



Volume 92 No. 4

AUSTRALIA

October-December 2009

THEY SHALL NOT PLANT AND ANOTHER EAT

One element of God's plan is His dealing with the nation of Israel, an understanding of which sheds light on several events of the past, gives some insight into present events and enlightens several of the prophecies relating to the future.

One of the early passages of Scripture that reveals God's dealing with Israel is Exodus 19:3-6: "And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel". God's promise to Israel that they would be a peculiar treasure was not unconditional but required them to obey His voice and keep His covenant.

God's reason for choosing Israel to be His treasure was not that they were more worthy or powerful than the other nations, but simply because He loved them: "... the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers..." (Deut. 7:6-8).

The record in Deuteronomy goes on to detail the blessings God promised them, provided they kept His commandments. On the other hand, He would be swift and decisive if they failed to obey Him: "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack

to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face... Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee... Thou shalt be blessed above all people..." (Deut. 7:9-14).

The Israelites agreed unanimously to obey Him: "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do" (Exodus 24:3).

Transgression

Nevertheless soon after their miraculous deliverance from Egyptian bondage the Israelites transgressed and worshipped a golden calf (Exodus 32:1-4).

As promised, God punished Israel for their transgression: "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel: and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds. And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them;

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And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass... And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites..." (Judges 6:1-6). The loss of their crops was a severe punishment.

Nevertheless when Israel turned to God He re-instated them as shown when Solomon consecrated the temple: *"Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement, and worshipped, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever..."* (2 Chronicles 7:1-22).

The prophet Isaiah

Isaiah lived approximately 200 years after Solomon built the temple. His prophecy relates to the nation of Israel which testifies to God's continued dealing with them: *"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah..."* (Isa. 1:1). In view of Israel's history Isaiah was caused to write: *"Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward..."* (Isa. 1:2-6). What lamentable statements, particularly in view of God's acceptance of Solomon's consecration of the temple.

Consequent to their continued waywardness, God punished them again: *"Now it came to pass in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, that Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the defenced cities of Judah, and took them"* (Isa. 36:1).

The sad story of Israel's woes continued—more than 100 years after Isaiah's prophecy, Zephaniah wrote: *"And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil. Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: they shall also build houses, but*

not inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, but not drink the wine thereof..." (Zeph. 1:12-13).

Coming further down the stream of time, the punishment of not reaping what they had sown was experienced by Israel in the twentieth century, as recorded by Meyer Levin in his book **"In Search"** (Horizon Press, New York 1950): *"...the harvest came, and we were about one-third of the entire kibbutz in the harvest team... we felt an exhilarating unity in labor, from those who pitched the bundles of wheat onto the thresher to those who stood sweating, half naked, in the exhaust of the machine pitching away the chaff... as we devoured our own bread we felt as though our energy had retuned directly to us, through the fruit of our harvest labor... (However) our fields were crossed by a donkey trail, and the comrades were constantly on the watch for Arabs who made a habit of slipping sheaves of grain under their voluminous garments, as they passed. At night, neighboring villagers might try to make more serious depredations. During the harvest season a doubled guard circled the fields, while reinforcements slept on top of the threshing machines. In my turn, I spent a night there.*

As we sat on the platform of the antiquated thresher, I absorbed many tales of Arab troubles, and came to understand that a chief source of conflict lay in this constant pilfering. From the earliest days the settlements had had to mount guards to protect their grain and livestock; the worst trouble came from the Bedouin, the nomad Arabs who camped about in their black tents, and with whom theft was traditional art, admired by the community... While pilfering by neighboring villagers could be fairly well prevented, through constant vigilance and through cultivation of relations with the villagers, the thieving impulse was only checkmated rather than erased. But nomadic Bedouin coming seasonally to squat near a colony might organize raids and involve local Arab villagers..." (emphasis added).

The punishment of their harvest being pillaged by others continues until today as recorded in **The Jerusalem Post** on August 24, 2009: *"Tired of police ineptitude and concerned about the receding Jewish character of the region, a group of farmers and volunteers from the Galilee have formed an organization called the New Guard (Hashomer Hahadash)...Modeled after the original guardsmen, led by Alexander Zaid, who protected the Jewish communities of the region in pre-state Israel at the beginning of the 20th century, the group's volunteers are primarily dedicated to upholding Jewish farming and pasture rights in response to nightly violations by local Beduin herdsmen..."* (emphasis added). *"It*

started when I saw the difficulties my father was facing in confronting Beduin herders from a nearby village, who infiltrated his property, cut his fences and stole his cattle," said the group's founder, 23-year-old Yoel Zilberman from Tzipori, a moshav not far from Nazareth... Aside from guarding at the outposts, volunteers patrol the dirt roads surrounding the grazing lands.... According to Ziberman's father, Chaim, most of the farmers and herdsmen in the region prefer to pay, rather than face the constant harassment and the expenses involved in fixing fences and making up for losses in cattle and pasture degradation. "What they do is enter into 'partnership' with the criminals," said E. "They either allow them to graze their herds freely, thus in effect giving up large portions of their land, or else they pay out a salary to the local tribal leader, for 'security services.'" It is noted that this report pertains to 2009.

Lost forever?

In view of Israel's repeated turning away from God in times past, it might be natural to assume that God's patience with them has expired and that He has abandoned them forever. Nevertheless that is not the case: the book of Isaiah contains many other prophecies regarding Judah and Jerusalem, including chapter 62:8-9: "*The LORD hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, Surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for the which thou hast laboured: But they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the LORD; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness*". Verses 11 and 12 of that chapter define the time when that promise will be fulfilled: "*Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. And they shall call them, The holy people, The redeemed of the LORD: and thou shalt be called, Sought out, A city not forsaken*". The prophecy refers to a time yet future when Israel will be called "*a city not forsaken*", a statement which is in stark contrast to the earlier statements when God "abandoned" His people.

Isaiah 65:17-25 also prophesies of the time when Jerusalem will not be forsaken. The verses declare that it will be when God creates the new heaven and new earth: "*For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth... for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people... And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and*

another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them".

Other prophets also have written of the blessed future time when Israel will be God's delight and will prosper. Jeremiah is one such prophet: "*And it shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD... Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD*" (Jer. 31:28-37). The promise is sure—it is only if the sun ceases to give its light and the regularity of the moon and stars fail that He will not fulfill His promise to watch over them to build and to plant. When they have been disobedient in the past He has punished them but the promise now is that, just as assuredly, He will watch over them to build them up and to plant.

Ezekiel 28:25-26 and Amos 9:14-15 also record God's promise to Israel: "*And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel... and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the LORD thy God*" (Amos 9:14). Israel will yet enjoy the fruits of their labour.■

BE STILL

The sermon published below was delivered approximately 55 years ago, before the days of direct dial telephone services, television, home computers, the internet, electronic mail, mobile phones, and cheap flights in jet-powered aircraft, all of which enable people to “keep in touch”. It is printed with the thought that reflection on the situation as seen by one devoted Christian only half a century ago might help those living today to better appreciate the changes that have permeated Western society.

The sermon

“It seems like audacity to try to preach a sermon on ‘Being Still’ in our world of today for it is an age of speed and rush. Most everything tends to turmoil of mind, there seems so much to do and such little time to do it in. City life adds ten fold to these tendencies and most of us find our environments these days either in or bordering close to the noisy bustle of the hub of a city.

Psalm 46:10 is a text that requires interpretation in its context: it has to do with the Millennium and relates to the raging nations as the great battle of Armageddon draws to a close. In angry foment of that time it will be a welcome voice indeed, and how ready will the nations of mankind be then to hear it.

But since we learn that the church is instructed and prepared in Godliness an age ahead of the world it surely is in order to apply the essence of this verse to ourselves now. We need to be still and know that God has all power to execute His plan. There is no need to get in a frenzy about ‘converting the world’.

Maybe too we may stand in special need at this end of the age to be guided wisely in our Class meeting affairs. None can dispute that the tendency is toward fewer numbers in our fellowships—on special occasions such as conventions the numbers may continue to be about the usual over a number years, but it is the Sunday by Sunday attendances that reveal the true state of affairs and where there is deep spirituality. Fewer elders and fewer helpers casts more pressure on the few, and in some cases it might be wise to take stock and ask oneself the question: “what would the Lord have me to do—try to keep up with the whirl of doing as much or more than ever, or cultivate more the spirit of being still and seek guidance to adjust matters more to that end?”. It is good to be busy but not so busy with so many things to do that nothing is done well.

In Psalm 76:8 we are told how the earth feared and was still when God arises to judgement and the

Millennium. The “stilling” of the earth will be an absolute necessity for the welfare of mankind: what richness of thought to the understanding mind does Isaiah 14:7 portray of that day: *“The whole earth is at rest and is quiet”*. The din of this twentieth century world must surely pass away.

Recently I have been interested in reading the view points of a person labouring with intent to assist people to enjoy better health. The thought was expressed that although in moments of relaxation the first thing that the majority do is to turn on the wireless, it is often the worst thing to do. To sit and quietly read is much better.

We have all noticed the tendency of children these days to be “on the go”. I have heard some parents remark (apparently proud of the fact) that “Johnny is always on the go, he can’t be still a minute”. The one I’ve been reading wrote: “The habit of stillness cultivated in childhood will be the basis of true poise in the adult; the child who has never been taught how to be still will be at a great disadvantage when he goes out to take his place in the affairs of the world. Rest, to be effective, means not only rest for the digestive organs, but relief from the shrieking of pop singers over every radio station in the land, National stations included. Children have no escape from these disturbances of the peace. Even where parents are considerate the neighbours carry on their radio programs and week-end parties far into the night.

Where real music soothes and heals, the crashing din of a “pop session” sets up a resistance in the fine mechanisms of the brain, even in an adult, which brings on a greater degree of fatigue, poisoning the blood stream, than many hours of manual labour. Noise, which includes music, stimulates and excites and when continued for too long a period, it reaches a point where it irritates and finally prostrates. As the radio is the chief noise maker in our midst we must place it as public enemy number one in this direction. Whatever advantages have been derived from the doubtful blessing of wireless we have paid for them very dearly in increasing nervous disorders amongst children.”

To Christians I say there is more value than realised by many in attempting as often as possible to carry out the advice of the Psalmist in Psalm 4:4: *“...commune with your own heart upon your bed and be still”*. It is capable of yielding more blessedness at times than listening to someone else preach a sermon. It has been remarked by one, somewhat in lighter vein, that God wanted John Bunyan to write “Pilgrim’s

Progress" so He shut him up in prison. One cannot help wondering how much of Paul's beautiful thoughts were borne out of reflection in solitude as a prisoner. In the light of their experiences these men in the stillness of their surroundings must have often communed with their own hearts upon their beds as it were.

Whatever may have been the ruling conditions during which great men of the past lived, and when we think of David, Abraham, Moses and many others as shepherds in quiet country environments, we feel sure that we of the present day are more handicapped in exercising the same thoughtful meditation; but that is not to say that it is of less value to a Godly life today, and he who earnestly seeks to order his life so as to have it will undoubtedly be spiritually richer for it.

Some of us at times need reminding that in political and national life the true Christian should not be unduly interested and never an agitator—the temptation is, and often we are rather fonder than we ought to be, to insist on "having our say" regarding this or that political measure and the sponsor of it. We can redeem time here maybe for communing with our heart instead. From 1 Timothy 2:1-2 we conclude that where no principle is at stake we should accept and abide by the ruling power with desire to lead a quiet and peaceable life.

In 1 Peter 3 the early verses are interesting in line with our topic. It is noticed that it chiefly concerns sisters. In this day when cosmetics are used almost universally and when the female community are slaves to "fashion", here is something for true Christian women to note well—that a meek and quiet spirit is the best of all in God's sight.

Then we have the well known text in 1 Thessalonians 4:11: "*study to be quiet*". The concordance gives the meaning of the word "study" here to be "esteem as an honour"; esteem it as an honour to be quiet. Weymouth renders it: "make a quiet life your ambition". The world today will call you an old fogey, stick in the mud, stick at home that never goes anywhere, but you will be more than compensated in spiritual blessings (and in many cases, physical blessings too). Make a quiet life your ambition, which is the opposite of wanting to have all the say on those occasions when you are in company; times when many grow resentful because they could not get a word in edge-wise. One reason for our zeal might be that we believe that what we want to say will be a witness to our faith in God. However think of the nervous energy you save by not having to try; if you are to speak the Lord will make the opening; if not, we can be content to be ignored".

The Lord's hand

There are several instances where the people of earlier times were directly instructed to "be still" and wait on the Lord. In two examples it was necessary for Israel to not be dismayed but to trust God.

Exodus 14:11-14 reads: "*And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace*". It was necessary for the Israelites to "stand still" in order to see the salvation of the Lord. The same situation may well occur in the lives of Christians in the 21st century: at times it is necessary to curtail our zeal and wait on the Lord—give Him time to work out His will—in order to allow the Lord to do His perfect work.

Another instance where it was necessary to allow the Lord to fight the battle is recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:15-17: "*And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you*".

The land

Also it was beneficial for the Israelites to rest even the land (let it stand still) for a year: "*And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard*" (Exodus 23:10-11).

These instances from old times have been recorded for our benefit: "*written for our learning*" (Rom. 15:4). The benefits have not stopped due to the passage of time; there continues to be great physical and spiritual profit in observing them. May we ponder them. ■

LESSONS FROM JACOB'S WELL

Those who live in the Western world in the 21st century might be unfamiliar with accessing water from a well—with modern reticulation systems all that is required to obtain water is turn on the tap. However that has not always been the case: in Jesus' day water was drawn from a well using a rope and bucket. Some aspects of drawing water from a well may be used as illustrations of the Christian life.

Jesus at Jacob's Well

John 4:1-15 records Jesus meeting a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Jacob's well lies near the modern city of Nabilus. In Jesus' day it was called Sychar. When first seen in 1697 by a man named Mondrel it was 75 feet (30 metres) deep, but Mondrel says it was probably dug to a depth of 120 to 150 feet (approximately 35-45 metres), and it held 15 feet (4 metres) of water.

John 4:1-9 reads: *"When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples), He left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink (for his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat). Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans".*

It is noted that some manuscripts do not contain the words *"for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans"*, however the concept seems to be consistent with the woman's reaction to Jesus' request and is in accordance with Jesus' instruction to His twelve disciples: *"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matt. 10:5-6).

Who It Is

Jesus continued: *"If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water"*. At that stage Jesus did not state who He was but continued to reveal His super-human powers by re-counting the woman's marital status.

By revealing His knowledge of the woman's history Jesus demonstrated that He was indeed *"greater than Jacob...which gave us the well"* (verse 12). In other words He did not outwardly claim to be the Son of God but provided evidence which led the woman to conclude that He was a prophet (verse 19).

Such should be the case with the Christian: self acclamation counts for nothing, as the Apostle Paul was careful to demonstrate: *"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God"* (1 Cor. 2:4-5). His demeanour was the opposite of the scribes about whom Jesus warned His disciples: *"Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts"* (Luke 20:46). The scribes did not verbally demand prominence and admiration, but their underlying spirit was to impose their sense of self-importance by an outward show—a manifestation of their pride.

Living water

Another picture may be drawn from the difference between the water that the woman was able to draw, and the living water of which Jesus spoke. The term 'living water' implies life-giving water. The Greek word for 'living' (zao) means 'to live' or 'to have life'; it occurs more than 140 times in the New Testament and some instances which bear out its meaning are: Matthew 4:4; 16:16; John 4:50-53; Acts 1:3 and Romans 9:26.

One feature of a well is that the inflow is from below—the flowing or active water is beneath the stagnant water that rises inside the well. Consequently, although the water towards the top of the water in the well was fresh water, it was not living water. The water to which Jesus referred was the words of life, the gospel of salvation; eternal life. The implication is that Jesus was able to provide living water—that is flowing, vibrant water. As the Apostle Peter exclaimed later: *"...Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life"* (John 6:68).

Nothing to draw with

As the conversation between Jesus and the woman developed, the woman said: *"Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep"*. The woman's statement may be interpreted to imply that drawing water from the well was not something that one could achieve without some equipment, and especially to reach the flowing water which was at the very bottom

of the well. And so it is with those who wish to access the spiritual living water. One of the essential “pieces of equipment” required by the Christian to access the life giving truths of God’s Word is the Holy Spirit: “*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor. 2:9-11). The Christian must have God’s Holy Spirit to draw the life giving water.

The Holy Spirit was poured out first at Pentecost and those who received it were energized (Acts 2:17-18). Those who received the Spirit had their eyes opened to the Scriptures, and thus became a well of salvation; a channel of Divine truth.

On the other hand, without the Holy Spirit, all human effort, regardless of how intellectual it might be, is fruitless. Paul wrote to Timothy: “*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be...ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (2 Tim. 3:1-7). Without the Holy Spirit diligent study profits nothing.

Effort required

Another picture that may be drawn from the deepness of the well is that considerable effort was required to haul the water to the surface. The same principle applies to the Christian: “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15). The Christian must be prepared to expend energy in order to obtain the life giving water.

Thirst again

The record continues: “*Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life*” (John 4:10-14).

Jesus declared that the water the woman would draw would quench her thirst in the short term, but that relief would be temporary and she would need to come to the well again to draw water. On the other hand the water that He would provide would satisfy her thirst forever. The duration of the relief from thirst that the water Jesus provides may be considered to reflect the on-going satisfaction that the Christian enjoys from the water of truth. It satisfies the soul such that there is no need to seek refreshment from

other sources: “*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*” (Eph. 4:14), but as Paul declared: “*...I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day*” (2 Tim. 1:12). The water of truth satisfies the Christian’s thirst forever.

However another picture that may be drawn is that, just as the woman had to come to the well repeatedly to draw literal water to meet her daily needs, so the Christian must repeatedly search the Scriptures to refresh themselves with the life giving water. This aspect of Christian endeavour was reflected in the zeal of the Christians at Berea who “*were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11). Their search was not a “once off” activity: they searched the Scriptures daily.

The need for continual refreshment is reflected in the exhortation given in Hebrews 10:25: “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*”. Gathering together with those of like mind provides spiritual refreshment and may be considered to be one way for the Christian to visit the well.

This picture is not contradictory to the earlier picture of the satisfying nature of the living water. They are different pictures and each is being used to illustrate a different aspect of the Christian life.

The need for repeated filling with life-giving water is a reminder of a temptation that might face Christians of long-standing; that is, to cease diligent study, especially of things with which they are familiar. However it is wise to heed the Apostle Peter’s words: “*Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance...*” (2 Pet. 1:12-13). Thus in the symbolism of the incident at Jacob’s well, it is necessary to continually draw living water from the anti-typical well of salvation in order to keep oneself refreshed and to be able to continue to be a well of living water.

The Christian as a well of living water

John 7:38-39 explains the concept of a Christian becoming a well of living water: “*He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall*

flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)". Thus, as mentioned above, it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that enables one to become a spring of living water and able to refresh others by sharing with them the words of life. When Jesus met this woman the Holy Spirit had not been given to mankind because "Jesus was not yet glorified"; no-one was empowered by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and therefore at that time no-one could be a well of living water.

However that is not the situation today and those who are filled with the Spirit should have a desire to be active in the dissemination of the word of truth, as Paul exhorted Timothy: "Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2).

Indeed the writer to the Hebrews was critical of those who had not progressed such that they were able to spread the gospel: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Heb. 5:12). Some had not progressed and had not become a well of living water; they could not share the gospel message with others.

Neither come hither to draw

"The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw". The woman's request reflected her desire to be relieved of the need to continually draw water from the well, due to the effort required to walk to the well and carry the water back to her home. For the Christian the picture is that they do not need to go to a specific location to draw water—there is no travel burden—because the living water goes with them wherever they go: "Jesus saith unto her, Woman believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...but the hour cometh when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth..." (John 4:21-23). The living water of truth goes with the Christian because it dwells in their heart.

Isaiah's prophecy

The only other instance where the expression "wells of salvation" occurs in the Scriptures is Isaiah 12:1-6: "And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore

with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted. Sing unto the LORD; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee".

The prophecy foretells a time when the nation of Israel will acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, and will drink of the life giving water that only He can give. The prophet Jeremiah confirms the promise: "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:31-34).

In that day the nation of Israel will drink of the water of life from the well of salvation in fulfillment of Jesus' declaration: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). ■

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF GENERAL SYNOD HELD AT THE CAMPION RETREAT CENTRE, KEW, VICTORIA ON FRIDAY 12 AND SATURDAY 13 OCTOBER, 2001.

Agenda Item 20: Press Release: Item 6: "It was resolved that this Standing Committee of General Synod... urges Anglicans and other Christians throughout the country to seek to understand Islam more fully and build closer relationships with Muslim communities".

[Source: <http://www.anglican.org.au/index.cfm?SID=28%Searchtext=Islam>]

The above press release is not published with any thought of criticism, nevertheless it highlights the significance of Acts 4:10-12: "...Jesus Christ of Nazareth...there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved". ■

GOD'S HIGHER WAY

John 14:27 is possibly one of the most comforting and also one of the most challenging verses of Scripture in the whole Bible: *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid".*

Peace is precious and is something that not only every Christian but also most people in the world hope for and cherish. But in these times it is a challenge to believe that the words quoted above are true—can anyone really be at peace in a world that has been troubled throughout history? In recent years Iraq, the Middle East, Asia and the African continent have been plagued with war; there have been earthquakes in China, tornadoes and cyclones in Burma and the USA. Some parts of Australia have experienced floods while other parts have suffered prolonged drought. Spain has also been in the grip of drought. Human suffering, both in degree and magnitude, has been enormous and therefore it is “natural” for every believer in God to ask “If God is a god of love, compassion and mercy, why doesn’t He do something to end the suffering? How can He sit idly by and watch His human creation endure such heartbreak?”

Beyond the human mind

God’s purpose in permitting such catastrophes is beyond the natural human mind to understand, although many have tried to do so. Solomon is one who tried.

Solomon was one of the wisest men to have ever lived on the Earth and so it is not surprising that he tried to fathom God’s purposes. He wrote: *“I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith”* (Eccl. 1:12-13). Solomon concluded that God has given this “sore travail” to the sons of men for a purpose, that purpose being that man would be “exercised therewith”. The primary meaning of the Hebrew word from which “exercised” is translated is “to depress”; it also means “humble”. Solomon repeats his conclusion in chapter 3 verses 10-11: *“I have seen the travail which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it ... no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end”*.

Although it is beyond the natural human mind to understand God’s purpose in subjecting mankind to the present distress, that is not the case with whom He has given His Holy Spirit: *“But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit...”* (1 Cor. 2:10).

The Apostle Paul

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the Apostle Paul wrote: *“For the creature was made subject to vanity ... by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope...”* (Rom. 8:20). Paul clearly states that God deliberately subjected His creation to “vanity” (the present suffering, including death) for a reason. Paul goes on to explain (verse 21) that there will be an end to the present travail: *“because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”*.

God’s supremacy

The first step in trying to understand God’s purpose in giving mankind the present experience is to understand and acknowledge that God is superior to mankind.

The prophet Jeremiah provides some insight: *“But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. Thus shall ye say unto them, ‘The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens’. He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion. When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures. Every man is brutish in his knowledge ...”* (Jer. 10:10-14). Those verses not only describe **God’s power** but they also state that He “*hath established the world by his wisdom*”.

God’s power

Regarding God’s power, the truth of Jeremiah’s declaration is undeniable: the “*multitude of waters in the heavens*” is a resource that causes floods when He sends them to Earth, while at the other end of the spectrum the “*vapours ascending from the ends of the earth*” bring drought (a lack of water). “*Lightnings with rain*” describes thunderstorms and His “*bringing forth wind*” equates to cyclones and tornadoes. The devastation that these “forces of nature” may cause is far greater than that caused by any device that Man has been able to engineer, and it is in that sense that Man is “*brutish in his knowledge*”.

God’s wisdom

The second of God’s attributes mentioned in the verses from Jeremiah is His wisdom; He made the world “*by*

His wisdom”. That statement is consistent with the fact that when He finished making the Earth He saw that it was “*very good*” (Gen. 1:31). However His wisdom did not stop there but continues to have effect until today and can be seen from a consideration of some of the events that have occurred since creation.

One event that illustrates God’s wisdom in His direct involvement in the affairs of men was His raising up of Pharaoh at the time of Israel’s release from Egyptian bondage; His purpose in doing so was “*to show in thee my power*” (Exodus 9:16). That purpose may seem obscure, but nevertheless it is the truth of the matter. The Apostle Paul refers to it in Romans 9:17 in his explanation that there is a **higher purpose** in God’s dealings with the human race than is apparent to the natural human mind.

Jesus foreordained

Another example of God’s wisdom in His arrangements for mankind which illustrates His higher way is explained by the Apostle Peter: “... *forasmuch as ye know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things... but with the precious blood of Christ... who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world ...*” (1 Peter 1:17-20). Peter declares that Jesus’ coming to Earth and death on the Cross was not something that was added after Adam transgressed, as if something went astray in God’s plan, but it was part of God’s plan from the very beginning: Jesus was “**foreordained**”.

The fact that Jesus was foreordained to be Man’s redeemer means that God planned, before the foundation of the world, that Man would sin because sin is the only reason why mankind dies: “*The soul that sinneth it shall die ... But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity ... in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die*” (Ezek. 18:4, 24); “... *and so death passed upon all men for that all sinned*” (Rom. 5:12). If mankind did not sin and therefore suffer death there would not be any need for a redeemer. However Jesus was foreordained to be Man’s redeemer before the foundation of the world; before mankind was created.

God’s objective in human suffering

It is God’s prerogative to use whatever means He chooses to accomplish His purposes. At the time of Israel’s exodus from Egypt He used hardship to keep them humble and to ensure that they would not desert their Deliverer: “*All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God*

led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or not. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God ... Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were... drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint... that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end...” (Deut. 8:1-17).

The magnitude of God’s wisdom needs to be fully grasped here. Israel had been in bondage in Egypt for more than 400 years and yet in His wisdom God subjected them to further deprivation in the wilderness. He did so to ensure that they would not take any credit for their subsequent prosperity. As well as that, His purpose was that He might do them “*good at the latter end*”, that is, that it would be to their ultimate benefit rather than necessarily being for their immediate benefit. Thus it is evident that God’s purpose was broader and of longer term than what man’s mind would have imagined; the nation had already experienced many years in bondage and yet there was more for them to learn so that they would not become proud later. The same principle applies to His dealing with the world of mankind and their subjection to vanity.

The larger scale

God’s plan is to deliver all mankind from “*the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*” (Rom. 8:21). His dealings with Israel during their exodus is just one example that illustrates how the imposition of adverse experiences can accomplish His purpose. In Israel’s case He imposed deprivation in the wilderness so that they would not turn away from Him in their later prosperity; in the same way mankind today is experiencing a lifetime of suffering. It is the same strategy as He used with Israel but on a much larger scale—indeed it is on a world wide scale. God’s purpose in giving this sore travail to mankind for such a long period is that, when “*the times of restitution of all things*” comes (Acts 3:21); when “*the inhabitant shall not say I am sick*” (Isa. 33:24); when “*the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped, and the lame man shall leap as an hart, when streams shall break out in the desert*”,

when all mankind shall “come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads” (Isa. 35:5-10); when there will be “no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain” (Rev. 21:3-4), they will **not** lift up their hearts with pride, but will say, “... Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths” (Isa. 2:3).

It is at that time that the present “sore travail” will have accomplished its purpose. The lesson is so powerful that not only will they say “this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa. 25:9), but they will also

be able to resist the temptations of Satan when he tries to deceive the nations at the end of the thousand year period foretold in Revelation 20:7-8: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together, to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea”.

It is as the prophet Isaiah declared: “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:9), and as Paul declares: “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).■

DISCERNING BOTH GOOD AND EVIL

In Hebrews 5:12-14 the writer reprimands the Hebrews for a lack of progress in their knowledge of the Word: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil”.

He writes that while they should have progressed to be teachers they were still infants and could not digest strong meat. He also states that strong meat is for them who are of full age, that is those who by “*reason of use*” have developed their skills and knowledge such that they are able to discern good and evil.

The act of discerning implies judgment. Strong’s Concordance defines the Greek word (#1253) as “judicial estimation”. It occurs only three times in the New Testament: Romans 14:1 (disputations); 1 Corinthians 12:10 (discerning) and Hebrews 5:14 (discern).

One of the first abilities a Christian must develop is to discern good and evil and keep oneself from evil as Jesus prayed for His disciples: “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15).

Indeed the discernment of good and evil is one of the platforms upon which Christian conduct is built. Paul wrote: “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men” (1 Thess. 5:15); and Peter

wrote: “For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile” (1 Pet. 3:10-11). Both of those exhortations require the recognition of evil, consequently it might seem strange that the Hebrews could not discern good and evil.

Maybe the task of discerning good and evil was not as easy as it sounds because the writer was referring to the written words “good” and “evil” and not good and evil acts.

In the Greek language the two words are written thus:

- Καλός (good; English transcript: Kalos); and
- Κακός (evil; English transcript: Kakos).

The difference between the Greek words is just one letter in the middle of each word (English “k” and “l”; Greek “kappa” and “lambda”).

Additionally the difference between the letters “k” and “l” is only two small strokes; changing an “l” into “k”. Thus to discern good and evil in the written word required an eye that was familiar with the words and keenly focused to detect the difference.

The example was powerful to the Hebrews at that time and it is powerful and relevant to the Christian today. Just as it was only those Hebrews whose senses were keenly developed “*by reason of use*” who were able to discern good and evil, likewise it is only those Christians whose spiritual senses are keenly developed by reason of use who are able to discern good and evil in the world today: “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2). May all Christians keep their minds exercised by reason of use.■

LOVE REJOICES IN THE TRUTH

In 1 Corinthians 13:6 the Apostle Paul personifies love, that is, he portrays it as a person. Love is not a person and therefore it cannot rejoice in the same sense as a person rejoices. However, by describing its qualities as if it were a person, the Apostle made it easier for his readers to understand his message.

A person rejoices when they are in harmony with their environment, including the events that occur in it. In 1 Corinthians 13:6 Paul wrote "*love rejoices in the truth*" because love and truth are in harmony; love does not rejoice in deception and error. In 2 Corinthians 4:2 Paul wrote, referring to himself and Timothy (chapter 1:1): "*But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commanding ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*". In effect Paul's statement means that it was by truth, and letting it be known that he stood for truth (he "*manifested the truth*"), that he had commended himself to every man. The expression "*commended ourselves*" is another way of saying that his conduct did not allow any allegations of dishonesty to be truthfully leveled at him. In order to do so he had "*renounced the hidden things of dishonesty*" because no one can be both dishonest and truthful.

God, Love and Truth

Love and truth are intrinsic qualities of God. The Apostle John wrote: "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8) and so everyone who is seeking to be holy as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:14-16) must develop the quality of love.

The Psalmist wrote: "*Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts...*" (Psa. 51:6). Those who are seeking to please Him must also desire truth in their inward parts. Truth in one's "*inward parts*" implies a desire to depart from evil: "*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow... Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me*" (Psa. 51:7-10).

The harmony that exists between love and truth is also expressed in Psalm 89:14: "*Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face*" (Psa. 89:14). Truth is essential for justice to be executed and love is essential for mercy. Consequently love and truth are integral parts of God's domain.

Endurance

Another of the several characteristics that are common to both love and truth is their endurance: "*For the*

LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psa. 100:5). Hatred, which is the opposite of love and mercy, will be destroyed when Christ's kingdom is established on the earth: "*When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever*" (Psa. 92:7). The prophet Nahum also declared that iniquity will come to an end and will never again afflict mankind: "*What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time*" (Nahum 1:9). The ultimate endurance is eternity and every aspect of truth tends towards eternity, whereas every aspect of iniquity engenders corruption of both mind and body which ultimately lead to death. God's kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom: "*And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed*" (Dan. 7:14). Love rejoices in the truth because it endures.

The destruction of iniquity

Another characteristic of both love and truth is that they are the instruments by which God will destroy iniquity: "*By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil*" (Prov. 16:6). When God judges the earth; when iniquity is purged from the earth; when men fear the Lord; when lies and secret dealings are removed, the prophecy of Isaiah 26:9 will be realized: "*Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength...For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low...he bringeth it even to the dust... The way of the just is uprightness...With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness*" (Isa. 26:4-9). Love rejoices in truth because it destroys iniquity. When the people of the earth learn righteousness, truth will abound and "*love will rejoice*" in full measure. ■

PEOPLES PAPER
AND HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM
ABN 23 734 654 922

Reg. No. 0022186J

Published by the Berean Bible Institute, Inc.
P.O. Box 402 Rosanna, Victoria, Australia, 3084
Email: FREE.Bereanbibleinstitute@gmail.com

Internet: www.bbi.org.au

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