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## “A BROKEN AND A CONTRITE HEART?”

### Psalm 51

David led a very eventful life, and Psalm 51 has to do with one of the more important events in his life and lessons that he learned. Prosperity did not work to King David's personal advantage. After years of phenomenal success under the Lord's blessing, his kingdom was mighty and his name was honourable and renowned. The necessity for him to personally participate in wars was past and his heart had begun to gravitate toward earthly pleasures, and he was less zealous for the Lord and the Law than he was at first. David fell into very grievous sin, which appears even worse when contrasted with the high moral character he showed earlier in his life when he was 'a man after God's own heart'. The story of his sins is told in scripture and is most straightforward. 2 Samuel 11 describes how he became captivated by Bathsheba's beauty and he committed adultery with her. In order to shield himself he caused her husband, Uriah, to be placed at the front of the battle that he might be killed by the enemy, which also involved the loss of several other lives as well.

#### David's Sin

There is not the slightest effort to condone David's wrongdoing. No excuses are offered in connection with the account. The full weight of these awful crimes is laid directly on David's head. If any excuse could be offered it would be from our fallen sinful human perspective. One such excuse might be that the kings of that time exercised total authority and it was commonly accepted among the people that the king could do no wrong; that whatever he pleased to do was proper to him because of his high position as the head and ruler of that nation. Now we can in no way agree with such a thought, but we can nevertheless reasonably suppose that such a generally accepted sentiment would have had some influence on David's thinking. For two years after these crimes were committed David sought to stifle his conscience and to consider that he had only used kingly liberties in what he had done. Nevertheless, his conscience pricked him and he felt alienation from God and a condemnation under His Law such as he would not have felt if he had been a man of lesser

character. God was not hasty in reproofing him either. He allowed him to have a full taste of this heart bitterness, allowed him to feel the darkness of soul and the absence of joy resulting from the cloud that had come between him and his Lord.

It was at the appropriate time after David had passed through a secret anguish of the soul that the Lord sent him a reproof through Nathan, the prophet, to bring the whole matter clearly before his mind. Nathan, under the figure of a parable, stirred up David's sympathies and his declaration of a severe judgment – the death sentence even - against the offender. Then the prophet brought home to him the lesson, saying You are the man. It was now constantly in his thoughts. The memory of his guilt followed him. It pressed on him, it haunted him. And no wonder! The only ground for wonder is that it did not occur to him before Nathan made that solemn appeal to him or that he could have been for a moment unconscious of the greatness of his crimes. This whole scenario, however, shows that people may be guilty of enormous sins and for a long time have no sense of their criminality, but when the consciousness of guilt is realised nothing will calm it down. Everything reminds the soul of it, nothing will drive away its recollection. In such a state the sinner has no refuge, no hope of permanent peace except in the mercy of God.

We must remember that David did not belong to the spiritual house of sons and hence had a far less clear

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view of such matters than that which belong to those begotten of the spirit and taught of God. We are not therefore to expect to draw exactly the same lesson for ourselves. Rather we of the spiritual house under a clear understanding of the divine will are to remember the higher interpretations of adultery and murder set forth in the New Testament - that whoever desires adultery and is merely restrained from it by outward circumstances or fears is really an adulterer at heart, as we read in Matthew 5:28. Also he that is angry with his brother, who hates his brother, is a murderer because the spirit of anger is that which, uncontrolled, would lead to murder (Matt.5:22). And that the person who covets the things of another and is merely restrained from taking them for lack of opportunity or fear of consequence is a thief at heart.

If these principles are applied by the new creation in their examination of their hearts, it is entirely probable that some of the household of faith today will find themselves very near the pain of King David as respect sin. So, viewing the matter in this light, they will exercise proportionately greater compassion in their judgment of David. Such, too, will find great consolation in the Lord's compassion provided they are exercised in respect of their own offences as was David concerning his. 'But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared' is the prophet's expression in Psalm 130:4. If God were lacking in compassion as many of our fellow humans are there would be nothing to hope for under such circumstances. It is when we realise that there is forgiveness with the Lord for all who are penitent in heart, for all who show evidence that their sins are not willful but rather from the weakness of heredity and under the pressure of temptations that we are moved to repentance by the hope of better things.

### **David's Contrition**

Psalm 51 is generally recognised as being the one in which David expresses to God contrition for his sins, and the fact that it is dedicated to the chief musician/implies that it was the King's intention that it in common with other songs should be sung in the Tabernacle services. We can thus understand that if the sin itself was flagrant and gross the atonement which David endeavoured to make was a very public one. Probably many in the nation had felt some of the King's condemnation and its influence must have been very detrimental. Now in his public view of it as sin and his prayer for divine forgiveness, the King would undo as far as possible not only the injury which he had inflicted upon his own conscience which hung as a cloud between the Lord and him, but also he would undo the evil influences as respect the conscience of the nation on the subjects of adultery and murder. Here again we see why David was described as a man after God's own heart. His sins were not pleasing to God, quite the opposite. But the belated appreciation of the

enormity of his sins, the hearty repentance, and the desire to be cleansed from every evil way were pleasing to the Lord.

Here we have an illustration of how all things may work together to those who love God. By reason of his heart loyalty to the Lord and the principles of righteousness, even these terrible sins resulted in bringing a great blessing to David, humbling him, giving him an appreciation of his weakness and of his need to abide close to the Lord. This allowed him to continue to have the Lord's fellowship and compassion and be safe from the temptations of his fallen flesh. And so it is with the new creation. How many of them have realised profitable lessons and blessings out of some of their stumblings? Not that the stumblings were good nor of the Lord, but the Lord was able to overrule such circumstances for the good of those who are of the proper mind, rightly exercised by them to repentance.

The **first three verses** of the Psalm express David's appreciation of his sin and his trust in the Lord without any attempt to apologise for his shortcomings. He trusted the Lord to make whatever allowances could be made and merely appealed to His great loving-kindness. In calling to mind the multitude of God's tender mercies in the past, he expressed faith and trust that in some way the Lord could blot out these grievous transgressions and forgive them. The Lord had not yet clearly defined the way in which He could be just and yet be the justifier of sins. Only vaguely through the shadows of the Day of Atonement sacrifices had He intimated that He had some way of His own by which in due time the guilty but repentant ones might be cleansed. David grasped the thought of mercy as understood in the types and shadows of the Law. Much more may we of the house of sons grasp the thought of our Father's forgiveness when we see that it is exercised towards us by the Lord Jesus Christ. By Jesus Christ who has already given Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time and whose sacrifices have been accepted by the Father. This acceptance was evidenced by our Lord's resurrection from the dead and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. If therefore David could trust the Lord for His loving-kindness and tender mercy and forgiveness of sins, the members of the household of faith should be able to exercise full faith in the divine character and the plan of salvation from sin.

The **fourth verse** would appear to ignore the fact that the wrongdoing had been done to fellow humans, but we may prefer to understand it to mean that while this wrong was against his fellow man, David recognised a still higher responsibility to God whose Laws he had broken and whose kingly office he had dishonoured. Hence the contrast between what man might think of his crime against man, in his still higher consciousness of sins against the Lord the latter seemed so much

greater as to practically obscure the former. The greater sin against the Almighty quite overshadows the wrong to humanity. David declares his recognition of the fact that God is the great Judge and whatever His judgment would be he knew in advance that it would be right.

In the **fifth verse** he introduces an extenuating thought as though reminding the Lord that he was born in sin and therefore perfection was not possible for him. But he does not use this fact as a screen behind which to hide his own responsibilities. Though born a sinner, David had freewill and so was responsible for yielding as he did to temptation, but he was confident that the Lord would give him the benefit of every mitigating circumstance. It will be noted that David expected punishment from the Lord for his sins and was here expressing his confidence that the Lord would send no punishment which would not be reasonable and within the limits of justice. What he was praying for in this Psalm was not a remission from proper punishment but rather for the cleansing of his heart in the sight of the Lord and for his restoration to the divine favour. As a matter of fact, we find that the Lord did send a severe punishment upon the King and that He restored the sinner to His favour, granting him to experience the joys of His salvation. In comparison with other kings of his time David had taken an extremely moderate course in sin in that he had not directly taken the life of Uriah but merely arranged his certain death in battle. But David appreciated the fact that God was looking deeper than this and desired truth, righteousness in the inward parts, in his heart. Outward crime and a crime allowed in the mind are both sins in God's sight.

His experience had taught David wisdom and now he wished to be thoroughly cleansed and prophetically says, 'Purify me with hyssop that I may be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow' as we read in **verse 7**. Hyssop was used in the sprinkling of the unclean under the Law. David, grasping to some extent the significance of the symbol, desired the anti-typical cleansing of his heart. His appreciation of the Lord's thoroughness in dealing with sin and His compassion for forgiveness are good lessons. The members of the household of faith, having seen with the eye of faith the great atonement for sins made by our Lord Jesus Christ, are able to appreciate the fact that the application of the merit of His sacrifice is quite sufficient to cleanse us from all sin and perfect us that we may be recognised as absolutely pure in the Father's sight and dealt with accordingly; not as sinners but as sons. From the statement of **verse 8** we may reasonably infer that during the year that preceded his repentance King David was in so miserable a state of mind that even the music and the singers and musicians had no joy in them to comfort his heart when he was barred from the Lord's presence and fellowship.

David was longing for the joy and gladness he had

experienced in times past, and figuratively he likens himself to one whose bones had been broken. He knew that his joy and comfort would return if he could again have God's favour. He knew, too, that the Lord could not look upon sin with any allowance, hence his prayer: <sup>9</sup>'Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities or unrighteousness.'<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.'<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your holy spirit from me.'<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and sustain me with Thy willing spirit.' No true Christian can read these words without feeling a deep sympathy for the different expressions. As new creatures in Christ Jesus we have had no experience with such terrible sins as those that weighed upon the heart of David. Nevertheless our higher responsibilities and higher conceptions of sin under the new commandment and under the instructions of the Holy Spirit as sons of God cause us to feel with proportionate weight transgressions which in the sight of the world would appear as nothing, such as covetousness, hatred and slander, which are thefts and murders from the higher standpoint of the divine view appropriate to the new creation.

In **verse 13** the prophet proposes to the Lord that his disgrace be used for instruction to others to show transgressors the Lord's way and to turn sinners from the evil of their course. How appropriate is this thought to us. Not until we know experimentally through faith in the blood of Christ that our sins have been put out of the Father's sight, not until we have experienced the joys of His salvation and forgiveness are we in any condition to be servants to the truth or examples to others. Thus we see that it is only those who have been begotten of the Holy Spirit who are anointed to preach the gospel. To others the Lord says, 'What right have you to tell of my statutes and to take my covenant in your mouth? For you hate discipline and you cast my words behind you, refusing to submit to divine requirements.' (Psalm 50:16,17).

The **14th verse** repeats the same thought in a slightly different form. If the Lord would deliver him from his guilt in connection with his sins, his tongue shall thereafter sing loudly of the Lord's righteousness, not his own. That is the song that all the blood-washed may sing. 'True and righteous are all thy ways, Lord God Almighty. Thou hast redeemed us from amongst men'. None of us has any right to sing of our own righteousness for, as the Apostle declares in Romans 3:10, 'There is none righteous, No, not one.' The mission of the cleansed ones is to accept and use the Lord's mercy towards them, extol His righteousness, accept their unworthiness, and to call upon others to recognise this fountain of righteousness and forgiveness.

'O Lord, open my lips, that my mouth may declare

Your praise' we read in verse 15. This expression implies that none need to expect to have the proper opening of their mouths to show forth the Lord's praises and give call to His marvellous light unless the Lord has first opened their lips with His mercy and truth. Otherwise how could any expect to tell of the tidings of great joy which shall be to all people? This equally implies that all who have had forgiveness of sins should be in the condition of spirit to make a full consecration of their all to the Lord, and then all should expect an unsealing of their lips that the message of God's truth and grace may flow from them for the instruction and blessings of others. As it is written, 'Grace is poured upon my lips' (Psalm 45:2) and 'He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.' (Psalm 40:3). Although these are appropriate especially to our dear Redeemer, they are appropriate also to every member of the church, which is His body. All claiming to be of the body who have never had their lips unsealed to confess the Lord to the extent of their opportunity have reason to question everything pertaining to their relationship to the Lord.

In **verses 16 and 17** David shows that he had acquired a deep insight into the meaning of some of the typical sacrifices. Probably by inspiration, he wrote more wisely than he understood. As seen in our study of the typical sacrifices, only the Day of Atonement sacrifices are sin offerings. The burnt offerings and the peace offerings of the remainder of the year represent consecration to the Lord and to his service. Grasping this thought prophetically to whatever extent he also grasped it intellectually, David expressed his realization that the Lord is pleased rather with a broken and contrite condition of heart than with burnt offerings, which were but types. Also we learn that nothing that we can give the Lord, even our acceptance in Christ, has any value in His sight until first of all we have given to Him ourselves, our hearts and our wills. Let us always remember that the Lord never despises and will never reject the broken and contrite heart. Therefore in any difficulty the Lord's people of the new creation may stumble into, if they find themselves hungering for the Lord's fellowship and forgiveness, if they find their hearts contrite and broken, they should not despair but remember that God has made provision through the merit of Christ which enables Him to accept and justify freely all who come unto Him through Jesus, and through faith in His blood.

There is a sin unto death, a sin unto second death from which there will be no recovery and no resurrection, but those who have broken and contrite hearts on account of their sins may know that they have not committed the sin unto death, for their condition of heart proves this. As the Apostle declares, 'it is impossible to renew them again to repentance' If anyone has committed the sin unto death, they are willful sinners against full light and knowledge. Let all

therefore rejoice in the grace of our God, who is able through Christ to accept His way to save unto the utmost all that come to Him, laying aside sin and its desires. If anyone of the church stumble into sin through weakness and temptation, not intentionally, 'we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous', as we read in 1 John 2:1. Such therefore may come with faith to the throne of heavenly grace that they may obtain mercy and find help in every future time of need. (Heb.4:16). But, like David, their fears and hopes should be for restoration of divine favour and not for escape from chastisement needful for their correction. God forgave David but He also chastised him, as we read in 2 Samuel 12:11-14.

### **A Lesson in Mercy**

Surely David must have learned a great lesson in mercy from this sad experience. How many times must he have called to mind his response to Nathan's parable - 'As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. He must make restitution for the land fourfold because he did this thing and had no compassion.' (Samuel 12:5,6). Poor David! His words show that he had a mind and heart that was no stranger to justice and pity in other men's affairs and hence that he was all the more guilty in his much more serious violations of justice and compassion. 'Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves' Paul wrote in Romans 14:22 - who is not condemned by his own declaration in respect to the affairs of others. O how merciful to the failings of others it should make us as we remember our dear Redeemer's words, 'But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.' (Matt.6:15). And when we remember that we may not even pray for forgiveness of our sins unless we from our heart forgive them who have injured us and again desire our fellowship.

This has been a rather fleeting glance at Psalm 51 and we have really only scratched the surface. There is a point we might think a bit more about, and it is this - whenever we stumble (in a figurative sense) God is always there with His outstretched hand to help us up again. But He has given us a free will, so it is up to us to reach out to Him and grasp on to His hand and with faith be lifted back up. Of course, to do this we must first recognise that we have sinned - acknowledge it to ourselves and then acknowledge it to our Father. We must go to Him on bended knee with a truly broken and truly contrite heart. We must have full faith in His justice and His mercy. We must come to Him with full faith in our hearts and remember that God has made that provision through the merit of Christ, which enables Him to accept and justify quite freely from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ and through the faith in His blood. The final condition is our last verse in Matthew 6:15, for how can we be deserving of our Father's forgiveness if we cannot or will not forgive others. (DO 12/04)

# “WHAT IS GOD’S WILL FOR MAN IN THE CHRISTIAN ERA”

Previously we refreshed our minds regarding two aspects of God’s will for man - the fact that God created man to have dominion over the earth and also that man would experience the consequences of disobedience. To quickly recap, I would like to read a few verses in Romans 8 from verse 20: “For the creation was made subject to vanity” and that immediately takes us back to the verses we had in Ecclesiastes where Solomon concluded that ‘all is vanity’. So, ‘the creation was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of Him who hath subjected the same in hope’. That is God’s will for man. He had a reason for subjecting us to vanity. Verse 21 ‘Because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.’ And don’t we know that! Observation tells us that man has lost the dominion that was enjoyed by Adam. Verse 23: ‘And not only they but we ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.’

This second part is titled What is God’s Will for man in the Christian Era, because it addresses the calling out of the church and the grafting in of the Gentiles. Both of these aspects of God’s will for man only apply during what is commonly called the Christian Era.

The Christian Era began in a spectacular way. In Luke 2:8-10 we read: ‘Now there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.’ A momentous experience! ‘And the angel said unto them, “Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people”’. But just as man today has lost the dominion that Adam enjoyed in the Garden of Eden, so also it is evident today that these good tidings of great joy have not yet come to all people. As we read in Romans 8, ‘the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now’. So how do we harmonize these Scriptures? Good tidings of great joy have not yet come. Why the delay? Has the promise of the angels failed? The secret, of course, is that God is calling out the church. We would now like to explore some verses to refresh our minds, first of all about the fact that God is calling out the church, and secondly when He decided to call out the church.

## THE CALL OF THE CHURCH

In 1 Corinthians 1 we read (verses 23 and 24): ‘We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness, But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.’ There are two points in those two verses that are very important. Firstly that there are two classes. To one class Christ is insignificant. The class comprises both Jews and Greeks, (unto one He was a stumbling block and unto the other foolishness). To the other class He was the power and wisdom of God. This class comprises those who are

called, again both Jews and Gentiles. So straight away we see that God is not dealing equitably with all of mankind at the present moment. The second point to note from those verses is that He says ‘**unto them that are called**’, so it is the calling of God that enables some to recognise Christ as the ‘power of God’.

What does it really mean to be called and what are the qualifications of those who are called? In 1 Corinthians 1:26 we see the qualifications of those who are called. ‘For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.’ And doesn’t natural observation confirm to us the truth of that verse? ‘Not many wise’, but some. By and large the people whom God has called are not in the higher echelons of the learned. ‘Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty’, but some. Not many people of the Lord are in places of high authority. ‘Not many noble are called’, not many kings and queens, but as we read in verse 27, ‘God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.’ We see here a very important point emphasized by the Apostle Paul – God hath chosen! It is God’s doing, as it says in Ephesians ‘By grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast.’ So we see that God is exercising His will and His purpose amongst mankind. Reading on from 1 Cor. 1:28: ‘And base things of the world and things that are despised hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught the things that are,’<sup>29</sup> ‘That no flesh should glory in His presence.’ And there, of course, is a good lesson for us. We aren’t to boast of our knowledge, even our knowledge of the Scriptures. No person, whether they be Jew, whether they be Greek, whether they be called or uncalled, is to boast. And so we see that at the present time God is exercising His right of choice.

Now we need to establish **when** God made the decision to call out His church. Was it added after the event? In other words, the angels gave the message that there would be great joy to **all** people, which hasn’t eventuated so far. Has God taken some rearguard action and called out His church to recover the situation, or was it God’s decision from day one that He would be calling out His church? So let us now consider **when** the decision was made.

In 1 Corinthians 2:7 we read the words: ‘But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom that God ordained before the world unto our glory.’ Now there are some words there that I think are very important – ‘we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery’. Firstly we see that it is a mystery – ‘not many mighty, not many noble’, not many of high estate. If it were God’s will to convert the world today, wouldn’t you think He would choose just those types of people, the ones with power, influence and intellect? But God hasn’t done that. It’s a mystery that He has chosen the base ones, the lowly ones, and therefore this high calling has gone unnoticed by those who are of some stature politically. In verse 7 we see that this was ‘ordained before

the world unto our glory'. This word 'ordained' is worth taking note of. In the Greek, Strong's 4209, it means to pre-determine. So God pre-determined to have this mystery. 'But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom that God ordained before the world...' Also the little word 'before' is worth taking note of. It was pre-determined before the world. The Greek for 'before' is 'pro', a preposition.

I now want to note three other places where this preposition 'before' is used in the Scriptures. There are plenty of other scriptures but I have picked just these three for the sake of time. I do that because it's easy to say, He decided this at the foundation (or slightly after the foundation) of the world, but the Scriptures are specific about the meaning of this word '**before**'.

In Matthew 5:12 we have another case where the word 'pro' is used: 'Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were **before** you.' This is the same preposition, pro. They persecuted the prophets before the ones Jesus was talking to. The word 'before' there certainly means before them in time; the prophets were before Jesus' Advent, and they were persecuted.

In Matthew 6:8 there is another instance of the use of the word 'pro': 'Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of **before** ye ask Him.' Now what is the purpose of that Scripture? If it said, He knows what things you have need of **when** you ask Him, there would not be anything special about God's knowledge of us. Of course He would know then, but no, He knows **before** we ask Him.

The last occurrence we will consider today is in Matthew 24:38,: 'For as in the days that were **before** the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage....' In the days **before** the flood. I therefore suggest that this little preposition, pro, meaning 'before', is a very important word, and it certainly means before in terms of time. So when we see in 1 Cor.2:7 that these things were ordained before the world, it means that they were actually pre-determined before, in terms of time. It was God's will from before day one!

Returning to 1 Corinthians 2:7, and the words 'Before the world unto our glory'. 'World' there is the word 'aion' meaning 'age'. In other words, this hidden wisdom was pre-determined before the ages. Reading on - <sup>8</sup>Which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. <sup>9</sup>But as it is written: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. <sup>10</sup>But God hath revealed them unto us by His spirit, for the spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.' As we saw earlier these things are not revealed to the worldly wise, but they are revealed unto us in the Christian era by His spirit.

#### PAUL'S OTHER LETTERS

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul confirms that God determined, at the beginning, to call out His church. In Ephesians 1 he says: <sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Je-

sus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, <sup>4</sup>According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.' What a powerful verse this is - According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world! The Greek word "before" again is 'pro'. He pre-determined this before the foundation of the world. Just what is 'the foundation of the world'? The Greek for "foundation" there is 'katabole' which means 'foundation or conception, to lay the very foundation' so this will of God to choose us was pre-determined before the foundations of the world were laid. The Greek here for 'world' is 'cosmos' so it means 'before the orderly arrangement'.

What a tremendously powerful statement that is because initially we read in Genesis that the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And what did God do? God then started to modify and order the earth so that man could live upon the face of the earth. God pre-determined, right back there before He laid the foundations of the orderly arrangement, to call out the church. Ephesians 1 again: <sup>8</sup>Wherein He hath abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known unto us the mystery of His will.' He has made known unto us, not the high and mighty, not those of great estate, but <sup>9</sup>He hath made known unto us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.' Could we have a clearer statement that it is God's will? <sup>10</sup>That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him.' And so we see an additional truth that we are not the only ones who are going to benefit from God's great mercy, but in the fullness of time He will gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth. So we see that while He is now dealing with the called out class, calling out a special people, eventually His benevolence is going to extend to everyone.

Paul confirmed the same message to Timothy, and we will just take a few moments now to refresh our minds about Paul's exhortation to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1: <sup>2</sup>To Timothy, my dearly beloved son...' Wouldn't we love to get a letter like that from Paul? 'Grace mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.' What a lovely introduction to a letter! In verse 8 he says: 'Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but be thou a partaker of Him according to the power of God. <sup>9</sup>Who hath saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.' 'Before' is the same Greek preposition, pro. And 'the world' there is Strong's 166 'aionios' and Strong gives the primary meaning of that as being 'perpetual'. So before the beginning of time, God pre-determined to call out this holy group of people according to His own purpose and grace, called out with the holy calling. Reading on - verse 10: 'But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' All of which is also summed up in Romans 16:25 'Now to Him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ,

according to the revelation of the mystery (and aren't we privileged to have that revelation?) which was kept secret since the world began.' How powerful are the next words of the Apostle (verse 26) that it 'has now been made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith. <sup>27</sup>To God only wise be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen'

### GRAFTING IN OF THE GENTILES'

Let us focus on those last few words for a moment - 'Now made manifest by the scriptures of the prophets according to the commandment of the everlasting God made known to all nations.' 'Made known to all nations'. What is now happening in God's plan? What is God's will now? As previously mentioned in Part 1, the fourth aspect of God's will for man is the grafting in of the Gentiles. This also was a decision taken right back in the beginning of time. Let's look at a few scriptures. Galatians 3: 'O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you.? Before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been set forth crucified among you. <sup>2</sup>This only would I learn of you: Received ye the spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?... <sup>8</sup>And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham saying, "In thee shall all nations be blessed."

Combining Romans 16:26 and Galatians 3:8 we have two expressions - 'Now made known to all nations', and 'the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith'. 'Foreseeing' - the Greek word *proheiden*, preposition 'pro' meaning before, 'heiden' to see. So God saw beforehand; that is He predetermined it, this was His will. 'Foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham saying, "In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed."' Let us think about that for a moment. In Old Testament times God dealt with the nation of Israel; they were His chosen people, the rest of the world was the heathen as we shall see in a moment. But when did Israel come into existence? The nation of Israel did not exist in Abraham's day because the line was Abraham to Isaac, then Isaac to Jacob, and Jacob was the one whose name was changed to Israel. So the nation of Israel as such did not exist in Abraham's day and yet the Scriptures say that God preached the gospel unto Abraham saying 'In thee shall all nations be blessed'. So God had predetermined to bless all nations before the nation of Israel even existed!

As mentioned above, the heathen are the Gentiles. We read in Galatians 3:14, 'that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.' We see three things here. Firstly, when combined with Galatians 3:8, the heathen are identified as the Gentiles. Secondly it is confirmed that God foresaw, that is that He pre-determined, that He would justify the heathen, the Gentiles. Thirdly we see that He had predetermined that He would do that through faith. God preached the gospel unto Abraham well before Israel came into existence. So before there were Israelites and Gentiles, God "told" Abraham that He would justify the heathen, the Gentiles, that 'The blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.' In Galatians 3:16 we read - 'Now to Abraham and his seed

were the promises made. He saith not "and to seeds" as of many but as of one, "And to thy seed" which is Christ.' There are two important points here. 'Abraham and his seed', his progeny. God made this promise before Abraham's descendants even existed; it was a pre-determined decision on God's part before the promises were made. What is a promise? A promise is a pledge or a statement made in advance before the event occurs. And so to Abraham and his seed were the promises made, and 'he saith not as of many but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ.' And we have in Galatians 3:29 - 'And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.'

We now move along to see that just as man lost the dominion that he had in the Garden of Eden, so also the exclusive right that was Israel's in Old Testament times was lost. Israel lost its exclusive right and the Gentiles were grafted in. Let us read Romans 9: <sup>1</sup>'I say the truth in Christ and lie not, my conscience also bearing witness in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup>That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.' Yes, the Apostle Paul had great sorrow in his heart for his kinsmen. He would be prepared to give up the privilege he had if his kinsmen would come and take hold of it. <sup>4</sup>'Who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption (they were adopted by God, they were His chosen people), the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God and the promises...<sup>7</sup>Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children, but: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." <sup>8</sup>That is, they who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; (they were the children of the flesh, but that did not make them the children of God) but the children of the promise are counted for the seed...<sup>10</sup>And not only this, but when Rebecca had conceived by one, even our father Isaac <sup>11</sup>(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth).' Let us ponder that verse for a moment. Two points are confirmed here.

Firstly the children of the flesh were not the children of God, but the children of the promise were counted for the seed - as stated in Galatians 3:29: 'And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.'

Secondly Romans 9:10 and 11 is a very clear statement that God had pre-determined this well before the nation of Israel even came into existence. Rebecca, 'when she had conceived by our father Isaac', had twins but before they were even born and therefore had done neither any good nor evil, that is, one did not suffer disfavour because he had done things which were evil and the other experience favour because he had done things which were good. This was before they were even born and therefore they did not have a chance to do either good or evil so that the purpose of God according to **election** might stand. In other words, it was God's prerogative as to whom He would promote and whom He would demote.

Reading on in Romans 9:<sup>12</sup> 'It was said to her, "The elder shall serve the younger." <sup>13</sup>As it is written, "Jacob have I

loved, but Esau have I hated.” Esau, of course, was the elder; maybe only marginally, but he was the elder, the firstborn, and yet God chose to bless Jacob and not to bless Esau in the same way. <sup>23</sup>And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared for glory, <sup>24</sup>Even us whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.’ Do we see the picture, that the elder serves the younger? Just as Esau was to serve Jacob, so those fleshly Israelites whom God has not called will “serve” (be in a subordinate position) to the Gentiles whom He has called.

We read in Ephesians 2: <sup>11</sup>Wherefore remember that ye being in times past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called the uncircumcision by those who are the circumcision in the flesh made by hands, <sup>12</sup>that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.’ We have this great privilege now of being of the seed class, pre-determined by God away back there before Israel even existed, and we have been grafted in to be part of the commonwealth of Israel, the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and the promised seed. In Ephesians 3 we read: <sup>1</sup>For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles, <sup>2</sup>if you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God given from me to youward, <sup>3</sup>how by revelation He made known to me the mystery, as I wrote in a few words. <sup>4</sup>Whereby when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of God <sup>5</sup>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.’ “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men”. It wasn’t made known to them but that doesn’t mean to say it didn’t exist. God had this wondrous plan right back from before the foundation of the world. <sup>6</sup>that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and partakers of the same promise in Christ Jesus by the gospel. <sup>7</sup>Wherefore I was made a minister according to the gift of grace given unto me by the effectual working of His power. <sup>8</sup>Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup>and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God who created all things by Jesus Christ;’

To make **all** men see, not just Israel but also the Gentiles, what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God. All those prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which we see and did not see them but God, who created all things through Jesus Christ, has given them to us by His spirit.

Does not Colossians 1 summarize God’s great will for mankind in the Christian era? Col.1: <sup>26</sup>The mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations but is now made manifest to His saints (**the mystery hid for ages and from generations is now made manifest to His saints**) <sup>27</sup>**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.**’ May we all strive to make our calling and election sure. (GS:4/04)

## “THE PROPHET HOSEA”

### Brief History / Time of writing

The Book of Hosea is not often looked at in depth but the content is of great value and worthy of study. During the time of Hosea Israel was divided into two nations with Judah in the south and the rest of Israel in the north. Hosea was a prophet chiefly to Israel in the Northern Kingdom when that nation was prospering outwardly, but inwardly it was decaying. Hosea is the undisputed author of the Book of Hosea. He identifies himself in the book as the son of Beerī. His name means Salvation and is basically the same as Joshua and its Greek form, Jesus. Aside from his stressful marriage, little is known of the life of the prophet Hosea. His place of birth is not given but his familiarity with and concern for the Northern Kingdom indicates that he lived in Israel and not Judah. He was the husband of Gomer, and his wife had two sons and a daughter.

Living up to his name, Hosea prophesied concerning the salvation of Jehovah, which will come when Christ returns to set up His kingdom. Commentators say that the literary features in Hosea’s book mean that he was probably a member of the upper class. The tone and the content of the book also show that he was a man of deep compassion, strong loyalty and keen awareness of the political events taking place in the world at that time. As a prophet he was also deeply committed to

God and God’s will as it was being revealed to Israel. Hosea was a contemporary of Amos. They both ministered in the Northern Kingdom of Israel at the same time. Isaiah and Micah ministered in the Southern Kingdom in Judah. Amos was a native of the Southern Kingdom while Hosea was a native of the Northern Kingdom. Hosea was younger than Amos and because their ministries overlapped there is much similarity in the sins that they condemned. In Amos the prophetic discourses are very pronounced while in Hosea, because of his intense personal involvement, they are not distinctly defined from one another. Hosea was the first of the prophets that foretold the destruction of Israel. His ministry pre-dates those of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel by about 150 years.

Hosea dates his prophecy in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel. This informs us that Hosea had an extensive ministry of more than half a century, probably from 790BC to 725BC, and he probably ceased his active ministry about five years before Assyria carried the Northern Kingdom into captivity in 722BC. Hosea prophesied during the final years of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which was a time of rapid moral decline. Worship of false gods was mixed with the worship of the One



True God. Ritualism rather than righteousness was the order of the day as even the priests had lost sight of the real meaning of worship. King Jeroboam II was the instigator of many of these idolatrous policies. He brought these policies in during his 40 year reign. He also had a very stable kingdom so part of his rule was good, probably due to God's blessing. This stability came to an end when he died.

### **The Message of Hosea**

The book of Hosea contains 14 chapters. In Chapters 1 to 3, after a brief introduction of himself as God's prophet, Hosea tells of his unusual family situation. God appeared to Hosea and told him in chapter 1, Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry. The reason for this unusual request was to demonstrate that God's covenant children, the nation of Israel, had been unfaithful to God because of their worship of false gods. Hosea did as the Lord commanded. He took a woman named Gomer. The first three chapters of the book report a stormy relationship as husband and wife. Soon after their marriage Gomer bore three children. Hosea gave them symbolic names, Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah and Lo-ammi, to show that God was about to give His judgment upon the nation of Israel because the people had fallen into worship of false gods. Just as the nation rejected God, Gomer eventually left Hosea and the children to a life of prostitution. But Hosea's love for his wife refused to die. He searched until he found her at the slave market, then he brought her back and restored her as his wife. This was quite a few years later after being married. This tender picture clearly shows that God has not given up on Israel, although the people have played the harlot also many times by returning to their pagan worship and enslavement to sin.

The second major division of Hosea's book, chapters 4-14, contains the prophet's message of judgment against the nations of Israel and Judah. The Northern Kingdom of Israel, Hosea's homeland, is singled out for a strong rebuke because of its gross sin and immorality, but the book ends on a positive note. In tender language, the prophet reminds the nation of God's undying love. So let us now dissect some of the details in the book of Hosea as they pertain to Israel, beginning with what seems to us a very strange instruction of God to the prophet, already referred to. "The Lord said to Hosea, Go take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery and departing from the Lord. So he married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim; and she conceived and bore him a son.' Few events in the Bible have been debated as strongly as Hosea's marriage but its purpose in God's dealings through the prophet are made clear.

The book of Hosea is a story of one-sided love and faithfulness that represents the relationship between Israel and God. As Gomer is married to Hosea, so Israel is betrothed to God. Both relationships gradually disin-

tegrate. Gomer runs after other men and Israel runs after other gods. Israel's spiritual idolatry is illustrated by Gomer's physical adultery. Hosea's message reflects a terrible fascination of Israel with Baal idol worship. Baal means 'husband' or 'lord' and his worship involved fertility rites that include ritual prostitution. Baal was the other lover to whom the unfaithful Israel often turned. All commentators seem to agree that Hosea's own experiences in life in some degree picture the Lord's experiences with Israel. Following the Lord's direction, Hosea took back his wife, reclaimed her, and his message to Israel was of God's continuing love for that people.

### **Gomer's Children**

Let us now look at Gomer's children. We do not say Hosea's children, and there is a reason for that. The first is a son named Jezreel, and Jezreel means 'God sowed' or 'God scattered' like scattering seeds to make something grow. Hosea tells of the fall of the royal family by naming his son this way. Jezreel was the name of one of the royal cities of the kings of Israel. It was a beautiful city situated in a pleasant valley and it is with illusion to that city and its king that this child is called Jezreel. So we read in Hosea 1:4,5: 'Then the Lord said to Hosea, Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel.' So we see here a clear prediction of the end of the ten tribes and their ruler. Hosea tells of God's abandonment of the whole nation in the name of his second child. This was a daughter. The first was a son and the second a daughter, and this shows that both sons and daughters of Israel had been corrupted in their ways. Her name was Lo-ruhamah, which means 'not pitied' or 'not beloved' or 'not having obtained mercy'. Our Bible Students' Commentary adds that the meaning is 'she never knew a father's love', that she was an orphan not because of the death of her father but because of the sin of her mother. So in other words, Hosea didn't claim to be the father of this child. We read in Hosea 1:6,7 - 'Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, Call her Lo-ruhamah for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to the house of Judah and I will save them, not by the bow, sword or battle, or by horses or horsemen, but by the Lord their God.'

We read here of the doom of the house of Israel - 'I will no longer show love to the house of Israel'. It intimates that God had shown them great mercy but they had abused His favours and forfeited them and now He would show them no more favours. Next we read in Hosea 1:8,9 - 'After she had weaned Lo-ruhamah Gomer had another son. Then the Lord said, Call him Lo-ammi; for you are not my people and I am not your god.' The meaning of the third child's name is 'not my

people' or 'no kin of mine'. Here we can see that this child is disowned by Hosea in the same way that God was going to disown Israel. Lo-ammi's name indicates to the Israel of that day that they were not Jehovah's people and Jehovah was not their god. So we can see that God rejected the ten tribes of Israel, but Judah still had a part in God's plan. So we can see that this was the main theme of Hosea's message. His unhappy family experience was an object lesson of the sin or harlotry of the nation of Israel in rejecting the One True God and serving pagan gods. Although the people deserved to be rejected because they had turned their backs on God, Hosea emphasized that God would continue to love them and use them as His special people. There are quite a few other details worthy of study in these prophetic utterances of Hosea, how they pertain to Israel, but time does not permit developing that at this time.

### Lessons for Christians

Hosea 6:1,2 says: 'Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will heal up our wounds. After two days He will revive us, and on the third day He will restore us that we will live in His presence.' What a wonderful promise we find in these verses! We see the Plan of the Ages in front of us as we read verse 2: two thousand years of revival through the pages of the Gospel and then a restoration of all of mankind to life; all who ever lived will be resurrected. The Plan of God marches on. Hosea 6:6 – 'For I desire mercy, not sacrifice; and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.' Jesus used these words in Matt.12:7. He did so in connection with the question of observance of the Sabbath. Jesus' message was full of hope as contrasted to the Law Covenant which was impossible for any man to keep. Hosea 6:7 mentions that 'like Adam, they have broken the covenant, they have been unfaithful to Me'. This was a little aside and it is interesting to us to show that Adam was under an implied covenant with God, as Hosea said.

Hosea 9:10 – 'When I found Israel it was like finding grapes in the desert; when I saw your fathers it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree'. How often we use the fig tree in connection with prophecies concerning Israel. We can see the fig tree beginning to put forth its leaves and fruit. By this we know that summer is near and that our redemption draweth nigh. Hosea 11:1- 'When Israel was a child I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son.' Nothing about the context had ever let anybody think to apply this to Israel. It seemed to apply to Israel as an infant nation coming out of Egypt, but once our attention is called to it we can see the name Israel, meaning prevailer, applies well to Jesus. And not only so but the coming of Israel out of literal Egypt and the coming of Jesus out of literal Egypt are types of the coming of the entire Israel, the church, out of that anti-

type of Egypt, the world. What beautiful pictures! Hosea 13:14 – 'I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? I will have no compassion'.

In God's Plan there is a time for everything. God sent forth His Son. In due time He paid the price of man's redemption, and when the appointed hour comes round He will claim His purchased property. 'Marvel not at this, the hour cometh in which all that are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done ill unto the resurrection of judgment.' (John 5:28,29). And another beautiful prophesy from Hosea: 'I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called not my loved one; I will say to those called not-my-people you **are** my people, and they will say, You are my God.' We read about this same verse in Romans 9:25,26 where the Apostle Paul quotes it, and after that he says in Chapter 10: 'For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile; the same Lord is Lord of all, and richly blesses all who call on Him.' Hosea 2:18- 'In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beast of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground; bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land so that all may lie down in safety.' This time of peace is just in front of us. We still see wars and weapons of war, but soon this will change. The sword will be beaten into the ploughshare, and as we read in Isaiah 11:6-9 – 'The wolf will lie with the lamb, the cow will feed with the bear, the infant will play near the hole of the cobra; they will neither harm nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.'

So, in summary, we are not to lose the force of this lesson by applying it wholly to the nation of Israel. It is also a warning to those in spiritual Israel who profess to be Christians but who do not heed the warnings of Jesus and who love the things of this earth. James 4:4 says: 'You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God. Any one who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.' Also, to the Laodicean church we read in Rev.3:17 – 'You say, I am rich, I have acquired wealth and I don't need a thing; but you do not realise you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.' We see that the warnings given to Israel, then, are just as applicable to the spiritual Israel of today. In his unquestioning obedience to God, Hosea demonstrated he was a prophet who had followed his Lord's will no matter what the cost. He was a sensitive, compassionate spokesman for righteousness whose own life echoed the message that God is Love. May God help us to be equally as faithful in following the footsteps of our Lord Jesus.

(DW 12/04)

## IN BRIEF

### “THE HABITATION OF GOD THROUGH THE SPIRIT”

(Eph 2:22, 1 Cor 3:9)

The two text passages indicate that there is a similarity between an earthly building and the Church. “*Ye are God’s building.*” (1 Cor 3:9); a building is a dwelling place, generally speaking it is a home. God speaks of dwelling in His people. We are the household of God’ we are growing into a holy temple unto the Lord through the Spirit’s power.

We know well the story of the two men, one building on a rock and the other on sand. The building that Paul speaks about in the text has a foundation that is very concrete – a sure foundation, the only foundation that any could lay down to build upon a habitation for God. None will be confounded who are built thereon. Various structures, however, may be built upon this foundation (1 Cor 3:9-13) but the day will declare the desirable ones. Christ is indeed a tried foundation; He shrank not from the hard experiences; He endured all to enable an imprisoned race to go out to freedom.

For nearly 2000 years many have been building on this foundation; has it proved a crumbling one? No, all other ground has and still is proving sinking sand! The one true foundation alone provides unfailing trust for time and eternity.

There is a contrast between Solomon’s temple and that which is being built for God now, though it was indeed a picture. In Solomon’s temple, only the best materials were to be used; where would the material then be found for the real temple of God? It might seem to us that faithful angels might first be considered, but such was not God’s plan. He sought more humble material – those “quarried” from sin. “*I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance*” – not many noble ones, but crooked sticks and crumbling stones, cut from the ranks of the base things of this world.

From these God has chosen, that no flesh should glory in His presence. “*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.*” (Rom 11:33) In a building there are often more small places rather than large, perhaps more weak than strong. There are few pillars in comparison with all other parts of the building; God gave some apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, etc., but just as necessary are the lesser members. We praise God for the pillars which He has used, but we praise Him too for the lesser members. The names of the apostles stand out, as also the names of many others whom God has used down through the age in an outstanding way.

But many obscure persons has He used for His building.

What ministry have such obscure ones rendered; how many travellers have they assisted? All are equally dear and precious. Though the material for God’s building seems initially so poor, its qualities are vastly improved in the quarry; indeed it is changed into the same image of Him who provides the foundation. Its lasting qualities are superb, even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

None will be able in the future to point out one “stone” that has not been perfected by the Master’s chisel – from the least to the greatest, all is wrought only through the blood of Christ; upon this Rock only will God build His Church. How thankful are we that God is willing in His people to build a habitation for Himself through the Spirit. (NM 74)

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*Lord. I am thine, entirely Thine,  
Purchased and saved by blood of Thine;  
Thee, my dear Master, now I call,  
And consecrate to Thee my all.*

### THE LAND VERY FAR OFF

“Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.” (Isa 33:17)

This is a very rich verse; while originally referring to natural Israel, it has just as true a message for spiritual Israel. The true home for the Christian is still visionary, it often seems very far off, but our CITIZENSHIP is there and we groan, as it were, waiting for the HOME God has appointed for us. (2 Cor 5:1,2) Jesus Himself spoke loving words concerning this home to his disciples (and us) as He was about to leave them – “I go to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:1-3)

All who have the hope of reaching this land very far off, must see the King in His BEAUTY even now; this beauty will be accentuated when we reach that land. We are thankful that we have found Jesus our King, our Saviour, and that we can behold His beauty even here and now, though unseen and unappreciated as yet by mankind in general. How often we think upon the beauty of our King who reveals so many beautiful things to us. Some day, present unbelievers will come to see something of His beauty also, they will come to love His beauty and receive of the wonderful things God has in store for them.

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“But Oh the joy when I shall wake  
Within the palace of the King!  
And I shall see Him face to face  
And tell the story – Saved by grace!  
(FJC)

# LOVE IS ...GREATER THAN LANGUAGE

And so it was that *"the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.... And the Lord said 'Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; ... Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So ... the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth; and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth...."* (Genesis 11 : 1 - 8)

Those verses tell us not only how the different languages originated, but also of the power of language. God could have used other influences (for example, family affiliations) to cause the people to scatter, but He used language. That God's purpose was achieved by confounding their language is clearly evident. Indeed, in some parts of the world, the people in different regions speak different languages, even though they live in the same country.

It was not until approximately four thousand years later that the miraculous gift to speak and interpret different languages was given to the apostles at Pentecost. It is no wonder then that the *"Jews ... out of every nation under heaven ... were amazed and marvelled ... when they heard them speak in his own language ..."* (Acts 2 : 5 - 7)

Of all the gifts, the gift to speak in other languages was perhaps the most keenly sought (coveted) by the Corinthians, and so Paul devotes what in our Bible is the whole of 1 Cor. 14 to it. None of the other gifts receives such extensive consideration.

## The power of language

Oratory is very persuasive. In Jude 16 we read: *"These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage"*. These "great swelling words" were not words from other languages, but the words of the common language. We can imagine how much greater would have been their admiration if they had spoken in more than one language, and hence how appealing to the Corinthians would have been the gift of 'tongues'.

The record in Jude does not mean that all oratory is "great swelling words". Acts 18:24-28 says that Apollos was *"an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures ... for he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ"*. Apollos was a powerful preacher. However, while his eloquence convinced the Jews publicly, his knowledge was incomplete, such that Aquila and Priscilla *"took him aside and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly"* (verse 26). So eloquence in itself does not mean spiritual maturity.

On the other hand, at times God has used those who were less fluent to achieve His purposes. Moses was aware of his *"uncircumcised lips"* (Exodus 6:12) and felt inadequate to confront Pharaoh. So God used Aaron as Moses' mouthpiece (Exodus 7:1-2). Nevertheless it is Moses who is regarded as Israel's deliverer (Acts 7:20, 35-37). The fact that Moses had *"uncircumcised lips"* did not mean that God did not use him to accomplish His purpose.

Paul also did not claim to be an orator - *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God"* (1 Cor 2:1). Nor was he regarded by others as an accomplished orator - *"For his letters say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible"* (that is, despised, set at nought - Strong #1848). (2 Cor. 10:10)

## Love essential

Although Paul did not claim to have *"excellency of speech"* (oratory), God gave him the gift of speaking in other languages: *"I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all"*. (1 Cor. 14:18) However on its own this gift was vain. In 1 Cor. 13:1 Paul tells the Corinthians that *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity (love) I am become as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal"*. It was essential for Paul to develop love in order to fulfil his apostleship.

Further, the word *"though"* in 1 Cor. 13:1 is from the Greek *"ean"*, (Strong #1437) and in the majority of occurrences is translated "if". So Paul is not boasting that he had the gift of languages, but that **if** he spoke in other languages and did not have love he would be as *"sounding brass and tinkling cymbal"*.

## The tongue of an angel

As well as possessing the gift of languages, Paul also says that he was able to speak *"with the tongue of an angel"*. Paul was initially received by the Galatians *"as an angel of God"*. (Gal. 4:14) Perhaps his statement in 1 Cor. 13:1 that he could speak *"as an angel"* was an additional way of reminding the Corinthians that, although he was God's messenger to them, the development of love was superior to even that office (Romans 11:13).

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