages of inspired history, a type of Christ, and deliverance from Egyptian bondage sees a family becoming a nation. At Sinai the Law is given, nationalizing the seed of Abraham, and the Israelite nation is born. This marks the end of an era of limited duration, the Patriarchy, the father rule period. Nevertheless, it was an era in which a cardinal rule is stressed and exemplified in the God-man relationship. There is one overriding and underlying principle: obey and be blessed; disobey and be cursed.

Redemption in Preparation

The Old Testament era is generally accepted as the record of some 4000 years of human history which divides into the Patriarchal Age of about 2500 years and the Mosaic Age of some 1500 years. This last, the Jewish dispensation, is initiated with the giving of the Law at Sinai. The "words the Lord spoke" were written on two tables of stone (Acts 7:53; Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10). Moses stood as the mediator between the people and God in the giving of this Law (Galatians 3:19).

The Ten Commandments circumscribed the relationship

of the nation of Israel and Jehovah (Deuteronomy 5:5, 22). It was a system ordained of God and designed to last until the Christ came in His Kingdom (Galatians 3:19). Then, a new covenant, the Gospel, was established bringing to fulfillment all previous law instituted by God. "Blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Colossians 2:14).

But, why was the law added? "It was added because of transgressions." In relation to the system and purpose of God which was to succeed it, the Law must be viewed as typical. The continuity of contrast between the Law and the Gospel, designed to stress the superiority of the Gospel featured in Hebrews, emphasizes the point. "Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount" (Hebrews 8:5).

—adapted by Jeff Asher
from *Searching the Scriptures*

The First of Ten

"I am the LORD your God...you shall have no other gods before Me" (Deuteronomy 5:6).

These were the first words which Jehovah spoke to the nation Israel after having brought them out of Egyptian bondage. They are the foundation of all true religion.

When Israel departed from Jehovah centuries later and began worshipping the gods of the Canaanites, He reminded them of this the first of all commandments, saying, "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another" (Isaiah 42:8).

There is only one God; he is Jehovah, the true and living God. His only begotten Son is Jesus of Nazareth whom He has revealed to us by His Holy Spirit (I Peter 1:12). Beside Him there is no God. He has said, "I am He, and there is no god besides Me" (Deuteronomy 32:39).

—from *A Bible Minute*
by Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 28

July 12, 2008

Redemption: The Theme of the Bible (3)

Redemption in Prophecy

Israel remained at Mount Sinai for two years after receiving the Law. In this time the tabernacle was constructed, the priesthood ordained and the worship of god instituted. After the second Passover was observed Israel marched to Kadesh in order to enter into Canaan. However, God's people met with tragedy at Kadesh because of unbelief and sin (Numbers 13-14). As a result, God sentenced the generation 20 years old and above to wander in the wilderness another 38 years, after which God would bring their children into Canaan.

Moses, Aaron, Miriam and all their generation died in the wilderness. Now, Joshua is the leader of Israel and he brings them into Canaan (Joshua 1-5). This generation, its elders and the generation afterward that knew Joshua and had seen many miracles, remained faithful to God. But, alas, a generation arose that "knew not the Lord" (Judges 2:7-10).

During the next 450 years Israel goes through several cycles of apostasy and restoration. God raised up Judges who ruled and championed the cause of Israel. These Judges led Israel back to

God while opposing the influence of idolatry.

During the judgeship of Samuel (I Samuel 8:1-7) the Kingdom of Israel is established. Saul, David, and Solomon each ruled 40 years successively. After 120 years of a United Kingdom, upon the death of Solomon, division came. The ten northern tribes defect to Jeroboam and are identified the Kingdom of Israel. Two tribes remain faithful to the house of David to establish what will become the Kingdom of Judah. The continued decline and fall of these two kingdoms usher in the gospel in prophecy.

The prophets occupy a major portion of the latter history of Israel. The scope of their work was both physical and spiritual. To this end they, as the mouth of God, taught and admonished the people in the right way of the Lord and kept in constant focus the promise of Messiah and His everlasting kingdom. They, in this sense, preached the gospel prophetically. They predicted every facet of the redemption consummated in the coming Messiah and Kingdom which He established.

In character and power the Messiah was to be called,

"Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace." His Kingdom was to be an everlasting government of peace established upon the throne of David to dispense judgment and justice forever (Isaiah 9:6-7). He was to be an everlasting priest, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalms 110:4), the Son of God (Psalms 2:7), possessed of unlimited power and dominion (Daniel 7:13-14; Psalms 110:1). Messiah was prophesied to be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2), of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). He was to be rejected, shamefully treated and crucified (Isaiah 53; Psalms 22:16); he would be betrayed by one of his own (Psalms 41:9). The Psalmist prophesied that he would be raised bodily from the dead by the power of God (Psalms 16:9-10), after which the gospel would be preached from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3) and the kingdom established. All this would occur in the days of the Roman Empire (Daniel 2:44). This is the gospel in prophecy of which Peter says, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were

moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21). "Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into" (I Peter 1:12).

According to Plan

The Old Testament closes and the prophets seal up their word because "it shall be for many days" (Daniel 8:26). Between the book of Malachi and the birth of Jesus is over 400 years. But, the New Testament opens with God's people in expectation of their Messiah (Luke 3:15). The time chosen for the advent of the Saviour into the world was ripe (Mark 1:15). Every circumstance of human history blended to bring to fruition God's plan. Jesus was born of a virgin, lived and died under the Law of Moses which he unerringly kept. Only in His death could the Law and the prophets be fulfilled. Jesus said of Himself: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17-18; cf. Luke 24:44-47).

The forty days following the resurrection of Jesus were spent in teaching the Apostles about His Kingdom (Acts 1:3). Finally, Jesus commands the Twelve to tarry in Jerusalem "until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The Lord then ascends to heaven, as the disciples stand watching, there to be crowned king (Acts 1:9; cf. Mark 16:19; Hebrews 1:3). A week later on Pentecost the twelve are assembled together

in an upper chamber in the temple when the climax of God's eternal purpose in redemption is realized. The Kingdom of Heaven is manifested to man and the Gospel in its entirety is preached (Acts 2:16ff).

The first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ is both a beginning and an ending. It is the ending of the Jewish or Mosaic Dispensation and the beginning of the Christian Dispensation, the age of grace. Fifty days after the death of Christ ushers in the period of apostolic activity which Christ commanded when He said "go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature...in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8). This "great commission" as it is sometimes called sees the Jew as the initial object of preaching and then the Gentile. Peter initiated this commission first in Jerusalem when multitudes of Jews were converted to Christ. He then carried the word to Cornelius at Caesarea, who with his whole house became the first Gentile converts. Thus, remedial system was completed and realized as a fact. God has done all he purposed and promised to do toward redemption.

—adapted by Jeff Asher
from *Searching the Scriptures*

The Second Commandment

"You shall not make for yourself an idol...You shall not worship them or serve them" (Deuteronomy 5:8-9).

The real sin in idolatry is that that the object is intended to portray the depraved ideas which the idol represents. Therefore, men "exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures...they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:23-25).

Men may not bow down to a golden calf, but they still have their idols which lead men to impurity. The Apostle Paul urged, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry" (Colossians 3:5).

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 29

July 19, 2008

Redemption: The Theme of the Bible (4)

Completion of God's Plan

Having previously traced the course of redemption through the Patriarchal Age and the Mosaic Age, we now consider certain aspects important to the completion of the redemptive plan.

The "fullness of times" saw the advent of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah (Ephesians 1:3, 7, 10). With his birth the sequence of events anticipated for more than 4000 years began to unfold. His baptism (Matthew 3) launches his earthly ministry of some three years. The selection of twelve disciples and the special preparation of these by way of teaching, example, and impressing their peculiar relationship to the kingdom is climaxed by His promise, "*I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*" (Matthew 16:19; 18:18).

What were these keys? To determine what they were and when they began to be used will be to determine when the kingdom came into existence. The keys were the conditions of

divine pardon embraced in, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16); "repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38); "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). Peter acted upon his delegated authority on Pentecost and as a result of his and the other apostles preaching approximately 3000 souls were saved upon obedience to these terms of pardon.

Redemption

The eternal purpose of God was to unite Jew and Gentile in the fullness of time in one body, by the cross (Ephesians 2:11-18). At least one facet of this purpose is outstanding on the day of Pentecost and in fact does not materialize for sometime thereafter. Admittedly, all the ingredients with respect to the law of pardon are from that point evident and available but the transition circumstances have not yet produced general application.

The prophet had promised, "It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I

will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). Jesus had commissioned his apostles to go into "all the world" and to "every creature". It would seem that the full import of this was slowly grasped as the Jew alone was object of apostolic preaching for a while and this is accepted as divine order, "to the Jew first and also the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

Cornelius and his household are the first Gentiles to hear and believe the gospel. With their conversion God's plan of redemption is totally implemented. The character and identity of Cornelius is a beautiful thing, admired among all, saint and sinner (Acts 10). He is presented as devout, charitable, a soldier and a worshipper of God. All this, but he is not a Christian, not a child of God. Cornelius had to be converted to Jesus Christ.

The account divides itself into three parts. First, there is the bringing together of Cornelius and the preacher, Peter in this instance. The miraculous is in evidence as we hear an angel speak to Cornelius in commendation of his

worthiness and in declaring his prayers heard. However, we note the angel as a messenger of God does not directly intervene in affecting God's purpose, redemption. The angel simply told him how the desires of his heart might be fulfilled. Send to Joppa for Simon, "he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do" (Acts 10:5-6; 11:13-14).

God's will is made known only through His Word, for Cornelius as well as for you or me. The Gospel must be heard, it is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16); it is the means to producing faith—"faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Second, there is the preparing of Peter (Acts 10:9-16). Perhaps steeped in traditional barriers, to some degree possessed of a limited concept of the commission, Peter was at that moment not ready for the task God had for him. In fact, not until the vision at mid-day upon the housetop in Joppa did Peter fully understand these matters. There he learned that the cleansing power of the blood of Christ would, as had been purposed from the beginning, bring the Gentile into favor with God just like the Jew. He departed with the devout soldier and the two household servants sent by Cornelius along with certain Jewish brethren for Caesarea. Arriving at the house of Cornelius he found an expectant and receptive audience waiting for him (Acts 10:17-28). Peter preached the gospel to that audience, prefacing his declaration by impressing that "God is no respecter of persons: But in every

nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35). When he had summarized God's eternal purpose, climaxing his sermon in declaring the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, he closed with a simple statement of requirements in so far as Cornelius and his house are concerned: "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins" (Acts 10:29-43).

At this point a third miracle occurs. "The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word" (Acts 10:44). Upon whom? Those that heard the Word. For their salvation? No. Why then? What was the purpose of this miracle? It was to convince the Jews that the Gentile as represented in Cornelius, could receive the grace of God upon the same terms and conditions as the Jew (cf. Acts 10:45). The result of this miraculous falling of the Holy Ghost convicted and convinced the Jews that "God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

The conclusion of this account pinpoints the obedience of Cornelius and his household. Take note again of the concluding statement of Peter (v. 43): "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." The logical and conclusive act in the obedience of Cornelius toward the remission of sins is expressed in verses 47 and 48. "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord". Salvation from sin in the only way the Spirit has ever

revealed. Cornelius, a religious man, yet lost in sin, was saved by the blood of Christ in obedience to the gospel.

No man living can hide behind his morality expecting and having it save him. No man lives without sin. In Cornelius we see the completion of God's remedial system along with a number of other profitable lessons. In him there is the classic example of the gospel in application and the continuing stress upon the unalterable and eternal principle: obey God and be blessed; disobey and be cursed.

—adapted by Jeff Asher
from Searching the Scriptures

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 30

July 26, 2008

Redemption: The Theme of the Bible (5)

A study of Redemption as the theme of the Bible would be incomplete without personal application.

We often express the fullness of our hearts with the song *I'm Redeemed*. The chorus goes, "I have been redeemed—Glory, glory, Christ is mine." One is able to sing these sentiments with any sense of appreciation contingent only upon having obeyed His will.

The Gnostic philosophy, rampant in New Testament times advocated that salvation is intellectual, knowledge is salvation within itself.

Colossians is the divine answer to this fallacy. Here salvation, redemption and forgiveness of sin is in Christ: "In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). The availability of such redemption and forgiveness is to every man. As Paul expressed it, "to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present

every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Colossians 1:27-28).

Paul's aim, here noted, warn every man, teach every man, present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. "Perfect" has to do with attaining of full purpose, namely redemption. Thus, present every man redeemed.

Christ & the Father

Analysis of Col. 1:15-23 results in a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ and His part in the scheme of redemption. His preeminence is shown in the relationship He sustains. In relation to the Father He is depicted as "the image of the invisible God." This is language similar to that in Hebrews 1:1-4 where Paul describes Jesus as Him "who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

Jesus is presented as the perfect manifestation of God the Father. The word "image" is challenging when we allow it to remind us of creation. "And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." God created man in His own

image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them (Genesis 1:26-27). Man was made that he might be the image of God. God's intent was interrupted by sin, thus man never achieved his destiny.

Christ & Mankind

Jesus shows what God is and what man was meant to be. In Christ is manhood as God intended. Jesus possesses the personal characteristics and the distinguishing marks of God. To see God one has but to look at Jesus Christ as He is presented in the purity of righteousness within the New Testament. Man attains to what God intended when he becomes the image of Christ, presenting himself in the purity of righteousness. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever" (I Peter 1:22-23).

Christ & Creation

In His relationship to creation, Christ is "firstborn" (Colossians 1:15). "Firstborn" not in the

sense of time but in the sense honor. Such was common as a title of the nation Israel, "firstborn of God" (Exodus 4:22), denoting favored, chosen, highly honored. Such is used as a title of Messiah, "I will make Him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (Psalms 89:27). Thus, the highest honor creation holds belongs to the Son of God. The Father has given Him that place of honor, He is completely unique.

The passage continues, all things were created by Him and for Him (Colossians 1:16), visible and invisible. He, Christ, is the word force in creation. Not only is He the agent in creation but He is also the goal and the end of creation, "created unto Him." The creation was to be His and was to glorify Him (v.17). In Him all things consist, that is, cohere or hold together. The idea is the One who is the beginning and goal of creation is the One who sustains it by His word (Hebrews 1:3).

Christ & the Church

In His relationship to the church, Christ is the head of the body (Colossians 1:18). The church as the body of Christ, over which He is head, is the organism through which He acts. Jesus Christ is the guiding, directing, dominating spirit of the church. Every act and word must be governed by Him. As man can neglect and abuse his body by prostituting its purity, so also the church. He is the "beginning," in the sense of time or originating power. He is the source of its life, the director of her continuing activities.

"Firstborn from the dead" punctuates the center and heart in the consummation of God's

plan for redemption. Jesus Christ is a living presence and not a dead hero or a past founder. The result is that He has the supremacy in all. Resurrection demonstrated His conquest of every enemy and that triumph gives Him right to be Lord of all.

Christ & the Sinner

In His relation to sin and the sinner (Colossians 1:20), the very object of His coming was reconciliation and redemption. The chasm between man and God needed to be bridged. The initiative was with God, man needed to be reconciled, the deficiency was with man. The medium of reconciliation is the blood of Christ. God "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Romans 8:32). "Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:9).

In the death of Jesus, God is saying: I love you like that; I love you enough to see My Son suffer and die for you; enough to bear the cross on My heart if only it will win you. The cross is proof there is no length to which God will not go to win the human heart. If the cross will not stir to love and wonder then my friend what will?

The scope of reconciliation is "all things". That is all things that are in need of redemption, every sinner. Those alienated by sin, through the blood of His cross, can be reconciled and restored to holiness (v. 22). The Gospel is the message of reconciliation, the message of salvation, the basis of hope for every man who will submit to its requirements (v. 23). Every soul thus redeemed is in the

church, the body of Christ (v.24). We are Redeemed, yes, even me, and even you. In Christ, "in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7), when found and accepted by the obedience of faith. God be thanked for this marvelous gift of His Son.

—adapted by Jeff Asher
from Searching the Scriptures

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 31

August 3, 2008

The Offices of Christ on the Earth

When we consider the offices of Jesus, we generally do not think of them in terms of their relationships to heaven or earth, or their pre-incarnate, incarnate or post-resurrection phases. However, recognizing these distinctions benefits us greatly.

The Pre-incarnate Word

The first verse of the Gospel of John introduces us to "the Word." This Divine Being was in the form of God (Philippians 2:6) and equal with God in nature (Colossians 1:15-16). John tells us that He was an active participant in the creation to the extent nothing entered existence without Him. This "Word" was made flesh and we know Him as Jesus (John 1:14).

This same "Word" before His being made flesh is found active throughout human history. He is known as the "Angel of Jehovah." That this "Messenger" was not the ordinary being classed as an "angel" is evident from the treatment He receives as He executes His duties.

In Exodus He commands Moses to remove His shoes and worship (3:2-6). He refers to Himself as the "I AM." Even the writers of the Old Testament attribute to Him the name Jehovah. Ordinary angelic

beings never make such a request (Revelation 22:8-9).

The Glorified Christ

Jesus assumed three offices upon His ascension: King of Kings, High Priest of the Order of Melchizedek, and our Advocate with the Father.

Jesus was the Messiah, the Anointed, that is, God's designated successor to the Throne of David (Isaiah 9:6). However, Jesus did not execute that office until He sat down at God's right hand in heaven (Hebrews 1:3, 8). While Jesus reigns over the earth He has never literally reigned on the earth, and the Scriptures do not indicate that He will. Jesus received all authority at His ascension (Matthew 28:18) and will return that authority to the Father after the Judgment (1 Corinthians 15:27-28).

Jesus fills a dual office respecting the Atonement for sin. He is at once the sacrifice for sin and the High Priest who offers it to God (Hebrews 7:26-27). Jesus' role as High Priest was promised to Him through the prophets and rested upon the unique qualification that He was a sinless man (Hebrews 5:1-10). His priesthood is an enduring one and, thus,

superior to that of Aaron by virtue of His endless life (Hebrews 7:15-25).

Yet, Jesus serves not only as High Priest offering a sacrifice for our sins, but also as our Advocate, a Mediator or Pleader before God for mercy (1 John 2:1). He is ever before God making intercession for His brethren (Romans 8:31-34). Having been reconciled to God by the forgiveness of our past sins we continue in fellowship with the Father through the ministry of Jesus in heaven (Romans 5:10; 4:25).

This is what Jesus does for us now in heaven before the Father. How wonderful!

Christ on the Earth

Jesus filled several offices while upon the earth. We sometimes overlook these and in doing so have an incorrect view of Him during the days of His flesh.

Jesus Christ was the Prophet of Jehovah (Hebrews 1:1-2). Moses said that God would send another prophet in the likeness of himself (Deuteronomy 18:15-22). Jehovah would put His words into the mouth of that prophet and confirm what He said by miracles, signs and wonders.

Jesus is that prophet (Acts 3:22–23; John 6:14; 7:40). He came preaching the words that God gave to Him (John 5:30–37; 7:16–18; 8:28–29). As a prophet He did not come in His own name (John 5:43), did not bear witness of Himself (John 8:17–18) and did not speak His own doctrine (John 7:16–17).

Jesus' office as "the prophet" was consistent with His taking the form of a servant and being made in the likeness of a man (Philippians 2:7). God sends a prophet; a prophet receives and reveals a message; a prophet has authority delegated to Him from God and sufficient power given to him to execute his commission. This was certainly true of Jesus (Luke 4:18; Isaiah 11:1–4; John 5:19, 30; 8:28–29).

Jesus Christ was the Apostle of Our Profession (Hebrews 3:1). An apostle is one that is sent forth under a commission (Matthew 10:5). He is one sent with a message to preach (Matthew 10:7) and the power to confirm the authority of that he preaches (Luke 9:1; Mark 6:12–13, 30).

Jesus was an apostle in His relationship to the Father (John 17:3). The Father sent Jesus with a commission (Matthew 15:24) and gave Him a message to reveal (John 8:28–29) along with the power necessary to confirm it (Luke 4:18; Acts 10:38).

Like the office of prophet, that of an apostle is consistent with His taking the form of a servant. Jesus went forth in the name of the One who sent Him (John 5:43). He worked the works that were given to Him (John 5:36).

Jesus Christ was the Son of God (John 1:14). There is a sense in which this title is unique to

Jesus—He is *the only begotten Son* (cf. John 20:17; Matthew 11:27). However, the phrase "Son of God" applies to a variety of individuals. Examining its use will reveal the character of the title, what office it designates.

Angels are "sons of God" (Job 2:1; cf. Hebrews 1:14) by virtue of their creation. Adam is "the son of God" since he was the first man God created and, thus, the head of the human family (Acts 17:25–29). The righteous of Adam's seed who marry the daughters of Cain are "sons of God" (Genesis 6:2). The nation Israel is the "son of God" (Exodus 4:22) because they are the object of God's special love and care chosen for His service (Hosea 11:1). The kings of Israel are "sons of God" as

representatives of the chosen nation and as types of the Messiah (Psalm 2:7; II Samuel 7:14). Those who believe and obey the Gospel are "sons of God" (John 1:12) equipped to serve Christ (I John 3:1–10). In this designation there is a special relationship of service, devotion and obedience toward God and His people displayed.

We learn the nature of spiritual sonship from passages that deal with physical sonship. A son is under the authority of his father (Galatians 4:1–2). Obedience is expected of a son (Hebrews 12:5–8; Matthew 21:28–32). A son comes in his father's name and acts in behalf of his interests (Matthew 20:37). A son is beloved of his father (Luke 9:38; 11:11–13) and loves his father (Genesis 46:29). He is the heir of his father (Matthew 21:38) and serves faithfully in his house (Luke 15:29–32).

Jesus was the perfect Son (Hebrews 3:6, 5:8–9). The Father on at least two occasions announced His approval of Him (Matthew 3:17; 17:5) and proved it in the resurrection (Romans 1:4). The Father rewarded His obedience by giving all things into His hands (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9–11) including the rule of His kingdom until all His enemies are vanquished (I Corinthians 15:25–28).

His Role that of a Servant

Jesus never got out of His role as a servant (Philippians 2:5–8). On earth He executed only those offices compatible with this role. He emptied Himself taking the form of a servant being made in the likeness of men. Jesus did not come in the offices of His prior or latter glory.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 32

August 10, 2008

The Mind of Christ

Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:5-7).

The Primary Lesson

Paul the Apostle issues a threefold directive to the Philippian Church. First, they are to be of one accord. In order to achieve this each one must humble self and take an active concern in the things of his brethren above his own concerns, wants and needs. As the supreme example of this disposition of mind, Paul introduces the example of Christ to them. The Word, whom they knew as Jesus, “made Himself of no reputation” or “emptied Himself” (ASV). He did not consider His own pleasures, comforts, desires or rights but put the needs of His brethren above Himself and was made in the likeness of men.

The primary lesson of this text is humility. When brethren have the mind of Christ, they are at peace, united and working spreading the Gospel of the

Kingdom of Heaven (Philippians 2:14-16).

In addition to the primary lesson of humility, the Apostle sets forth concepts that relate to the nature of Jesus Christ in the days of His flesh. A careful study of this text will help us understand some important questions about Jesus Who is God and man (John 1:14). In coming to appreciate these concepts, we will gain an even greater appreciation for the mind of Christ that we are to acquire.

The Form of God

There are two positions taken relative to the phrase “the form of God.” W.E. Vine, following E.H. Gifford, asserts that μορφή includes the whole nature and essence of Deity, and is inseparable from them. It does not include anything accidental or separable such as modes of manifestation at one time attached to the form, and at another separated from it. Gifford concludes, “The Son of God could not possibly divest Himself of ‘the form of God’ at His incarnation without thereby ceasing to be God.”

Gifford is correct in his conclusion regarding divestiture

of Deity; Jesus most assuredly retained in the incarnation the essence of Divinity. However, Gifford misses the truth concerning μορφή being the “essential form” or “the divine nature” without which there can be “no existence”.

Notice Mark 16:12, “After that He appeared in *another form* unto two of them.” If μορφή means the divine nature without which existence is impossible, how could Jesus appear in *another* (ετέρα), that is, different essential nature. Did God cease to exist on the road to Emmaus?

That μορφή does not mean “essential nature” is evident from other passages where the participle is used. For example, “the form of knowledge” in Romans 2:20 denotes the outline of the scheme of redemption which the Law gave, certainly not the essential knowledge of the totality of God’s plan (cf. Romans 16:25-26). Likewise, in 2 Timothy 3:5, “the form of godliness” is the appearance of religion where the real substance of it was lacking (cf., James 1:26-27). The Greek word μορφή is used to designate that which strikes the vision. It is the

external appearance, not the essential nature of a being.

This truth about μορφή appears in the words compounded with it. For example, the word μεταμορφόομαι means: “was transfigured.” It is used in reference to Christ in Matthew 17:2 and Mark 9:2. The Father did not change Jesus’ essential nature on the mount, only His outward appearance, that which struck the eye. In Romans 12:2, believers are commanded to be “transformed.” Their outward manifestation is to be consistent with the new man that was born in baptism (cf. Romans 6:11–18). They are no longer to pattern their lives after the world. Similarly in 2 Corinthians 3:18, believers are to “be changed” into the same image of Christ. Not that our essential natures become Divine, but that we seek to be what Jesus is revealed to us in manner of life through the Word. We change our spiritual appearance to that of Christ (Galatians 2:20).

Rather, “form” is “the appearance, look or likeness, of someone, that by which those beholding him would judge him” (Nicoll). As Gene Frost observed: “The form is not identical with the divine essence; but (it) is dependent upon it—a reflection of it—the appearance can be laid aside, but not the essence of one’s being” (*The Deity of Christ*, p. 6).

Thought It Not Robbery to Be Equal with God

Jesus did not choose to retain His station, nor did He regard the necessary humiliation robbery. Jesus “for your sakes became poor, that ye through

His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

The translations in the various versions grapple with the difficulty of the language in verse six. The ASV gives us, “who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped.” The NASV reads, “although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.” The RSV says: “who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped.” The NIV renders the text, “who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.”

All of the versions make it clear that Jesus did not grasp, hold on to or retain that which constituted equality with God. We have already made it clear that Jesus did not and could not relinquish His Divinity (John 5:18). All that Jesus, the pre-incarnate Word, could release His hold upon was the glory (John 17:5), the power (Luke 4:14, 18, 32, 36), the authority (Matthew 28:18), the privileges (John 6:15) and the prerogatives of the Word of God (Matthew 26:53).

Mark Twain wrote an interesting novel entitled, *The Prince and the Pauper*. The plot involved two young boys that were “bookends” in facial appearance and size. However, one was a prince and the other a poor commoner. The prince wanted to try on for size life outside the confines of the castle. He convinced his doppelganger to take his place

in the affairs of the state for the brief escapade. They exchange clothing and names and the merriment begins.

Which one was the prince? He who had the appearance and was enjoying the privileges or he who had the birthright and the title? If you can understand this, then you can understand to a small degree what Jesus did. He removed from Himself all that gave the appearance that He was Divine and entered the world; this Prince became a pauper for our sakes.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 33

August 17, 2008

The Mind of Christ (2)

Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:5-7).

But Emptied Himself

Jesus emptied Himself or, as the KJV says, "He made Himself of no reputation." There has been much discussion of these phrases. Some have taken the position that Jesus "emptied" by adding to Himself all the attributes of humanity. Others have said that Jesus did not add or lose anything because all that man is He already was and He retained in full possession and use all that He ever was. Others have noted correctly the primary lesson of the text and simply said, "Jesus emptied Himself." All of these explanations fall short of the truth of the text.

As already noted, Jesus could not relinquish divine nature, upon this I think all brethren are agreed. Whatever interpretation is given of this passage must begin with the recognition that Jesus retained divine nature (John 1:1-3, 14). However,

where the disagreement arises is in ascertaining to what degree if any Jesus relinquished the exercise of His divine powers and prerogatives.

The text identifies four things of which the "emptying" consisted. These are: (1) taking the form of a servant, (2) being made in the likeness of men, (3) Being found in fashion as a man, (4) humble obedience unto death.

The Form of a Servant

The word for "form" in this phrase is the same as the word for "form" in verse six, μορφή. When we studied this word before we noticed that it means the "external appearance." Those who have taken the position that μορφή must mean "the essential unchanging nature of a thing" find themselves in great trouble here. I would like for one of them to explain how a being can exchange one unchanging nature for another unchanging nature. This explains why some have said Jesus "emptied" by *adding*. I would also like to hear defined the "unchanging nature" of a servant. The passage does not say "the form of a man," but that of a *servant*. We know that angels are

servants as well as men (Hebrews 1:14). Furthermore, the nature of a man is not that of a servant exclusively, since not all men are servants (Luke 16:19-20). It is apparent that μορφή has to do with the appearance of a thing, not its essential nature.

Jesus did not come in the splendor and glory of the Word of God. Neither did He descend in the radiant light of an archangel. The Son of God did not come riding on a charger at the head of an immense army as would King David or Solomon. His birth was not attendant with the flourishes of trumpets and the chiming of bells. His entry to His capitol was upon the foal of an ass. His appearance was ordinary and unbecoming. His hands were rough as a mason's and his feet were dusty and callused from walking everywhere He went. The measure of His life is summed up in these words, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Our Lord came in the role of a servant and never left that role during the extent of His sojourn upon the earth. He did not claim or

demand what was rightfully His, but suffered as a poor, homeless Jew.

Jesus did not use any of the powers, demand any of the privileges, or exercise any of the prerogatives of His divine status. He came as one under authority dependent upon His Father who sent Him (John 5:19, 30; 8:28).

Made in the Likeness of Men

The word "likeness," ομοίωμα, means: "the shape, image, similitude, or resemblance of a thing." The Servant resembled a man.

While it is true that "likeness" does not always indicate "sameness" the issue of whether or not Jesus really took on human nature is dealt with in other passages. In Hebrews 2:14–17, the writer says of Jesus, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same ... wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren in all things." Philippians 2:7 is an affirmation that the Eternal Word was made flesh, that is, human in nature.

Found in Fashion as a Man

Not only did Jesus look like a man, He acted like a man. I believe that Paul is telling us that Jesus lived a real human experience. The word "fashion," σχῆμα, refers to the manner of life. Men not only saw in Jesus the form and bearing of a man, but one in the state and relations of a human being. The servant-hood of Christ involved not only the manifestation of human nature but a real human experience. Jesus lived life as a

man. Of Him Paul wrote, "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him" (Hebrews 5:8–9).

He Humbled Himself and Became Obedient

Paul does not end his description of the service of the Word, his synopsis of the human existence of the Son of God, with only a consideration of its appearance and experience. Paul describes it in its character when he says that the Word "humbled himself and became obedient unto death."

When Paul writes of the humanity of Jesus, it was genuine, not only in its outward manifestation but also in its performance. Jesus was a real man giving real obedience to His God. Herein Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" and "condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3). Jesus is an example of perfect human character (1 Peter 2:21–22). Therefore, we are commanded to follow His steps and imitate His example (Ephesians 5:1–2; 1 John 2:6; I Corinthians 11:1).

Jesus as a real man, living real human experiences dealt with them as all men should do.

There could be little purpose in the humiliation of Jesus if it were not possible for the rest of us to learn how to live from Jesus' example.

Some of our brethren would rob us of the comfort, the power and the victory the life of Jesus gives us by saying Jesus was *different*. They tell us we cannot

do what Jesus did because Jesus was divine, deity, God. What they ignore is that He was *man*.

This is the whole point. Jesus came and showed us the way. He redeemed us from sin and said, "Brother, come and follow me. Walk as I walked and live as I lived." Jesus gives us hope. He gives us courage. And, when we fail, He shows us compassion and says, "Try again, I am here to help."

There is no cheap grace here. No passing the blame to God because "I am only human." There is only the man Christ Jesus, example, brother in tribulations, friend and Saviour—Amen!

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 34

August 24, 2008

McGarvey on the Nature of Jesus in the Flesh

J. W. McGarvey was president of the College of the Bible at Lexington, KY. He is recognized as an able scholar and defender of primitive Christianity. Among his most noted accomplishments are the contributions he made during the late nineteenth century in the battle against liberalism and modernism which was sweeping through American religious movements. Brother McGarvey is considered one of the ablest defenders of the integrity of the Scriptures and the person of Christ.

What follows are several comments from the pen of brother McGarvey concerning the nature of Jesus in the flesh. These are submitted because there seems to be much confusion among brethren today on this question and other related matters. McGarvey's insights on the issue are relevant since he was at the fore of the controversy with rationalism and modernism nearly a century ago.

J.W. McGarvey on the Temptation of the Son

"As a second David, Jesus went forth to meet that Goliath who had so long vaunted himself against all who sought to serve God, and had as yet found none

to vanquish him. The account of the temptation must have been given to the disciples by Jesus Himself, and as it pleased Him to give it to us as an actual history of real facts, it behooves us to so accept it without being presumptuously inquisitive. Of course, it has supernatural features, but the supernatural confronts us all through the life of Jesus, so there is nothing strange about it here.

"Jesus had taken upon Him our flesh, and hence He could be tempted, with a possibility of failing. But His divinity insured His victory over temptation. He became like us in ability to fall, that He might make us like unto Himself in power to resist. It behooved Him to be tempted, that thus sharing our nature with its weakness and temptation He might bring us to share His nature with its strength and sinlessness (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15-16).

"Sinlessness does not preclude temptation, else Adam could not have been tempted, nor could Satan himself have fallen. Moreover, temptation is in no sense sin. It is the yielding of the will to temptation which constitutes sin. The spiritual history of humanity revolves around two persons; namely,

the first and the second Adam. The temptation of Christ was as real as that of Adam. He had taken upon Himself our temptable nature (Philippians 2:7-8), and He was tempted not as a private soldier, but as the Second Adam, the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10-18). The failure of the first Adam brought sorrow, darkness and death; the success of the Second Adam brought joy, light and immortality" (*The Fourfold Gospel*, pp. 88-89).

"The case of Jesus was now similar to that of Israel. He was in a foodless wilderness, but He trusted that as God had provided for Israel in its helplessness, so would He now provide for Him. Israel sinned by doubt and murmuring, and proposing to obtain bread in its own way—that is, by returning to Egypt (Exodus 16:1-9). Jesus avoided a like sin.

"We should note the use which our Lord made of Scripture in His hour of trial he did not look to visions and voices and special revelation for guidance, but used the written Word as the lamp for His feet (Psalm 119:105); in the conflict of temptation He did not defend Himself by His own divine wisdom, but used that wisdom

which God had revealed to all Israel through His prophets. Jesus fought as a man (Philippians 2: 6-7), and used that weapon which, as God, He had given to man (Ephesians 6:17). Jesus used the Scripture as of final, argument-ending authority. Eve also started with "God hath said" (Genesis 3:3); but she was not constant in her adherence to God's word.

"Jesus permitted Satan neither to question nor pervert the Scripture....In using the word 'man' Jesus takes His stand with us as a human being (*ibid.*, pp. 92-93)...We could have no higher endorsement of the Old Testament than this use of it by Christ. It was sufficient for Him in His temptations and with the addition of the New Testament, it is sufficient for us in all things, II Timothy 3:16-17; Colossians 3:3-16 (*ibid.*, p. 96).

"Satan left to return many times. Here was the first being endowed with human nature Who had defeated Satan under all circumstances for thirty years. This was Satan's first defeat under Christ's ministry. His last is yet to come, and it shall come by this same Christ Jesus...Jesus was probably fed by the angels, as was Elijah by one of them (I Kings 19:4-7). Satan and suffering...then angels, refreshment and rest. God had indeed given his angels charge, and they came to Him who refused to put the Father to the test. But they did not succor Jesus during his temptation, for that was to be resisted by Himself alone (Isaiah 63:3), (*ibid.*, pp. 100-101).

"We can see several reasons, humanly speaking, why the

humanity of Jesus should be made a ground for committing the judgment of the races of men to Him: (1) Jesus having experienced our infirmities and temptations, we can feel sure of His sympathy, Hebrews 4:15-16. (2) Jesus, partaking of the nature of both God and man, is, because of his unique nature, the only fit daysman or umpire between them, Job 9:33 (*ibid.* pp. 203-04).

"In this section, Jesus is presented as overcoming temptations by which all merely human beings have been overcome...our author shows us in this section how Satan can be resisted. Jesus achieved His victory by familiarity with the word of God, coupled with unhesitating acceptance of even the slightest indications of God's will. No man can resist, as He did, without His reverence for God's will and His acquaintance with God's word. As we approach Him in these two particulars, we will approach Him in His perfect resistance to the temptations of the devil" (*Matthew & Mark*, pp 44-45).

—Compiled by Jeff Asher

The Third Commandment

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain" (Deuteronomy 5:11).

The third commandment forbids the use of the name of God in oaths or in common discourse rashly, irreverently,

unnecessarily, or without weighty or sufficient cause.

It ought to break the heart of believers to hear the name of God lifted up in the vain, vulgar and vicious ways so common to conversation and in popular music and literature. I do not understand a nation whose motto is "In God We Trust" that outlaws recognizing that fact in a pledge of allegiance or lifting up His name in prayer before a school function, but at the same time insists defaming the name of God is to be allowed and even encouraged. No wonder judges have banished the Ten Commandments from public buildings.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 35

August 31, 2008

The Purpose of Jesus' Miracles

One of the greatest studies in the New Testament is that of the miracles of Jesus. From the time of childhood, we are fascinated with the mighty deeds which our Lord did while He was among men. At first, they amaze us. Then, they convict us. Finally, they assure us.

We are amazed at their character and intrigued by the greatness of the power which they display. We are ultimately convicted, as was Nicodemus that Jesus is a teacher which came from God because no man could do what He did unless God was with Him. These mighty deeds assure us that He who calmed the tempests, healed the sick and raised the dead is very God and Savior of us all.

The miracles of Jesus serve a definite purpose in God's plan for revealing Jesus and salvation through Him to mankind. The narratives of the miracles are not fairy tales or legends. They are definite interventions of God through supernatural means to bear witness that Jesus was His Son and our Savior.

Definitions of Terms

There are three words used throughout the New Testament to designate what we commonly

refer to as "miracles." The term miracle, which would be better translated as "powers", denotes the divine source by which the deed is done. It is the word which signifies the supernatural origin of the work.

The term "sign" designates the purpose or design of the miracle. A sign is designed to demonstrate authority, or confirm the testimony given by the miracle worker.

The term "wonders" always occurs with one or both of these other terms. It signifies the marvelous, amazing and undeniable character of the miracle.

Their Purpose

Identification—Jesus worked miracles in order to identify Himself as the Christ (Matthew 11:3-5). There are no specific OT prophecies which attribute miracles to the Messiah.

However, Matthew 12:17-21 quotes Isaiah 42:1-4 as being fulfilled through the miraculous works of Jesus. That the Jews expected miracles to be worked by the Messiah is indicated in John 7:31. Jesus recognized the importance of the miracles as a means of identifying Himself when He said, "Except ye see

signs and wonders ye will not believe" (John 4:48).

Recommendation—The New Testament teaches that miracles serve the function of establishing the authority by which a teacher speaks or acts (John 9:29-33). Jesus established Himself as a teacher come from God by the miracles which He did (John 3:2). In all those areas where Jesus exercised authority to reform, reprove or rebuke, His actions were approved by the signs which He gave (Matthew 9:6; John 5:10-11).

Confirmation—Miracles also serve the purpose of verifying the personal testimony or witness of the one working the miracle. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. He called upon those who were skeptical to believe the works which were corroborating testimony of His claim (John 10:37-38). God bore witness of Jesus in the miracles, signs and wonders which He did (Hebrews 2:3-4).

Their Character as Evidence of Christ's Claims

The value of miracles as proof of the identity of our Lord is seen in an examination of their character. In the first century there were many who came claiming to be Christ (Matthew

24:23–24). These false Messiahs would seek to deceive even the elect with “power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9). However, the miracles of Jesus were of such a character that all may discern the source of His authority and the validity of His claims (John 20:30–31). There is no doubting “whence He is” (John 9:29–33).

The miracles of Jesus were dignified, that is, Jesus did not work miracles for the sake of notoriety. His was not a “carnival” ministry. He even forbade some whom He healed to tell about what He had done (Matthew 8:4). Jesus worked His miracles either out of compassion or for some specific desired end. He was not in His miracle working given to theatrics or charlatanism.

The miracles of Jesus were not selective. He did not screen the crowd so that only those with non-discernible illnesses were brought to Him (Matthew 8:16). He worked every conceivable type of miracle. There was no situation before Him that He did not demonstrate His authority over it.

Jesus dealt with obvious cases of illness, disease and deformity. The “miracles” Jesus worked were sure demonstrations of the supernatural (Matthew 12:22–23). The cases that came to Him were such that those who witnessed knew that the power of God had been exercised. Whether or not Jesus worked a miracle was beyond doubt. Those that were healed were men known to actually have been lame, deaf or blind throughout the community (John 9:8–10, 20). Jesus did not

travel about with a select group that was healed in every town.

Those that were the object of Jesus’ healing powers made total recoveries. They were “made whole” (Mark 6:56; 7:31–35). There were no relapses or partial healings. Those that came to Jesus were completely restored.

When Jesus worked a miracle, it was instantaneous. The miracles of Jesus were not gradual but immediate in their occurrence (Matthew 8:3). The words of Scripture are “straightway” and “immediately,” not “eventually” or “after a while.” Furthermore, Jesus was always successful in His miracles. He never failed or made excuses (Matthew 12:15).

Jesus came preaching the Gospel of our redemption (Matthew 4:17). The great salvation which He revealed to us God confirmed through the miracles which He did (Hebrews 2:3–4). That He was God’s Son, He showed by the signs which He gave (Acts 2:22). That we should do as He says He showed us by the works which His Father gave Him to do (John 10:25, 32, 37). Yes, these things are written that you might believe and have everlasting life through His name.

—Jeff Asher

The Fourth Commandment

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Exodus 20:8–9).

God made the Sabbath day for man and not man for the

Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). And, while we are no longer required to observe the Jewish ordinance of not working on Saturday (Colossians 2:16), there is, nevertheless, a principle to be derived from it. No man will be what he ought to be working all of the time. Even Jesus recognized this when He urged His Disciples, “Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while” (Mark 6:31).

We must make time for the refreshing and renewing of the inner man. Jesus said, “Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Matthew 6:25). Man does not live by bread alone and there is much more to living than working for money to spend on things!

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 36

September 7, 2008

How Do You Know You Were Saved?

Sometime ago I was in conversation with a friend of mine, and the subject of her twelve-year-old daughter came up. The mother remarked that her daughter had been “saved” a few nights before. She related some of the circumstances surrounding the occasion, all of which made me want to ask the question, “How do you know she was saved?” I forget now what prevented me from asking the question, but I do remember that I have thought about the incident many times since then.

Of course, neither the conversation nor the experience it related is unique. Surely such happens every day, many times a day. The problem is, these “saved” experiences have so many different and varied particulars about them that one would be forced to conclude that there are many different ways to be “saved,” if all these be true experiences. That is what should trouble the honest seeker of truth. Are there, indeed, many roads to heaven and many ways to be saved? Is there no significance to the words of God’s son, who declared, “For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth to life, and few are they that find it” (Matt. 7:14).

I recall hearing of one woman who stoutly declared she was saved, and she knew it because she opened her cupboard one day and saw Jesus sitting on a biscuit. He then proceeded to tell her she was saved. Others declare that all of a sudden a strange feeling came over them a “feeling better felt than told” and they concluded they had been saved. Some relate hearing a still small voice “speaking peace to the soul.” Some avow they were saved at the “mourner’s bench” when they “prayed through,” and still others maintain that God saved them the moment they had the conviction of belief in their hearts. And on we could go, describing the various experiences that many claim as proof of salvation.

But can we not have some accurate guide or gauge upon which we can rely? After all, our feelings can deceive us. I remember thinking as a young man that I had a brain tumor. It was just before I was to get married (I’m not claiming any connection), and I had been reading something having to do with the brain. One article evidently discussed brain tumors, and I began to develop the symptoms that were right

there in the article. Of course, it turned out that I didn’t have a tumor, and thus my feelings deceived me. A well-known Biblical case of false feelings has to do with Jacob and Joseph. You will recall that after the older brothers of Joseph sold him into slavery, they dipped his coat in the blood of an animal they had slain and then presented the garment to their father. Jacob was very distraught and was convinced that a wild beast had slain his son. It was many years later that he learned the truth that his son was not dead. True, he had been deceived, but that didn’t change his feelings one bit! He would not have felt a bit different if Joseph actually had been slain. And this is why it is so dangerous for us to trust our eternal salvation to mere feelings. Jeremiah said, “The heart is deceitful above all things...” (Jeremiah 17:9). The wise Solomon declared, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). We cannot get to heaven on our feelings or what seems right.

We must consider the role of Satan while on this subject. “He is a liar, and the father thereof”

(John 8:44). He is called the “deceiver” in Revelation 12:9. When we note his approach to Eve, King Saul, Uzzah, yea all sinners, we must recognize that his whole campaign is one of deceit. Now, if he could deceive one into thinking or feeling saved, this would suit his purpose well. Is it possible for Satan so to do? Certainly! Therefore I say again, we cannot get to heaven on our feelings or what seems right.

What shall we do, then? Go to the Bible, the Word of God. It contains “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). Note the words of Romans 8:16: “The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God.” Mark the difference between bearing witness “to” and bearing witness “with.” The Holy Spirit does not come and tell me or anyone else that we are children of God. That is not what the text says at all, even though many misinterpret the passage that way. Rather, the Holy Spirit bears witness with my spirit. Observe:

The Holy Spirit Says In His Word:

- Believe (John 3:16; 8:24)
- Repent of Sins (Acts 2:38)
- Confess (Romans 10:10)
- Be Baptized (Mark 16:16)

My Spirit Says:

- I Have Believed
- I Have Confessed My Faith
- I Have Repented of My Sins
- I Have Been Baptized

Therefore, I am a child of God. I know I have been saved, because the Holy Spirit bore witness that if I would do these things I would have my sins forgiven. When my spirit can testify that I have done these things, then the two spirits bear witness with one another and the results are certain. I don’t have to depend on what someone else tells me, nor on the sometimes erroneous feelings of the heart. What could be simpler?

Dear reader, do you know you have been saved, or do you just feel saved? Take your Bible from the shelf and dust it off. Turn to the book of Acts (the book of conversions) and read there how thousands upon thousands of people became simple, non-denominational Christians. Add all the facts together, and then when your spirit can testify that you have done what they did, you will know that you have been saved, and that you are a Christian just as they were. Until you have done this, you have no hope of salvation.

—Jefferson David Tant

The Fifth Commandment

“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you” (Deuteronomy 5:16).

Paul calls the Fifth Commandment, the first commandment with a promise

(Ephesians 6:2). Israel was promised national security so long as they were a people that revered and carried for their parents.

If there is anything that is contributing to the decay of American values, it is the decline in our respect for the aged and the trend toward expecting the state to render care for one’s parents. God says a great nation is one that respects the elderly and honors their presence and contributions. The heathen forsake their elderly, but a righteous people “honor father and mother...[they] rise up before the gray-headed and honor the aged” (Leviticus 19:32).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 37

September 14, 2008

The Problem of Spiritual Immaturity

I marvel that after almost two thousand years, we have not yet learned to place the emphasis on the spiritual man.

Concerning this problem the Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians as follows: *“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”* (I Corinthians 3:1–3).

The great evils that accompany those who are untaught in the church are listed in verse three as envying, strife, division. This simply means that without the development of the spiritual man, the church of our Lord will be continually beset with strife and division. When error seeks a following it always looks for those who have not grown spiritually. An untaught membership can only be the result, when the emphasis is not placed on the inner man.

Prayer

The inner man cannot grow without prayer. When trouble comes to the body of Christ, it comes from those who have not learned to pray. The admonition to “pray without ceasing,” the constant example of Jesus as He withdrew to pray, the steadfastness of the early church in continuing in prayers, all cry out for the development of the souls of men through supplication in prayer.

The man who prays recognizes his dependence upon a higher power. In so doing, he is less likely to follow his own way, and “walk as men.” At the same time, he recognizes authority, in that he prays, not for his own will to be done. There is little chance that the part of man made in the image of God can ever develop without much praying.

Bible Study

The inner man cannot grow without study. Paul wrote to Timothy, that such study would cause the Christian to become full grown, in rightly dividing the word of Truth (II

Timothy 2:15). When strife and division seeks fertile soil they inevitably find it with those who have not studied.

It was this spiritually dwarfed element in the body of Christ that cried out for the organ, the missionary society, and the innovations and the digressions of past generations. It is this same group who refuse to study that threatens the unity of the church in our times. We are still neglecting the inner man.

Brethren will not sit down with their New Testament to test whether or not their practices are scriptural. Rather, they echo the hollow cries of “tradition” and “sentiment.” Just as Timothy would have to hang his head in shame if he had refused to give proper diligence to studying the word of God, brethren today should be ashamed when they cannot prove their practices by the Bible. They have failed with the Corinthians of old to put off the carnal man.

Meditation

The inner man cannot grow without meditation. In Psalm

One, David declares that the man of God delights in the law of the Lord, "and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (v. 2). To give the inner man the proper opportunity for growth, God's people need not only to read His word but to store it up in their hearts, to think about it as they go about their daily task, and to turn it over again, and again in their minds.

Paul teaches in Colossians 3:16 that the word of Christ should "dwell in us richly in all wisdom." When God's word fills the heart, there is not room for those things that destroy. It will shape and mold and feed the inner man until he becomes strong and able to survive.

In the Old Testament, in Ecclesiastes 7:4, the writer declares "that the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." This could not happen to the man who meditates on the word of the Lord.

Study and meditation are reflected by the language we use in connection with spiritual things and applications. The spiritual man will correctly use the language of inspiration. Observe in Nehemiah 13:24 that the Jews spoke a mongrel language and could no longer speak the pure speech of Israel. This language of Ashdod reflected their carnality. They had lost sight of God's purposes for Israel, and the blood line of the

Saviour, and talked like the nations around about them.

When we speak as the Bible speaks, when we call New Testament things by New Testament names, when we let the words of the Holy Spirit, as spoken by the Apostles represent divine truth, the inner man continues to grow. An impure speech encourages a dwarfed and misshapen soul. The inner man lives in a climate that spells disaster for his well being.

Are We Yet Carnal?

In this day when so many are concerned with the physical side of the kingdom we are losing sight of the growth of the inner man. We are more concerned with methods than with message. We are more concerned with numbers than with righteousness. We are more concerned with impressions than with indoctrination. I marvel that we still want to, "walk as men."

—James P. Miller

The Sixth Commandment

The sixth commandment says, "You shall not murder." (Deuteronomy 5:17).

However, America is rapidly becoming a culture of death and murder. There are 1.37 million or more abortions in the US every year. These account for nearly three percent of all the abortions in

the world. This is over 100 times the number of citizens murdered in this country by felons committing violent crimes.

The Bible says, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." Every one of us, born and unborn, young and old, bears the image of God within. It is this likeness with the Divine that exalts us above the beasts and demands that murder be avenged.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 38

September 21, 2008

Into All the World

“And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). These were among the parting words of Christ as he left the earth for his coronation in heaven. They presented at once the universal scope of the Gospel, and placed upon the apostles, as His selected ambassadors, the responsibility of discharging these directives. That they took seriously their task is evidenced by the fact that within their lifetime Paul could pen these words: “and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Colossians 1:23).

Urgency

The urgency of the work permitted no slack. They moved under a sense of compulsion for Paul said “woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel.”

That sense of urgency which possessed the apostles infected their converts in the early

church. Those genuinely converted desired the salvation of their friends and acquaintances.

It was the spirit manifested by Philip who went to Nathanael to share the knowledge that he had found that One of whom the Law and the prophets spoke (John 1:45). This was the spirit of the scattered church as its members were dispersed and “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). Pressed by this compelling charge, Philip went down to the city of Samaria and “preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). Upon his obedience to the faith Paul “straightway preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). This spirit of urgency moved Paul throughout the Roman Empire teaching now a handful of women on a river side, then a number of philosophers on Mars Hill; now a jailor and his family, then proclaiming Christ in Caesar's house (Acts 16, 17, 28).

This was all a debt to be paid. “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians;

both to the wise, and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you who are at Rome also” (Romans 1:14-15).

This same spirit was imparted to those taught by Paul. To Timothy he said “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:2). Thus, the message is to be perpetuated.

Individually & Collectively

Not only were Christians individually concerned with reaching the lost, but the church in its collective capacity engaged itself primarily in the work of spreading the Gospel message into all the world.

The church in Thessalonica was commended because from it “sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not speak anything” (I Thessalonians 1:8).

Congregations were helping to send the Truth in their support of those who preached it. Paul was supported financially by "other churches" while he preached in Corinth (II Corinthians 11:8). On another occasion he was supported by the church in Philippi "for even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity" (Philippians 4:16).

A Pressing Need Today

Nothing is more needed now than a sense of urgency toward the lost on the part of each Christian, who has the power, whether he recognizes it or not, to fill every corner of his own private world with the saving message.

Great mass movements may be conceived and executed under the sound of trumpets and with the general heraldry which characterizes the arrival of the circus in town, but these cannot begin to compare in effectiveness with the simple person to person relating of the story of Christ and his church. There is too much of a tendency to feel that group activity can discharge our private responsibilities.

In accord with the need for more personal teaching, there is a need for congregations to become impressed with the importance of sending and supporting men in remote quarters of this nation where the plea for the old paths is unheard, as well as into those far off nations where a spiritual darkness blacker than midnight has settled. There are

yet many nations in which God's power to save, has not been proclaimed, at least in modern times. In all of these nations there are to be found men and women who would be receptive to the Truth should they learn it. They stand in the same condition as those found in the market place at the eleventh hour. They had not entered the vineyard because "no man hath hired" them. The "hiring" is equal to the "new birth," to being "added," "translated," and "grafted." It is salvation (Matthew 20:1-16).

Nothing could be more appropriate in conclusion than the words of Jesus: "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into the harvest" (Matthew 9:27-38).

—Connie W. Adams

The Seventh Commandment

"You shall not commit adultery."
(Deuteronomy 5:18).

In the beginning God made man. From the man He made woman and brought her to him, saying, "A man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh." God's intention was that one man and one woman

should be joined together in marriage for an entire lifetime.

Today, men have no regard for the either the Law or the intent of God. 49 out of 50 states allow no-fault divorce. Several states are seeking to redefine marriage in order to solemnize sodomy. Preachers, pastors, and priests are commonly reported as adulterers. Yet, the Bible still says, *"Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge"* (Hebrews 13:4).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 39

September 28, 2008

Into all the World (2)

That the gospel message is universal in scope is recognized by all who have even a slight amount of Biblical knowledge. It is the remedial system sent forth from God to souls floundering in sin. Wherever sin may be found, there must the gospel be carried. All who have been bathed in that fountain filled with Immanuel's blood should find no rest until they have made every possible effort to teach the truth to their neighbors, friends, relatives and to send it into distant places where such truth has either been withheld from the people, or where it once was taught but has now been silenced. Christians individually and collectively must be engaged in this pressing work.

A Proper Zeal Necessary

While zeal is woefully lacking in many quarters, and while we would promote it in every scriptural way, it needs to be observed that zeal apart from knowledge can be dangerous.

It is evident that more and more brethren are impressed with their responsibilities in reaching the lost of earth with the gospel. This is cause for rejoicing. But zeal alone is not enough. The person who would teach another must not only be eager to talk with his neighbor, he must know what to say. It is not enough for a preacher to desire to go into some distant field; he must be grounded and settled in the faith so that he will wisely and properly instruct those he may convert. Nor is it sufficient for a congregation to be zealous to send a man to some field, she must accomplish her work through the local church and her elders must not assume more oversight than God intended for them to have. It will now be shown that in some respects the people of God have demonstrated more zeal than they have knowledge (cf. Romans 10:2).

Zeal without Knowledge

The men who are supported to preach in foreign or distant fields are important. If a young man is a student in a college operated by brethren,

sometime or other during his stay there he will hear reports from men in what are sometimes referred to as the "mission field." Or he may engage in a study in what is styled a "mission study class."

The writer recalls being stirred quite deeply by a preacher from New York who visited the campus when he was a student, with but little persuasion he would have "struck off" for New York. There have been cases when young men just out of school have gone off to some foreign country to preach.

While there is a need for preachers all over the world, zeal must be tempered with knowledge. It would be good for the man to demonstrate his faithfulness among brethren who can encourage him and advise him when he needs it. It would also make it easier for him to secure adequate support. Then he needs to make every preparation which can be made before he embarks. If another language is to be learned, it would be helpful to work on that before going. The customs, history

and nature of the people among whom he shall go ought to be studied.

We are not inspired as were the apostles. We have seen brethren on the foreign field come up with some of the most "harebrained" schemes to get before the people. Many are quite loose doctrinally. Men ought to go and brethren ought to support them, but men who have proved their soundness and who have their feet under them ought to go.

The manner in which brethren support those sent can show more zeal than knowledge. At the close of World War II considerable zeal for the lost of other nations manifested itself.

The spark was fanned into flame and brethren began to visualize whole nations turning to the Lord. Preachers were sent and supported through a sponsoring church. That church assumed responsibility for the work and asked other churches to assist by sending funds to her and said she in turn would direct it to the preachers. Here was zeal, yes, but did they not know that the only method employed in the early church for supporting preachers in the field was by each church sending directly to that man? "Other churches" sent wages to Paul (II Corinthians 11:8). The church at Philippi sent to him on another occasion (Philippians 4:16). There is not a case on record in the New Testament where one church acted as a forwarding agent for others. Yet, in the zeal of

the hour, all that was overlooked, and what was cause for great rejoicing has been turned into unspeakable sorrow as the sacred body of Christ has been torn by strife and discord by those who in their zeal had begun a practice unauthorized and which could have been avoided by knowledge of the Truth and faithful adherence to it. When men go forth being sustained by a sponsoring church, and preach to others about returning to the old paths, speaking where the Bible speaks, and restoring the church to its original purity, they are inconsistent. Let any of them show from scripture justification for their practice and we will gladly withdraw the charge.

There has been so little zeal for the lost of earth, it is a shame that many who have gone, in their zeal have forsaken knowledge. Both are necessary.

—Connie W. Adams

The Eighth Commandment

"*You shall not steal,*" is the eighth commandment (Deuteronomy 5:19).

Theft is perhaps the most common crime in any society. In America today stealing is organized and sanctioned by 42 of the 50 states. I refer to the lottery.

Gambling is just as much stealing as dueling is murder. Although by mutual consent, it is nevertheless what it is. In gambling the participants wager or stake in a pool an amount, which all agree the "winner" will receive as the result of the outcome of some predetermined chance. The winner takes from the losers giving nothing of value in return.

The Bible says, "*He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need*" (Ephesians 4:28).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 40

October 5, 2008

The New Testament Plan of Salvation

Most every careful thinking person at some time in his life thinks about his eternal destiny. This is a very important subject. It is not enough just to think about salvation; one must learn what to do and do it.

No greater question has ever been asked concerning the individual than the question: "What must I do to be saved?" The answer to this question has needlessly caused a great amount of religious confusion in the present century. Is this because the Bible is not clear in giving an answer? Or is it because preachers and religious leaders have ignored some clear passages on the subject or have misapplied them?

It cannot be that the Bible is not clear on the matter because that is one of its main themes. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, presents four major themes: man is a sinner and can do nothing by himself to procure his salvation; God loves man and desires his

salvation; God gave His Son to die that man's sins might be remitted; man must do something in obedience to God to obtain this salvation provided for him. How could such an important matter be treated vaguely in the New Testament? It claims to be our only guide (II Timothy 3:16–17), and must be rightly divided to learn the truth (II Timothy 2:15).

The Need for a Remedial Plan

It is clearly evident from the Bible that salvation cannot come purely by law. The Jews were given a Law which could not give salvation because none kept it flawlessly (Hebrews 8:7). James says if one keeps the whole law, yet offends in one point, he is guilty of all (James 2:10). To be saved by the law one must keep it perfectly, but no man ever did that (Romans 3:9–23).

It is likewise evident that man could not work out a formula without law that would give him remission of

sins. The Gentiles were without this Law given to the Jews, and they were no better off (Rom. 2:14; 11:32). Since neither the Gentiles without the Law nor the Jews with the Law could obtain forgiveness for a single sin committed, some plan must be provided by God through which this salvation could be obtained. This is what we call the Gospel Plan of Salvation.

The Plan of Salvation as Taught in the Gospel

The first thing an honest seeker for truth must do is to divide the Bible as it should be. We should not go to the part that tells of Noah's salvation from the flood to learn what God wants us to do. That would be failing to rightly divide the Bible. What God demanded of Noah, Moses, Abraham, or any other person living in former dispensations is not what he commands of men today. One section deals with men before the death and resurrection of Christ and the other with men since that time. A serious mistake made

by many religious leaders and teachers is to fail to distinguish between the Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ. Since we are looking for the salvation that could not be produced by the Law, we must find the answer in some section of the Bible other than the Law of Moses. That leaves the New Testament in which to find the answer.

Plans Not Taught in the New Testament

Everyone knows that there are several systems of salvation taught by the denominations today, some of them conflicting widely. Men are required to do various things in an effort to reach forgiveness of sins, some of them differing so widely as to be incongruous. Shall we say that God is the author of such confusion? Certainly not (I Corinthians 14:33). God has one single plan of salvation, and to be saved every man must submit to it.

These man-made denominational systems of salvation fall into two classes: (1) salvation by faith only and (2) salvation by works only. It is impossible for both of these to be true at the same time. Neither of them may be true, or one may be true, but both cannot be true. *(To be continued next issue)*

—H.E. Phillips

Why So Many Hate the Bible

I have often wondered why people are so eager to disregard and disobey the Bible. It seems that with the slightest suggestion of an error in the word of God many people hasten to magnify the charge of error and go their way upon the assumption that the Bible is a book of the same caliber as those written by man. Why are men so easily persuaded that the Bible is not a perfect guide? Why are they so hostile to this Book?

First, it is true that man naturally resists that which claims to be so perfect that no improvements can be made. The Bible makes the claim to be absolutely perfect and does not permit man to make any changes for the better in his own view. This claim causes some to search for errors and weakness just to make it on their own level.

Second, the Bible claims to have the complete control over sinful man. It is the only power of God to lead men from darkness to light. Anything that claims absolute power and control over man is resisted by those who dislike authority, and there are many such people today.

Third, man does not like his sinful and weak practices exposed. He would rather have his good points emphasized and his sinful life covered and ignored. The Bible does not do this. It exposes the hypocrites, it pronounces doom upon all who deny Christ and despise his word, it quickens the anger of

those who are condemned for building their own religions, and it shuts out of the kingdom all who are immoral and anti-spiritual. Many will not accept the Bible as the word of God upon these grounds.

Fourth, the Bible is a revelation "once for all delivered" and cannot be changed. Some would prefer a revelation that could be added to or revised every generation to meet the needs of a changing world, but the Bible will not be changed or modified. This provokes the hatred of millions of people.

Man must learn that the word of God is the mind of God and cannot be lowered to the level of man's thinking. As God's ways and thoughts are far above man's thoughts, so the word of God is as far above man's writings.

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Carthage, TX 75633
(903) 693-8336

Sunday

Bible Class 9:30 AM
Assembly 10:25 AM
Assembly 6:00 PM

Wednesday

Bible Class.....7:00PM

Website

www.bibletalk.net

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Kerry Henry (903) 836-4438
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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 41

October 12, 2008

The New Testament Plan of Salvation (2)

Faith Only Salvation

Among the various doctrines the most popular is that held by the majority of Protestant denominations. They differ somewhat as to the process of this system, but they are generally agreed that salvation is by "faith only". The process of reasoning in formulating the plan is simple: find a passage that attributes salvation to faith and then conclude that salvation requires nothing more. Then explain out every other passage that may attribute salvation to any other condition. Many proof texts are used which have one of two things in common: they either have to do with matters under the Law of Moses, or else speak of the entire plan under the term "Faith" in contrast to the Law of Moses. The principle texts are: Luke 7:50; John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Acts 16:30; Romans 5:1; 9:30-33; Ephesians 2:1, and others of similar import.

None of these passages are denied, nor do we deny that everyone is saved by faith. But it is entirely different when someone adds the word *only* to the proposition. Not one of these passages teaches that one

is saved by *faith only*. There is a big difference.

We are saved by the blood of Christ, but not by the *blood only*. If that were true faith could not enter. *Faith only* means nothing except faith. That would eliminate repentance, prayer and other things they require the sinner to do to be forgiven.

Not only does the New Testament not teach the doctrine of salvation by faith only, it condemns it in no uncertain terms. In James 2:14 we have an inspired argument to this very end: "*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?*"

Now he is stating the very proposition—"can a faith without works of any kind save a man?" In verse 17: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." He clearly states that faith without works is dead. Will a dead faith save anyone? If so, the devils have nothing to fear

in eternity, for they go that far.

It will do no good to say that this is "historical" faith, for there is not one single hint anywhere in the Bible of such a thing.

The difference between saving faith and all other kinds is that it works in obedience and the other does not. Whatever one calls it; faith alone is dead and will not save.

But James goes on to prove from the history of Abraham that the faith that blessed him was one that obeyed. There is not a single example anywhere in the Old or New Testaments that shows a man was blessed until his faith obeyed God. That is the difference in "faith only" and a "live faith."

In verse 24 James says: "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by *faith only*." This is the only place in the entire Bible where the words—"faith only"—are found together.

This teaches that one is *not* saved by faith only. There are some Scriptures that thoroughly destroy the system of salvation by faith only. In John 12:42-43 we read: "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many *believed* on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not

confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." Here were some that believed on Christ, and the same writer said in chapter 3:36 that "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life..." Were they saved? They were if faith only saves.

But the obvious meaning of this passage is that some among the chief rulers believed as others who were saved but did not go on to confess him because of fear. Jesus said those who would not confess him before men would be lost (Matthew 10:32--33).

In Acts 2:38 the people who heard Peter and the apostles were "pricked in their hearts," which means they believed. Peter did not tell them to believe when they asked what to do, and the reason is that he knew they already believed. He told them what more they must do in addition to just believing—"repent and be baptized." This proves something more than belief.

In Acts 16:30 Paul told the jailer to believe on the Lord and he would be saved. Then he preached Christ that he might believe. After the jailor was baptized he brought them into his house and set meat before them, "and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house" (verse 34). His believing included his obedience and was not "faith only."

The plan of salvation taught in the New Testament was not a plan of "faith only." It included something in addition to faith but based upon it.

Works Only Salvation

This position is the opposite extreme of faith only salvation. It is the principle idea practiced by Roman Catholics and is included in many other denominational practices. One strange thing is that most of the religious bodies who teach the doctrine of "faith only" actually practice the doctrine of "works only." A denial of this is expected but the evidence is too strong to deny.

Works only means salvation results by works of some sort without faith. The majority of religious bodies today practice infant baptism, and their creeds show that they believe in infant damnation or original sin. If one believes an infant is born in sin and lost, he must be consistent to have some plan by which the infant can be saved. Baptism upon the faith of his parents is used for this purpose. God does not save us on the faith of others. If an infant is saved from original sin by baptism without faith—no infant can believe—then is it not by works without faith? Every practice of infant baptism tells of a salvation by works without faith. But Hebrew writer says: "Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

—H.E. Phillips

The Ninth Commandment

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Deuteronomy 5:20). Solomon said that there are seven things which the Lord hates. Among

them were "a lying tongue" and "a false witness who utters lies" (Proverbs 6:17–19).

Lying is so common in our society that most folks think nothing about it. 65% of Americans said it was alright to lie to protect someone's feelings, and only 52% could say lying was never justified.

Truth tellers are in short supply. We have in recent years heard Presidents, congressmen, corporate executives, sports figures, entertainers, teachers and preachers lie. When someone comes along willing to tell the truth we are aghast and, more often than not, the majority gets angry. Yet the Bible says, "Speak the truth to one another..." (Zechariah 8:16).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 42

October 19, 2008

The New Testament Plan of Salvation (3)

The place to begin is with the authority of Jesus Christ after his resurrection. Just before he ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of God and begin the reign over his kingdom, he assembled his apostles and gave them what we call the *Great Commission*. This commission tells us the plan of salvation today. The accounts of this are found in Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47; John 20:22-23. All these refer to the “great salvation” spoken of in Hebrews 2:3 that “first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” Before the Great Commission was given salvation was administered according to the will of Christ while on earth, but now his divine law—the Gospel—has forever established the terms by which all men, Jew or Gentile, must be saved.

There are five well defined steps that lead to the remission of sins. Moreover, these steps must be in proper order. Each one depends upon the one preceding. Let us study them in their order in obtaining forgiveness of sins.

Hearing the Gospel

God has bound preaching as the first condition of salvation. “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that

believe” (I Corinthians 1:21). This is the beginning point. Paul says the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16).

Unless this Gospel is preached salvation cannot follow. Not only must the Gospel be preached, it must be the ancient Gospel that was preached by the apostles. Any other gospel is condemned (Galatians 1:8-9).

When Philip came to the eunuch on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, he “began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35). When Peter related his experience in the house of Cornelius to those in Jerusalem, he says that he was sent to “tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14). This shows the importance of the Gospel in effecting effect salvation. It is in harmony with the great commission which says to “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.”

Faith or Belief

But what is the purpose of this preaching? It is belief. No man can be saved who does not believe the Gospel that is preached.

Just what should one believe? “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;

and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10). In verse 13: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” Believing is accepting as truth that which the Gospel teaches. We believe on Christ who is the central figure of the Gospel as the Saviour of the world. This is the second step, and leads naturally to the third.

Repentance

No man can be saved who does not repent, and no one can repent scripturally who does not first believe. Some religionists insist that repentance must come before faith so that faith can be the condition that saves. But if repentance is a condition, either before or after faith, it destroys the doctrine of “faith only.”

The Bible plainly teaches that repentance follows faith. “But without faith it is impossible to please him . . .” If repentance is before faith, it is without faith, and cannot possibly please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Besides this, the very nature of repentance demands faith. Repentance is the change of mind with regard to sin. Would an unbeliever do this? The very thing

that leads a man to turn from sin to righteousness is his faith. This faith comes from the preaching of God's word. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

After a person hears the Gospel he believes it. When he believes the Gospel he must repent of his sins. This is further proved by the example on Pentecost. After Peter had preached Christ, the people were "pricked in their hearts," which means that they believed what he preached and were convicted of their sins. Peter did not tell them to believe, for they had already done that; he told them to *repent*. Thus repentance must follow faith.

The Good Confession

Confession comes after repentance? This condition is not stated in the great commission, but it is implied because it is stated elsewhere in the New Testament as a condition to salvation. Paul said in Romans 10:9-10: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." This confession is made with the mouth *unto* (looking toward) salvation. The mouth is to confession what the heart is to belief. This is in harmony with John's statement in I John 4:15: "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God." It must follow faith or it will not please God. It must follow repentance or it would be a lie. Now what follows this confession?

Baptism for the Remission of Sins

This is the act of obedience that most denominationalists reject as a condition to salvation. The main reason is not that the Bible is not

clear on the subject; it is because some have died without obeying this command and these preachers want to entertain some hope of their salvation. They know if baptism is a condition, and if these have died without it, they are lost. The best way to solve the problem is to denounce baptism as a condition to salvation.

Peter told the multitude on Pentecost who believed his preaching to "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The expression "for the remission of sins" means exactly the same as the statement

by Christ when he gave the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:28: "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The expressions are identical in the original language and carry exactly the same meaning. If one says that "for" means "because of" in Acts 2:38, it must carry the same meaning in Matthew 26:28, which would cause Christ's blood to have been shed "because of" the remission of sins, instead of "in order to" their remission.

—H.E. Phillips

The Eighth Commandment

"*You shall not steal*," is the eighth commandment (Deuteronomy 5:19).

Theft is perhaps the most common crime in any society. In America today stealing is organized and sanctioned by 42 of the 50 states. I refer to the lottery.

Gambling is just as much stealing as dueling is murder. Although by mutual consent, it is nevertheless what it is. In gambling the participants wager or stake in a pool an amount, which all agree the "winner" will receive as the result of the outcome of some predetermined chance. The winner takes from the losers giving nothing of value in return.

The Bible says, "*He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need*" (Ephesians 4:28).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 43

October 26, 2008

The New Testament Plan of Salvation (4)

Baptism for Remission

This is the act of obedience that most denominational preachers reject as a condition to salvation. They do not so because the Bible is unclear on the subject. Rather, it is because some have died without obeying this command and these preachers want to entertain some hope of their salvation. They know if baptism is necessary, and these have died without it, they are lost. The best way to solve the problem is to denounce baptism as a condition to salvation.

Peter told the multitude on Pentecost to “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” The expression “for the remission of sins” means exactly the same as when used by Christ when He instituted the Supper in Matthew 26:28: “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many *for the remission of sins.*” The expressions are identical in the original language and carry exactly the same meaning. If one says that “for” means “because of” in Acts 2:38, it must carry the same meaning in Matthew 26:28, which would

have Christ's blood shed “because of” the remission of sins, instead of “in order to” their remission.

Peter associated repentance and baptism together for the same purpose. If baptism is “because of remission,” so is repentance. This would eliminate repentance as a condition to salvation and make it an effect. Baptism stands in the same relation to forgiveness as repentance. If repentance is in order to the remission of sins, so is baptism.

In addition to this we have the great commission of Christ. He told the apostles to preach to every creature, “that repentance and remission of sins might be preached to all nations.” In another account he placed baptism in the same relation to remission of sins. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” In these two passages we have faith, repentance and baptism all to the same end—remission of sins.

Peter plainly tells us that baptism is a condition to salvation. “*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward*

God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (I Peter 3:21). He says baptism “also now saves us.” Someone may object: “This is figurative.” The figure of our salvation by baptism is the salvation of Noah; as the waters of the flood carried him from the old corrupted world to a new one, so obedience in baptism carries us from the old world of sin into the new world of forgiveness.

Paul explains this design of baptism further when he writes: “*Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection*” (Romans 6:4, 6).

Notice the expressions: we are “buried by baptism” into death; then “like” Christ was raised, we are raised in baptism. It is a burial and a resurrection *like* the death and burial of Christ. Why did Christ have to die and be raised? All through the New Testament it is explained “for the remission of sins.” This act which is *like* that of Christ is for the same purpose. Notice further: We are raised to *walk in newness of life*. Is it possible to

walk in the new life without being raised to it? Certainly not! Then is it possible to be raised without being buried? No. How are we buried? This passage says we are buried with him by baptism. In Colossians Paul says we are buried with him *in* baptism (Colossians 2:12). The only conclusion from this passage is that baptism is essential to walk in the new life—one cannot get into it without baptism.

In Romans 6:17, *“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”* Now what is the *form* which they had obeyed? Obviously, the death and resurrection of Christ spoken of earlier in the chapter. Paul said the doctrine was the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Corinthians 15:1-4). The only form of the death, burial and resurrection which man can obey is baptism spoken of earlier by this writer.

Now what does obeying this *form* accomplish? *“Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness”* (Romans 6:18). Paul says it makes us free from sin *then*, at the time of obedience.

The man who labors to eliminate baptism as a condition to the remission of sins is fighting a losing battle from the beginning because God's word will stand forever. Every man who has not been scripturally baptized is yet in his sins and will remain so until he completes his obedience in this act.

—H.E. Phillips

Time for a Check-up

Termites are some of the most destructive creatures upon earth. They work under cover of darkness and in some of the most powerful buildings. The greatest opportunity for termites is in the building where the owner is certain no such thing could happen to him. Because there are no outward signs of destruction, the owner becomes careless and ignores all warnings to check up occasionally on the condition of his supporting timbers to his house. After a while he begins to notice signs of their evil work. When he investigates thoroughly he finds that his house is nearly gone.

Religion is like that. The evil work of undermining the very foundation of Christianity must work in secret until it gains the foothold to act in the open in bringing the downfall of the church. Strange as it may seem, the most ardent workers against the church are in the church. Just as termites get into the foundation of a building to do their work, those who would destroy the church must get into it and at the very foundation of a congregation.

There are early signs of termites working, and the same is true of religious termites. The experienced and trained man knows where to look and what to look for in locating them. The word of

God furnishes us the signs of evil workers in the church. Watch out for puffed up and over-zealous persons. Watch out for those who cry “let us do *big* things for the Lord.” Watch out for those who want the church to get into everything that comes along. Watch for the language that is not found in the word of God when they begin to describe the work and worship of the church.

Watch out for the slack in morals and personal duties of Christians. Watch out when everything is approved and nothing opposed. These may be signs of religious termites. We had better have a good check up of our own personal thinking and of the church.

—H.E. Phillips

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 44

November 2, 2008

What Do the Scriptures Say Concerning Salvation?

I want to begin a study of a series of lessons dealing with *salvation*. We will attempt to answer the questions: "What does the Bible have to say about being saved; that is, what does it have to say about salvation?" In the American Standard Bible that I use, the word "saved" appears 53 times and the word "salvation" appears 45 times in the New Testament alone. The phrase "remission of sins" eight times and the term "justified" 28 times. These are terms that have to do with a man being in a right relationship with the Lord.

One Verse Salvation

My friends I cannot think of anything that is more important for a man that is determined to go to heaven than to realize that he must handle aright the word of truth. (II Timothy 2:15). I have often suggested to you, and we will examine this further in these studies, that this involves the context of the Scripture, and the context involves a statement. You open your Bible and you read a statement and you look at that statement in terms of its

immediate context. You determine what the author is talking about in view of what precedes it and what follows it. Then you must look at all other related truths. This is called the remote context. The Bible is a unit and I must understand that. This is very important, it is a serious matter. It is my firm conviction that the cause of religious division is the fact that men reach conclusions based upon a partial truth. Not necessarily because they are mean or vicious or dishonest but because they have failed to recognize the importance of examining all of the facts in the case. A partial truth can be disastrous.

It is a tragic mistake to just focus in on one particular passage and conclude that is all I need to know about salvation or any other subject. To do this is to be guilty of spiritual suicide, and those preachers who lead you to believe that you can find all that you need to know about salvation in one passage are assisting you in committing spiritual suicide.

It Is Written Again

"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.' But He answered and said, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge concerning you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.' Jesus said to him, It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me. Then Jesus said to him, Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and

Him only you shall serve.' Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Our Lord, in Matthew 4:1-11, when He was being tempted by the Devil, stated a very basic and fundamental principle, which I call "the law of harmony," when He said "again it is written." Satan had stated a partial truth but Jesus said that is not all of what the Scriptures said for it is also written that "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Jesus did not allow him to argue a partial truth but required that all of the facts in the case be considered. Thus the Savior, in that brief statement, emphasized the importance of getting all of the facts in the case.

The Bible declares or implies that one passage may be limited or modified by another. That is what you have in Matthew chapter four. The devil cited Psalms 91:11-12 and Jesus replied with Deuteronomy 6:16 and thus pointed out that the passage in Deuteronomy limited or qualified the passage in Psalm 91. Jesus did not array one Scripture against another but demonstrated that one Scripture may limit, modify, or qualify another. To deny that is to deny the implication of this passage.

Thus, this leads me to the conclusion that I must be willing to look at all the facts in the case. If I am not willing to do that then I am not honest, I do not have enough integrity to look upon the face of God in peace. I must understand that when God promises me a blessing, and that blessing is predicated upon doing something, I cannot receive that

blessing without doing what He tells me to do and I may have to do more.

That is why we must look at what the Bible has to say about salvation. If we do not do this, then there just may be something that the Lord has told us to do that we have failed to do. That is why the Lord warned in Matthew 7:15-21 declaring, *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."*

—Elmer Moore

The Ninth Commandment

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Deuteronomy 5:20).

Solomon said that there are seven things which the Lord hates. Among them were "a lying tongue" and "a false witness who utters lies" (Proverbs 6:17-19).

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fifty-two percent could say lying was never justified.

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When someone comes along willing to tell the truth we are aghast and, more often than not, the majority gets angry. Yet the Bible says, *"These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates"* (Zechariah 8:16).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 45

November 9, 2008

Lessons on Salvation (I)

I want to begin a study of a series of lessons dealing with salvation. We will attempt to answer the questions: "What does the Bible have to say about being saved; what does it have to say about salvation?" In the American Standard Bible that I use, the word "saved" appears 53 times and the word salvation appears 45 times in the New Testament alone. The phrase "remission of sins" 8 times and the term "justified" 28 times. These are terms that have to do with man's right relationship to the Lord. It is a tragic mistake to just focus in on one particular passage and conclude that is all I need to know about salvation or any other subject. To do this is to be guilty of spiritual suicide, and those preachers who lead you to believe that you can find all that you need to know about salvation in one passage are assisting you in committing spiritual suicide.

Our Subject

I want us to look at Romans chapter ten. Let's begin reading in verse one and continue through verse 15. Then I want to examine this text.

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they

may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.' But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead) But what does it say? 'The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For

"whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"

Now friend, our subject is identified in this text. There are a number of things stated by the Apostle Paul and I will not be able, in the brief study today, to cover all of the points but will continue in our next lesson.

So, we have our subject introduced and some things about it stated. Let's look briefly at this text because there is a point or two I want to make. I intend to do precisely what I have suggested before, look at all the facts in the case.

The writer talks about his Jewish brethren (verse 1) and his prayer and supplication to God for them that they may be saved. Thus, our subject is introduced.

Ignorance May Impede Salvation

In the very next verse he tells us why he said this: "for I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge." They were zealous for God. They obviously had a belief in God, but their action was not according to what God would have them to be. Is that not what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23, "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*"

Why do you think the Bible says many are called but few are chosen? Why do you think the Bible teaches that broad is the way that leads to destruction and many are they that enter therein and straight is the way that leads to life and few there be that find it? Do you not realize that the devil will do everything in his power to keep you from learning the truth? Paul is saying that these Jews were ignorant of God's plan for making man right. They had zeal for God but not according to knowledge. Why? Verse three tells us: "*for being ignorant of God's righteousness.*" Do you not realize that "*the righteousness of God*" may refer to an attribute of God but that it may also refer to the plan of God for making man right? You must determine its meaning by the context. What is Paul talking about in Romans Ten? He is talking

about man being right before God. He is talking about salvation. Thus, he said "*being ignorant of God's righteousness.*" They were uninformed; they did not know what God expected of them. They were ignorant of God's righteousness and were seeking to establish their own. That is, they wanted to be saved or made right on their terms, not on God's terms. And so, the Jews were ignorant of God's plan for making man right and sought to establish their own plan. Consequently, the passage says they would not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. You cannot subject yourself to some quality or attribute of God but you can subject yourself to God's plan for making man right. I submit to you that the immediate context of Romans Ten indicates that people can be ignorant of God's plan for making man right.

Righteousness on Whose Terms?

Is not that what Jesus said in Matthew 7:21-23, that there were people who wanted to be right but they did not want to be right on Gods terms. He pointed out, in the context, that false teachers were misleading them. They are doing it now. That is why there are preachers in this area that are not willing to discuss their differences. They are not willing to take a look at some of the things that they teach that are opposed to what others teach.

It is interesting to note that in this same Roman letter (1:16-17) the apostle states: "*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation*

for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written: 'The just shall live by faith.'" The Gospel which is the faith (Galatians 1:11, 23) is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, and therein is man's faith.

Our salvation depends upon our doing all that the Scriptures teach concerning man's responsibility in the process of being saved. We dare not isolate one or two passages and ignore all that is said in other passages that may limit, modify or qualify our chosen passage.

—Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 46

November 16, 2008

Lessons on Salvation (II)

We have begun a series of studies around what is the most important subject you can read about in your New Testament—the subject of salvation. I based my remarks upon Romans 10:1–15 and pointed out to you that there are several terms that mean the same thing such as: “saved,” “justified,” “remission of sins” and “righteousness of God.” All these terms refer to salvation. The “righteousness of God” is used throughout Romans to refer to God's plan for making man right.

From Faith to Faith

I also referred to Romans 1:15–16 to show that man's salvation depends upon the Gospel of Christ for “it is the power of God unto salvation” and “in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” In the Gospel, God's plan for making man right is revealed “from faith to faith.”

The term “faith” is used in the New Testament in at least two ways. First, it is used objectively to refer to the Gospel of Christ. It is called “the faith” or “the word of faith” (Galatians 1:11, 23; Romans 10:8). Second, it refers to the faith that man has.

Jesus said “be not faithless but believing.” (John 20:27) and the Hebrew writer states: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (11:6). So, faith is sometimes used to refer to man's belief. Therefore, the phrase, “faith to faith” at Romans 1:17, refers to the belief that man has in the Gospel of Christ which is “the faith,” that is, that system of faith. This Gospel is indispensable to salvation (Ephesians 1:13).

The Faith of the Gospel

When “faith” is named and salvation (or justification, or being right, or similar terms as the case may be) is the result then “faith” should be understood as a comprehensive term, i.e. a term that is large in scope. It is “faith” that means the Gospel, which is “the faith” and man's faith in that Gospel. Now why would I say such a thing? Because that is what Romans 1:16 says: “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.” So, the only way man

will be made right is by the Gospel and his belief in it.

Consider Romans 10:6 again, and note that Paul speaks about the “righteousness which is of faith.” This faith is produced by the word or the Gospel (v 17). This faith is absolutely necessary and indispensable if man is to be made right in the sight of God; however, it is not just as an emotion, not just a conviction that he is right, but it is that he can turn to book, chapter and verse and put his finger on the text that indicates that what he did is exactly what the Bible teaches that he must do in order to be made right.

We Are Saved by the Word of God

I submit to you then that salvation depends upon faith, faith depends upon the word and, therefore, salvation depends upon the word of God. The word of God produces salvation; it is obviously necessary if man is to be saved.

In I Corinthians 1:18 the apostle declares “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Now, the “word of the

cross" is the word that tells you about the cross, it tells you why the cross was needed, it tells you what was accomplished on the cross and tells you how that man can appropriate the blessings provided in the cross. Paul says "to us who are being saved it is the power of God". That is, "the word of God" that tells you about the cross is the power of God unto salvation. Not only is that the case, but in I Corinthians 1:21 the apostle declares: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." He does not say through foolish preaching does he neighbor friend. He says "foolishness of preaching" as in the eyes of the world but not foolish to those who believe. That is the same context starting back in verse 18 where Paul said, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." That is also what Romans 1:16 said as already noted.

Note again, if you will, that in I Corinthians 15:2 the apostle Paul says: "By which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you— unless you believed in vain." Thus, man's eternal salvation depends on holding fast to the word that was preached unless we believe in vain. You cannot look upon the face of God in peace separate and apart from the word of God. The truth is important.

Man must hear the truth; he must come to a knowledge of the truth (John 8: 32); he must

believe truth (II Thessalonians 2:12); he must love truth (II Thessalonians 2:10); he must obey the truth (I Peter 1:22); he must walk in truth (3 John 4); his worship must be according to truth (John 4:24) because he will be judged by that same truth (John 12:47–48). Thus, hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, man believes it and in believing the Gospel he learns that he must repent, he changes his mind about sin, and in changing his mind about sin he confesses his faith in Jesus Christ that He is the Son of God and is buried with the Lord in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life. Having done this he is promised salvation: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Good News of Salvation

The Gospel is the good news about Christ, and it is a system of faith that tells man what he must do to please God. Obedience to the Gospel is essential for salvation. Furthermore, all that is revealed in this Gospel must be considered important and authoritative.

—Elmer Moore

The Tenth Commandment

The tenth commandment says, "You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17). Paul called this commandment to mind while writing the book of Romans, he said of it, "For also I did not know

lust except the law said: 'You shall not lust'" (7:7, MKJV).

The advertising and entertainment sectors of our society are on a non-stop campaign to promote lust and coveting. They tell me I need a bigger, newer, smarter, more efficient car like my neighbor's. They assure me that monstrous mortgage for that enormous house is easily affordable on my salary with the adjustable rate. They seek to convince me that I can have anything my heart desires provided I put it on the credit card at the astronomical interest rate of 25%.

The Bible says, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have" (Hebrews 13:5).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 47

November 23, 2008

Lessons on Salvation (III)

If you have a business failure that is bad; if you lose your health it is, of course, terrible. Over the last few days, we have observed some calamities that have happened from the standpoint of the weather, the rain, the floods and the fire in the San Jacinto river valley. A lot of people have suffered; but none of this can compare to the loss of your soul. These things are only temporary, some can be replaced, but the lost soul will suffer for eternity. We need to know what the Bible has to say about the subject of salvation.

It is tragic to assume you can learn all you need to know about salvation from just one passage. There are those that will tell you that “this is all you need to know about it.” Friends, that is not so; it is just not so. You need to learn all that the New Testament has to say about salvation; your eternal happiness depends on it.

The Gospel Is Necessary to Salvation

In Romans 10:8 our subject is identified: *“But what does it say? The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach).”*

The context indicates that being right in the sight of God is predicated upon faith (cf. 10:4). We learned that the word “faith” is used to refer to the Gospel of Christ and man's submission to it, man's belief and obedience of it. The writer of the Roman letter begins by talking about the obedience of faith (1:5) and ends with that same thing (16:26–27). Since salvation is predicated upon faith, and that faith is predicated upon the Gospel, it becomes obvious then that no man can be saved without the Gospel, the Word of Truth (Colossians 1:5). That is why the record says that the Gospel is God's power to save, (Romans 1:16).

Must Confess In Order to Be Saved

Now consider verses 9 and 10 of our text. The writer says: *“that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.”*

In the study of the Scriptures it is important to recognize that the order of record is always the order of occurrence *unless* it is

impossible for it to be so. When you read something in a particular order, you must accept that as the order in which the events occur unless there is a statement that indicates otherwise. Our text states some conditions to salvation that are not necessarily given in the order in which they are occur. It is *impossible* to confess what one does not believe—to do so you would be confessing a false conviction, a lie. Therefore, the order of record in verse 9 is not the order of occurrence. The very next verse indicates that this must be the case because the order in verse 10 is reversed.

The religious world in general affirms the concept that you are saved the moment that you believe—salvation at the point of faith before any acts of obedience. I have debated publicly a number of men on that subject. I know that they teach it. Does your preacher teach that “all you have to do is believe that Jesus died for you and immediately you are saved?” This passage denies that idea because Paul says: “For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.” As I have shown,

man does not confess before he believes because he would then confess that which he does not believe and that would be a falsehood and that could not make him right. So, man believes and then he confesses and then he is saved. Consider this then: it does not make any difference what it is that one has to do after belief, if the Bible teaches that there is anything that one has to do after he believes, then salvation does not occur at the point of belief.

Must Call on the Name of the Lord to Be Saved

Now, let's continue to read from verse 11 through verse 13. The writer says: "For the Scripture says: Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Now at this point in our study, I do not wish to get into the matter of what it means to "call on the name of the Lord." It is something that man must do. Whatever it is that man must do, he must do it in order to be saved because the passage says that "whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved". That is stated in Joel 2 verse 32 it is stated in Acts 2 verse 21 and it is stated again here. So, one must call on the name of the Lord to be saved, if he does not call on the name of the Lord he is not saved. Whatever Paul means by the expression "calling on the name of the Lord," it is necessary and it is in addition belief.

Read verses 14 and 15: *"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"*

I submit to you that there are no preachers like that today. These were men to whom the Word was provided by inspiration. There are no preachers like that today, but we have the message they preached in written form. So, the passage says "how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" Truth is necessary. Faith is the result of testimony and thus in the 17th verse Paul concludes that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Note then the order: man must call on the name of the Lord but he cannot call without believing and he cannot believe without hearing.

What is the order: he hears, he believes, he calls on the name of the Lord. It does not make any difference what that calling is, it is something he must do after belief in order to be saved.

Again then, we see that man is not saved at the point of belief. My friends you can see that because he says "how shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed."

The Obvious Conclusion

I submit to you that in Romans 10:9-15 Paul by inspiration of the Holy Spirit categorically repudiates the false concept that one is saved at the point of belief—that he is saved by faith

only—without doing anything else. I have shown that the believer must confess (v 10), and that the believer must call on the name of the Lord (v 13); he cannot call on the name of the Lord without having already believed. Furthermore, he cannot believe without hearing. Thus, he must hear the Gospel, believe the Gospel, confess the faith of the Gospel and call on the name of the Lord in order to be saved.

—Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 48

November 30, 2008

Lessons on Salvation (IV)

What do you think is meant when Paul states: "*Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved?*" (Romans 10:13).

There Is No Difference

First, in this text Paul declares that every man today has the right to be saved. Every man has the right to call upon the name of the Lord, both Jew and Gentile (cf. Romans 1:16–17; 2:10–11). The prophet Isaiah prophesied of this offer of salvation: "*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it*" (2:2).

Romans 10:13 is a quotation of Joel 2:32 where the context shows that men would call upon the name of the Lord in the "*last days*." In Acts 2:17 the apostle Peter refers to Joel's prophecy. He begins saying, "*in the last days*." First of all, we have the same time factor identified in Acts 2 as in Isaiah 2. Then he says "*I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh*" and so "*all flesh*" is identified by Joel where "*all nations*" are identified in Isaiah 2. Then Peter continues quoting from Joel and in verse

21 saying "*whosoever*." So, the point of emphasis is "*all flesh*," "*all nations*," "*whosoever*."

Men read this passage and do not know that the emphasis is upon the fact that all can call upon the name of the Lord. They read this passage and all they see is the word "*call*" and they assume that it is talking about prayer. However, that is not what it is talking about. You are being misled by these teachers. The context shows that it is concerned about the right of both Jew and Gentile to call on the name of the Lord, i.e., salvation is for all men.

In Galatians 3:28 the Paul states: "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*." What is he saying, if not, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile? That had not always been the case. The Jew had a written law given to him (Romans 3: 19). The Gentile did not have that written law. So far as Judaism was concerned the Gentile was not included unless he became a convert and even then he was considered a second class citizen. That is not true under the Gospel of Christ. So, I submit to you that the

statement "*whoever shall call on the name of the Lord*" refers to the right of both Jew and Gentile to call on the name of the Lord, whatever that expression may mean.

In Romans 10:12–13 Paul continues saying: "*there is no distinction between Jew and Greek*." That is what Peter said in Acts 15: "*Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith*" (15:7–9). That is what Paul says here in Romans 10:12; that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. The emphasis is upon the fact that all men have the right to call on the name of the Lord in order to be saved.

Who Is the Lord Upon Whom Men Call?

The apostle Peter stated: "*It shall be that whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Acts 2:21). Now, obviously, some questions entered into the minds of those present that day. Who is the Lord upon whom we

ought to call? Why should we do that? How shall we go about it?

Peter immediately (v. 22) sets in to show that the Lord was Jesus. He makes an argument about that. In verses 22 through 24 he makes four statements about Jesus of Nazareth, two of which he had to prove.

He proved that Jesus was delivered by a predetermined plan by quoting the prophet David in Psalm 16:8 (cf. Acts 2:25-28). In verse 29 Peter proves that this is not referring to David because, as they well knew, David was still in his grave. David was not talking about himself (verse 30) but he was talking about the Christ, the Messiah, the Deliverer, the Anointed One of God. Peter continues to affirm he and the Apostles were eye-witnesses to the fact that Jesus was resurrected (v 31&32), just as David prophesied.

Now, note verse 33 where he declares that Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God, having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. What the Holy Spirit had promised had been promised through David, and what He promised through David was that from the fruit of his loins He would sit one upon his throne. Peter said that Jesus was sitting upon David's throne. He said *"Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit."* Jesus received that promise of the Holy Spirit and *"poured out this which you now see and hear."* He was on His throne, in Acts the second chapter and he is still there today. I submit to you that Peter proved that Jesus

was the Christ. He concludes that sermon in verse 36 by saying *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."* Jesus is the Lord upon whose name men must call.

How Do Men Call Upon the Name of the Lord?

Now Peter is going tell us how to do it. Those that heard Peter's sermon were pricked in the heart and asked: *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* Then Peter said to them, *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (vv. 37-38).

Peter told them how to call on the name of the Lord. He told them how to invoke the Lord's blessing, i.e., by doing what He told them to do. Having been acknowledged as believers, they were told to repent of their sins and be baptized as the Lord directs and in so doing they would receive what the Holy Spirit gives which is salvation.

You know what they did? They called on the name of the Lord because verse 41 says: *"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."* No man calls on the name of the Lord, according to Acts 2:21, without being baptized into Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

To call on the name of the Lord is to invoke His blessing by doing what He has said. Whatever the Lord has said man must do in order to be saved, that is what man *must do*.

In Romans 10, Paul talks about the preaching of the Gospel, the hearing of the Gospel, believing the Gospel, and he talks about calling on the name of the Lord. In Acts two those who had heard and believed the Gospel which Peter preached wanted to call on the name of the Lord. They were told by an inspired apostle to repent and be baptized.

I submit to you that *"calling on the name of the Lord"* requires more than belief; it requires more than repentance and confession; it requires baptism. Calling on the name of the Lord is done by doing that which the Lord tells us to do. It is accomplished by obedience to the Gospel.

— Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 49

December 7, 2008

Lessons on Salvation (V)

I want to consider two passages with you where you have two questions and two answers. Each of these passages has to do with salvation or its equivalent. In Acts 2:37, those that heard Peter asked the following question: "Men and brethren what shall we do?" Peter then answered: "Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins" (v. 38). It is not difficult to understand that they wanted to know what they had to do to have their sins forgiven in order to be saved. Peter answered that question and said "repent and be baptized."

In Acts 16:30–31 you have a similar circumstance (a question and answer about salvation). This was the circumstance when Paul and a companion, Silas, had been imprisoned. There was an earthquake that loosened the bands of the prisoners and the Jailer, thinking that they had escaped, was about to take his own life. The apostle Paul said to him: "Do yourself no harm for we are all here." Then, in verse 29, the Jailer "called for a light and fell down at the feet of Paul and Silas and asked: 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'"

There is no difference between this question and the one of Acts 2:37. Both wanted to know what they had to do—what they had to do to have their sins forgiven. The Jailer asked: "What must I do to be saved?" They replied: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (v. 31).

There are different attitudes that men take toward these two passages. The skeptic that does not believe in the Bible will say, "This is a contradiction!" He will tell you that Peter answered one way and that Paul answered differently. Therefore, you have a contradiction. Is that what happened in this instance? I don't believe that for a moment. We can harmonize the two.

Others absolutely deny Acts 2:38 building a false theory around Acts 16:31. We need to consider this in our lesson today.

More Than One Answer

Let us suppose, for the purpose of illustration, that someone asked you, down on the court house square, "How far is it to Lufkin, TX?" You tell them that it is 70 miles (using round figures). They drive over to

Mount Enterprise and ask "How far is it to Lufkin, TX?" And, some fellow says, "About 45 miles." He drives off and says to himself, "I wish these people in East Texas would make up their mind on how far it is to Lufkin." Now, that fellow would have a problem, would he not, if he thought that way? I want you to know there are people with the same kind of problem which fail to understand the difference between the questions and answers given in Acts 2:38 and Acts 16:31.

Already Down the Road A Bit

In Acts 2:38, if Peter had given them that asked the same answer that Paul gave to the Philippian Jailer in Acts 16, it would have been ridiculous; it would have been absurd. Those in Acts 2 already believed. Why would he tell them to believe when he had evidence that they already believed (v. 37). So, in chapter two the people that ask the question "what must we do" already believed. Their belief that Jesus was the Christ was what prompted the question. Peter had proved to them that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Christ, the Messiah, and He

was at the right hand of God exalted. He concluded the sermon by saying, "Let all the house of Israel know assuredly," or without any doubt that, "this same Jesus whom you crucified is both Lord and Christ" (v. 36). He had already told them to believe before they asked the question. They believed; they were convinced of the truth of what they had heard. The horror of that realization cut them deeply and caused them to seek escape from what they had done. Hence, they asked: "What must we do?" Therefore, they had already traveled a distance down the road toward salvation. They were not at the same point the Philippian Jailer was when he asked, "What must I do to be saved?" They were told to "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."

Still on the Square

In Act 16:31 when Paul told the Philippian Jailer "Believe on the name of the Lord," it was because the Jailer did not believe. How could he, for he had not heard the message of the Gospel. That is why the record says in verse 32, "Then they spoke the Word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house." Why do you think they spoke to him the Word of the Lord? You know it was so that they might believe because the Word produces belief or faith (Romans 10:17; cf. John 20:30-31). So Paul spoke to them the Word of the Lord that they might believe in Him and be saved.

Not only did this man believe but there was obviously a change of attitude and

disposition because he took Paul and Silas the same hour of the night and washed their stripes and was baptized, he and all of his family immediately. Why do you suppose he was baptized? Paul said, "Believe on the Lord and you will be saved." Then he preached the Gospel to him. The Jailer heard and believed the Gospel and was baptized the same hour of the night, he and all of his family who also heard and believed. Why do you suppose they were baptized immediately, the same hour in which they believed? It was because it was important; it was essential for their salvation. That is what they wanted to know, "What must I do to be saved?"

Then in verse 34 the Jailer set food before them and rejoiced having believed on the Lord. What did this "believing" in verse 34 include? It included hearing the Gospel; it included their belief that Jesus was the son of God; it included a repentance of their sins; it included their acknowledging that they believed that Jesus was the Son of God; and it include their being baptized.

Conclusion

You know that it included repentance don't you. Do you believe for a moment that Paul did not tell them to repent? Do you believe that he told the Philippian Jailer that all you need to do is believe, you don't have to repent? Do you think that? You say: "No, he had to repent." Why? You know that repentance was included in the belief. But, baptism was included in that belief also because it was included in the acts of belief that followed the preaching.

In Acts 16:30-34 you have what is comparable to that in Acts 2:36-38. Men heard the Gospel (they must hear it) men believed the Gospel (they must believe it), they repented (they must repent) and were baptized (they must be baptized) and then they were forgiven of their sins.

—Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 50

December 14, 2008

Lessons on Salvation (VI)

Let's look at Romans 1:16–17 where we have our subject of salvation described. The apostle Paul declared: *"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith."*

The Gospel Is Essential

This passage declares that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is God's power to save. There is no way that man will ever be in the right relationship with the Lord, enjoy salvation and the remission of his sins, without the Gospel. That is what this passage says, that the Gospel is God's power to save.

How is the Gospel the power of God to save? The Gospel is the New Testament; it is the last will and testament of our Lord (Hebrews 9:16–17). The Gospel is a final and complete message from Jesus Christ (I John 3:11).

The Word "Gospel" is used interchangeably with the Words of Jesus Christ. I know that because Romans 2:16 says that I will be judged by the Gospel; but John 12:47–48, says I will be

judged by the Words of Jesus. You can see that if I am judged by the Gospel and judged by the Words of Jesus, then the Gospel and the Words of Jesus is the same thing. There is not any question but that the Gospel is the New Testament, the last will and testament of our Lord.

How Is There Power in the Gospel?

How then is the Gospel God's power to save? This passage says that it is. Could you explain to somebody how the Gospel is the power of God to save? The next verse tells you how, verse 17, *"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, the just shall live by faith."*

This passage declares that God's plan for making man right is revealed in the Gospel. The expression "righteousness of God", like "the love of God" may mean some particular quality of God. The "love of God" may mean that God loves you or that you must love Him. Similarly, the expression "righteousness of God" may refer to the fact that God is righteous or that God is the source of righteousness. In

Romans 1:16 it refers to the plan or the means that God has for making man right—justification. Thus the Gospel, the New Testament, reveals God's system of justification and that plan is the power of God to salvation to everyone who hears it, receives it, and obeys it.

The power of the Gospel resides in its ability to persuade man. The Gospel has the power to convince man that Jesus is the Christ, to convict him of his sins, to persuade him of his need for the redemption that is in Christ.

For example, in Romans 3:21 we are told, *"Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe, for there is no difference."* This text affirms is a "righteousness of God" that is manifested by the Law. It is identified as God's righteousness which is *through faith in Jesus Christ*, to all that believe. Mark these terms and keep them in mind *"faith to faith," "through faith in Jesus Christ to all them that believe."*

In the Galatians 2:16 Paul said to Peter: *"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but*

by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." The works of the law or the law of works was a system of Judaism that demanded moral perfection for man to be saved and justified by that law. However, Paul rejects that notion and affirms that a man is justified through faith in Jesus Christ and consequently he said "we believed on Jesus" that we might be justified by faith.

These terms "faith to faith" or "by faith in Jesus Christ to all them that believe" and like expressions, are describing the Gospel. The Gospel is sometimes called the "law of faith" (Romans 3:27). Paul said he preached the Gospel, (Galatians 1:11) but he also said he preached "the faith" (1:23-24). The Gospel of Christ and "the faith" is one and the same thing.

When Jude said "contend earnestly for the faith" he was talking about that system of doctrine identified as the Gospel. So, in these passages you have "faith" being used objectively to refer to the Gospel of Jesus Christ which man believes. Therefore, you have "faith to faith" that is, faith (the Gospel message) to faith (which is man's acceptance and submission to that message). That is the power of God unto salvation in the Gospel.

God's Power Realized in Christ

Let us look at another passage where the power of the Gospel is under consideration. In II Corinthians 5:17-21 Paul writes: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old

things have passed away; behold all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the Word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

First of all, consider the necessity of being in Christ (cf. II Timothy 2:10). "In Christ" we are a new creature or creation. The New Testament says one is a new creature in Christ; that he becomes a son of God in Christ, (Galatians 3:26); that all spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3); that he is God's chosen in Christ (1:4); that he has salvation, or redemption, or the forgiveness of his sins in Christ, (Galatians 1:7). All of these things are said to be "in Christ."

I certainly understand that "in Christ" may mean through the provisions that Christ has made. But, I also know it may mean in a certain relationship, and that is how it is used in this instance. One must be in a relationship with Christ. He gets "in Christ" by paying attention to the Word that identifies the way into that relationship. In verse 18, Paul said we were reconciled to God through Jesus Christ by the ministry of reconciliation; in verse 19 he calls it the "Word of reconciliation." The Word is involved in our reconciliation

just like the Gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16).

Galatians 3: 23-27 is the inspired commentary on this verse: "But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

You must be baptized into Christ in order to have that righteousness of God which is in Christ. The Gospel is God's power to save because it reveals to and persuades man concerning what he must do in order to be saved.

—Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 51

December 21, 2008

Lessons on Salvation (VII)

When I talk to you about the “Church,” I mean the Church you can read about in your New Testament. I am not talking about one that you may read about in some world encyclopedia that will tell you about a particular denomination that started in some particular city at some particular time and has some particular doctrine. I am talking about the Church you read about in the New Testament. What does the New Testament have to say about salvation in that Church—the Church that Jesus declared He was going to build?

I Will Build My Church

The Bible record tells in Matthew 16:16 that Peter declared: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus then answers him in verse 18 “On this rock I will build my Church.” That is, on the firm foundation of the fact that you have just acknowledged that I am the Son of God. The Bible does not teach and Jesus did not say that He was going to build His Church on Peter. That is a figment of man's imagination. In I Corinthians 3:11, Paul wrote: “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is

laid, which is Jesus Christ.” The Church you read about in the New Testament is built upon the Lord Jesus Christ not upon Peter. Jesus acknowledged that Peter was called Simon the son of Jonah, just as Peter had confessed that Jesus was the Son of God; then Jesus proclaims that He would build the Church on that firm foundation which Simon had confessed, the fact that He is the Son of God.

Jesus further indicates that even though He would die and enter into that unseen world of the dead (Hades), yet He would prevail over death and over Hades and build His Church. Hades shall not prevail against it. He said “I will build my Church.” I know that He did that very thing because I read about that Church in the New Testament. It is interesting to note in Acts 8:1 that Saul (Paul) laid waste the Church: “*At that time a great persecution arose against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.*” This persecution continued, according to Acts 9:1–4, “*Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the*

high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And as he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

How is it that when Paul laid waste the Church, how is it that when the Church is being persecuted that Jesus said to Paul you are persecuting me? The reason why is because the Bible teaches that the Church is His body. According to Colossians 1:18, Jesus is the head of the Church which is His body (cf. Ephesians 1:22). Jesus certainly built His Church; He said I am going to do it and He did it.

Salvation & the Church

Now my question is this: What does the New Testament have to say about this Church that Jesus said I am going to build, the one that He did in fact build?

In the Ephesian Letter Paul declared: “*And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be*

head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." The passage says Jesus is the head over all things to the Church. So, the Church that I am talking about is the one over which Jesus is the head (cf Ephesians 5:24).

This Church is the one that Jesus purchased with His own precious blood. Paul said that He gave himself for it (cf. Ephesians 5:25). In Acts 20:28, Paul charges the Ephesian Elders after this manner, saying: *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God which He purchased with His own blood."* This is the Church that I am talking about.

Christ & the Church

In the Ephesian Letter (Ephesians 5:22-33), Paul has a lengthy discussion about Christ and the Church. I am aware of the fact that the husband and wife relationship is discussed in this passage also. However, the primary lesson is about Christ and the Church. Many times, in the New Testament passages, you will find that there are two or more lessons in a particular context. One will be primary and in Eph 5, the primary lesson is about Christ and the Church. How do we know that? Because that is what he says in verse 32, listen to him now: *"this mystery is great but I speak in regard of Christ and the Church."* He goes on to say that what he said about the husband and wife relationship was no less the truth, (verse 33).

So, I submit to you then that the primary lesson of Ephesians 5 is

about Christ and of the Church. Look at verse 22, and consider the question: Who does that passage teach is the Saviour? Well, it is Christ. That is why it is strange to me that preachers grace pulpits, even in our fair city, and they have not learned that yet. They have not learned that Jesus is the Saviour in this passage. Furthermore, it tells us who the saved are. Read the passage again and determine who the passage identifies are the saved. Christ is the savior, who are the saved? Don't hedge, who are the saved in verse 23? You say, "Well preacher it is the body." That is precisely right, that is what the passage says. The passage says that Christ is the Saviour and the body is those whom He saved.

Well, what is the body? In Ephesians 1:21-23 we read: *"Far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."*

How is the "body" being used? It is used to describe the Church. Therefore, Jesus is the Saviour of the Church, those that are saved in Ephesians 5:23. The Bible teaches that the Church consists of those that are saved. That is what this passage says; Christ is the Saviour and the Church is the saved. The New Testament teaches that men became members of the Lord's Church by hearing the Gospel of Christ preached; by believing that Gospel message; by changing their mind about

sin (that is repentance which is produced by Godly sorrow that will lead to a reformed life); acknowledged the faith, by their mouth, that they had in their hearts; confessing the name of Jesus Christ; were buried with the Lord in baptism and were raised to walk in newness of life. This passage says that the Church is made up of the saved; yes, all of the saved are in the Church.

—Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 8 Issue 52

December 28, 2008

Lessons on Salvation (VIII)

Our attention is focused on what the New Testament teaches about the Church and salvation. We are discussing the Church that was in existence several hundred years before denominationalism came upon the scene. We are not talking about Judaism; we are not talking about Protestantism; we are not talking about Catholicism. We are only concerned about the Church you read about in the New Testament that was built by the Christ nearly two thousand years ago and whether or not salvation and that Church has some relationship.

The Word Church

I need you to understand that the word "Church" in the New Testament is used in at least two different ways. It is used to refer to all of the saved whoever they might be and wherever they might be. In I Corinthians 1:2, Paul writes: *"To the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."* Here you have two aspects of the Church identified.

You have a particular group of people "the Church of God at Corinth." One would be hard pressed to not understand that the language "the Church of God at Corinth" located it and thus, a local group of God's people; the Church at Corinth. But then you have "with all in every place" which identifies them in the aggregate or the universal sense. Sometimes the word "Church" is used in the New Testament to refer to God's people in the universal sense and sometimes it refers to them in the local sense. Sometimes it refers to these people as they come together in the assembly (I Corinthians 14:33-34).

We need to recognize these distinctions because there are so many differences between the Church local and the Church universal. A casual reading of the New Testament will show them. For instance, there are many local Churches described in the New Testament. There are seven of them identified in the first three chapters of the book of Revelation. Yet, there is just one Church universal, that is all there is. The Bible says there is just one body (Ephesians 4:4-6), and the body is the Church (Ephesians 1:22-

23), there is just one Church universal. There are many members but only one body (I Corinthians 12:20).

The Church Is the Saved

Is there any relationship between that Church and the salvation of the souls of men and women? Ephesians 5:23 declares that Christ is the Saviour and the Church is the saved. I could rest my case upon that for if you believe the Bible you know that the Church is made up of the saved. That is what that passage says. The word Church is made up of two words; a verb and a preposition which means "the called out." The Church is the called out people of God, those that are called by the gospel and obedient to it (II Thessalonians 1:7-10; 2:14).

Another passage that shows the relation of the Church to salvation and shows that the Church is made up of those that are saved is Acts 2. In this chapter you have the gospel being preached for the first time. It was preached, in promise, to Abraham, (Galatians 3:8) and by prophecy (Isaiah 53) but preached in fact on the first Pentecost after the resurrection

of Jesus. You see, the facts of the gospel involve the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. That could not have been preached as a fact until it happened. You cannot preach something as a fact if it has not happened. So, this was the first time that the gospel was preached in fact.

The Apostle Peter stood before a group of unbelieving Jews (2:14-41); he stood before a group of people guilty of crucifying the Son of God; he stood before this group of people and said to them: "You by the hands of lawless men did crucify and slay." You can see that he did not buy the idea that you do not need to talk to people about what's wrong with them; that you do not need to talk to them about things that are incorrect. He said to them "you crucified the Son of God." He proved to them by their own Scriptures, the Old Testament, they misunderstood what the prophets wrote about the Messiah. He said "Let all of the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ."

When the Jews heard this they were pricked in their hearts. They believed it. The question they asked is evidence of that. They said, "Men and Brethren, what shall we do?" In effect they were saying, "We are lost; we are guilty of sin; we know that we have done wrong; we know that we have crucified the Son of God; we were wrong." Now, "What shall we do; what can we do to be forgiven of this?"

Then Peter said to them in verse 38, "Repent ye and be baptized every one of you in the name of

Jesus Christ unto (for) the remission of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Thus, he told them what they must do to be saved. They wanted to know what to do to be saved and the Apostle Peter told them what to do in order to be saved. He told them to repent and be baptized. He goes on to say in verse 40, "Save yourselves!"

Peter said, "Save yourself." How were they going to save themselves? Well, they could do that by appropriating the blessing provided; by obeying the will of God. Peter said, "Save yourself from this crook or perverse generation." The record says in verse 41, "Then they that gladly received his word was baptized and the same day there was added to them about three-thousand souls."

Now observe what verse 47 says about the Church and salvation: "Praising God and having favor of all the people and the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved." That passage says that the Lord adds the saved to the Church. How many do you think the Lord Misses? Do you think He misses a few? No! That passage says the Lord adds the saved to the Church and He doesn't make any mistakes about it. So, I submit to you that the process that saves a man is the process that makes him a member of the Church that you read about in the New Testament. Salvation is not one process and becoming a member of the Church another one. Now tell me: Do you believe that you can be saved without becoming a member of the Church that you read about

in the New Testament? If you believe so, tell me how you would explain this passage? What do you think about it when the record says that the Lord added daily such as were being saved? That is why the New Testament teaches that whenever a penitent believer confesses his faith in Jesus Christ and is baptized for the remission of his sins he enters the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13), but the body of Christ is the Church and thus, he becomes a member of the Church in this way. The New Testament teaches that the Church you read about in the New Testament is made up of the saved. What does the New Testament teach about salvation and the Church, the Church is the saved, the called out people of God.

—Elmer Moore

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