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## JERUSALEM AND ZION

Most Christians view Jerusalem and Zion as referring to natural Israel or spiritual Israel (viz the Israel of God) interchangeably. To the Jews, Jerusalem refers to their long hoped for capital city and Zion embodies their national aspirations. To many Bible students however, Jerusalem and Zion potentially refer to a number of different entities. Specifically, many prophecies appear to use Jerusalem in reference to the earthly governmental phase of the kingdom and Zion in reference to the spiritual phase of the kingdom.

Let us look at some of the differences and similarities of usage of these terms in the scriptures, also at some of the available historical and geographical data in relation to Jerusalem and Zion and see whether these differences and similarities help in understanding these concepts. Firstly, let us consider some of the historical and geographical data relating to both, noting that most of the features refer to aspects of Jerusalem and Zion closely related to the time of the kingdom of Israel when at its Zenith under King David and his immediate successor King Solomon.

### Jerusalem

Jerusalem is an ancient city and its history can be traced back at least 3,000 years. Its Hebrew name is a dual form referring to the 2 hills of Zion and Moriah on which it was founded. The derivation of its Hebrew name is disputed but probably signifies possession of peace. Jerusalem does not derive its importance from natural endowments except for a perennial spring. Situated at the edge of the Judean desert, it has an arid climate. Its land is agriculturally poor and its limestone base has no minerals of value. Strabo, a Greek geographer of the first century A.D., described it as a place that would not be envied, one for which no one would fight.

The early records of Jerusalem's name, which appears only in lists, underscore its unexceptional nature. Its earliest appearance, called 'Salim,' may be in commercial documents from Ebla in Syria ca. 2400 B.C. (note 1) Egyptian execration texts from the nineteenth century B.C. call the city 'Rushalimum,' and those from el-Amarna in Syria in the fourteenth century Urusalim. This city is mentioned very early in Scripture, being

usually supposed to be the Salem of which Melchizedek was king (Genesis 14:18). B.C. cir.2080. The name Jerusalem first occurs in Joshua 10:1, where Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem, is mentioned as having entered into an alliance with other kings against Joshua, by whom they were all overcome (compare Joshua 12:10). BC 1618.

Excavations on Ophel hill show that during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 B.C.) there was a walled city. By the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 B.C.) the Jebusites occupied this excellent stronghold, which they boasted the lame and blind could defend (2 Sam. 5:6). The 11-acre city with a crowded population of no more than 1000 was called Jebus during this period. Jebus's strength is indicated by its being the last major city on the ridge to resist settlement by the people under Joshua. Although located within Benjaminite borders, it was never occupied by this tribe for any significant period (Josh. 18:16; Judg. 1:21)

Jerusalem was elevated to its place of central importance by David ca. 1000 B.C. He took the city by utilizing the steep shaft of the Gihon spring, through which his commander, Joab, entered the city. Joab then opened the gates to David's forces (2 Sam. 5:8). After that, the Judahites and the Benjaminites dwelt with the Jebusites at Jerusalem; for it is that the children of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites inhabiting Jerusalem; and we are farther informed (Judges 1:21) that the children of Benjamin did not expel them from Jerusalem. The Jebusites were removed by Judah only from the lower city, but kept possession of the mountain of Zion, which David conquered at a later period.

<sup>note 1</sup>These texts are found on fragments of ceramic pot, dating from c1900BC, and seem to have been used in an Egyptian ritual magic cursing of surrounding peoples and Egyptian rebels.

### In This Issue

Jerusalem and Zion	1
Prove and Hold Fast	6
Wisdom	10
Love...Surpasses Material Things	12

When David, who had previously reigned over Judah alone in Hebron, was called to rule over all Israel, he led his forces against the Jebusites, and conquered the castle (fortress) of Zion which Joab first scaled. He then fixed his abode on this mountain, and called it “the city of David,” B.C. cir. 1044. He strengthened its fortifications, but does not appear to have enlarged it. There he carried the ark of the covenant; and there he built to the Lord an altar in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, on the place where the angel stood who threatened Jerusalem with pestilence (2 Samuel 24:15-25).

### **Zion**

Mount Zion is a prominent hill of Jerusalem, being generally regarded as the south westernmost and the highest of those on which the city was built. It included the most ancient part of the city with the citadel, and, as first occupied for a palace, was called the city of David (2 Chronicles 5:2). Being the original site of the tabernacle pitched by David for the reception of the ark, it was also called the holy hill, or hill of the sanctuary (Psalm 2:6). Zion is a Hebrew word whose precise meaning is not known. It may mean ‘citadel’ or ‘fortress’.

Of the several hills on which Jerusalem was built, Zion is the largest and, in many respects, the most interesting. It extends considerably farther south than the opposite ridge of Moriah and Ophel. The western and southern sides -rise abruptly from the beds of the valley of Hinnom, The southern brow of Zion is bold and prominent; and its position, separated from other heights and surrounded by deep valleys, makes it seem loftier than any other point in the city, though it is in reality lower than the ground at the north-west corner of the wall. On the east, the descent to the Tyropeon is at first gradual, but as we proceed northward to the modern wall it becomes steeper; and about 300 yards within the wall, directly facing the-south-west angle of the Harem, there is a precipice of rock from twenty to thirty feet high.

Zion was the first place in Jerusalem occupied by buildings. Upon it stood the stronghold of the Jebusites, which so long defied the Israelites, and was at last captured by king David (Numbers 13:29; Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:21). Upon it that monarch built his palace, and there for more than a thousand years the kings and princes of Israel lived and ruled. In Zion, too, was David buried, and fourteen of his successors on the throne were laid near him in the royal tomb (1 Kings 2:10; 11:43; 14:8, 31, etc.). Zion was the last spot that held out when the Romans under Titus captured the city. When the rest of Jerusalem was in ruins, when the enemy occupied the courts of the Temple, the remnant of the Jews from the walls of Zion, haughtily refused the terms of the conqueror, and

perished in thousands around and within the palaces of their princes.

From this brief overview of the historical and geographical aspects of Jerusalem and Zion we can already glean some similarities and differences. In terms of similarities we note that both are associated with Israel’s royal government starting with King David. Both Jerusalem and Zion become prominent once both are taken from the Jebusites by David; first Jerusalem and finally the fortress of Zion. Both Jerusalem and Zion were walled and protected. Zion was especially fortified and together with its natural protection afforded by valleys on three sides was considered almost impregnable.

We note that in terms of differences Jerusalem refers to the city whereas Zion is its most prominent hill or mountain. Jerusalem’s name is intimately associated with peace whereas as far as one can tell the name Zion refers to a fortress or citadel. Zion was the most prominent and highest point of the city and it was also the location of an ancient fortress or citadel. Even though Jerusalem can be said to be the seat of the royal power, it is on Zion that King David’s palace was located. Under David it was specifically on Mt Zion that he placed the site of the tabernacle for the reception of the ark of the covenant. Zion’s specific association with the royal line and throne beginning with King David is emphasised by its other name of “the city of David”

It therefore seems, at least from the geographical and historical point of view, that despite the close association of Zion and Jerusalem, significant differences exist. These differences take on even more importance and significance when one considers the “typical” nature of the life of David and his immediate successor Solomon.

### **The Typical Nature of David**

This thought of David being a type of Jesus is not new to us David is one of the ancient worthies mentioned in Heb 11. He is described by God as “a man after mine heart” and was one who found favour before God. In Acts 13:33-38 Paul makes it clear that the “sure mercies of David” would be accomplished in Jesus. It was Jesus who was raised from the dead not David. We read in vs 34 “<sup>34</sup> And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David” Here Paul applies prophecies made to David, to Jesus. This establishes Jesus as the anti-typical David.

Psalm 89 tells us in some detail regarding what these sure mercies are:

- 1.The Lord’s arm will make David strong (vs 21)
- 2.His foes will be crushed (vs 23)

- 3.Through the Lord's name David's horn will be exalted (vs 24)
- 4.David's hand will be set over the sea and his right hand over the rivers (vs 25)
- 5.David is to be appointed God's firstborn (vs 27)
- 6.He will be the most exalted of the kings of the earth (vs 27)
- 7.God will establish David's line forever and
- 8.His throne would be established forever, and lastly
- 9.God will remain faithful to David

Probably the most important aspects of the sure mercies of David relate to God establishing David's line and throne forever by virtue of God's faith to David. Paul makes this link between David and Jesus very clear. We also have other scriptures that make this link even stronger. We note that David is to be appointed God's firstborn. This appears to be a reference to Jesus and the church. Jesus is referred to as the "firstborn of all creation" Col 1:15, and "the firstborn of the dead". But we also note that the body of Christ is referred to as the "church of the firstborn" in Hebrews 12:23

This next part of the sure mercies of David again appears to be mainly a reference to the whole spiritual seed although David himself was the most powerful king in the Middle East during his reign and thus appears to have fulfilled the type. Of course the ultimate fulfilment will be during the reign of Christ. On his thigh shall be written "king of kings and Lord of Lords" The saints of the most high shall be associated with this royal rule as we read in Daniel 7:27 concerning the power of the four beasts in Nebuchadnezzar's vision: <sup>27</sup>And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him

Also we read in Rev 20:4 that "they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" and also in 2 Tim 2:11+12 For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: <sup>12</sup>If we suffer, we shall also reign with him. These are truly exceeding great and precious promises. And what great encouragement it gives us to make our calling and election sure.

Moving onto the next important part of the sure mercies of David. we note that God will establish David's line forever. Here the word line comes from a word that simply means seed or offspring. Here the reference is to David's regal line and as we have seen the reign of Christ will fulfil this; since of that kingdom there shall be no end. Jesus himself was a literal descendant of David through both Mary and Joseph. God promised that he would establish his throne forever. We have already seen in Daniel that Christ will reign over a kingdom, which shall be an everlasting one.

Isaiah 9 brings together these thoughts nicely. Here we have prophecies concerning Jesus including his future role as a king, sitting on the throne of David and that the kingdom will be established forever. Isaiah 9:6+7<sup>6</sup>For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

It seems clear then that the spiritual seed, viz. Jesus and his body are the anti-typical David. In this spiritual seed the sure mercies of David will be realized in the complete sense. We have already noted that Zion was the actual site of David's throne. This is where his palace was built and was where his descendants lived and reigned. If the type and anti-type relationship bears up we would then expect that anti-typical Mount Zion should be associated with the spiritual seed. And indeed we find this to be confirmed in Rev 14. We therefore have it doubly confirmed that anti-typical Mount Zion is associated with the reign of the spiritual seed. The spiritual seed is promised glory, honour and the divine nature. A heavenly or spiritual body with life inherent is part of this divine nature. Therefore Mount Zion aptly describes the heavenly state or location of the ruling spiritual seed.

As prospective members we have come to this Mount Zion. We note the heavenly or spiritual state or location mentioned here. Spirit beings in their natural state are unseen and so the ruling spiritual seed would be unseen by the world in general. By the time Jesus, who is the lamb mentioned in Rev 14, stands on Mt Zion with the 144,000, the whole seed will have been born on the spiritual plane. Like the wind, these spirit beings will be imperceptible to the world of man in a direct sense. Moreover, by this time they will have inherited the divine nature and like Jesus will dwell in unapproachable light for man. We see then that when Jesus and the Church have all been born to the spiritual divine nature and stand on the anti-typical Mount Zion, they will be the anti-typical David. Thus will be the fulfilled the sure mercies of David.

### Scriptural Usage

Let us now look at the frequency of usage of the terms Zion and Jerusalem in the scriptures

### Zion, Jerusalem

The word Zion OR Sion (the NT equivalent) is found in 163 verses in the KJV whereas Jerusalem is found in 764 verses. If the words were interchangeable completely in terms of their usage and meaning, one would expect similar frequencies of usage. This in

itself may suggest that Zion has a special or specific significance.

### **Zion and Jerusalem together**

Zion OR Sion and Jerusalem are used together in the same verse 45 times in KJV (once in NT Heb 12:22). Hence in most cases the words Jerusalem and Zion (or Sion) are used separately. This suggests that both are not used just for emphasis or repetition of the other.

### **Zion or Jerusalem AND heaven**

It is also interesting to note, especially in regard to trying to elucidate the anti-types of mount Zion and Jerusalem, whether there are any references in the scriptures to either Zion or Jerusalem and heaven. This would focus our attention quickly since an anti-type refers to the heavenly reality of the physical type. Or as Paul puts it in Hebrews “the example and shadow of heavenly things” Jerusalem is used in the scriptures in association with heaven in four cases; either as heavenly Jerusalem, new Jerusalem or the city Jerusalem descending from heaven. There is one reference in Hebrews and 3 in Revelation. In regards to Zion or Sion there are no direct associations with heaven. This means that the anti-type has to be deduced possibly more indirectly

### **Mountains and Cities**

We have already noted that in terms of its most basic historical and geographical aspects Jerusalem refers to a capital city and Zion to Jerusalem's most prominent hill or mountain. An analogous situation would be the city of Washington, the capital of the USA and Capital Hill where the President lives. The orders or directives are made by the President on Capital Hill and then carried out by the various executive agencies located within the city.

#### **1) mountains**

Hills or mountains are usually symbolic of kingdoms in prophecy. We note the well known verses in Isaiah 2:2,3. We already know that only the kingdom of God will be a never ending kingdom, which will fill the earth, once the earthly beastly kingdoms of the earth have been destroyed. And so the use of mountain is symbolic of a kingdom. We also note the use of the symbolic mountain in Isaiah 11:9. The association of mountain and kingdom is even more explicit in Obadiah 21. Therefore the anti-typical Mount Zion would appropriately refer to the spiritual part of the kingdom from which the orders or edicts are given. Or as Isaiah 2:3 puts it; “for out of Zion shall go forth the law”

#### **2) cities**

A city in the scriptures, when used symbolically, is usually used in reference to a religious government backed up by power and influence. A government in its most basic sense is the body that has authoritative

direction or control. A city, particularly a capital city such as Jerusalem or Washington contains the institutions of state that put into effect the orders or edicts from the king or president.

We note that Heb 12: 22-23 mentions not only Mount Zion but also Jerusalem, albeit heavenly. The construction of the verse seems to be important here. We note that the word “and” is used after Mount Zion suggesting that what follows is not a reference to the same thing but something additional. This is in contrast to the definite article being present after the phrase “the city of the living God”, suggesting that the heavenly Jerusalem is the same thing as the city of the living God. And that this is different to Mount Zion.

From the differences previously noted between typical Zion and Jerusalem, and the difference between mountain and city we should not be surprised to find that Mount Zion and heavenly Jerusalem may not be exactly synonymous. Mount Zion would still refer to the seat of real power of the spiritual aspects of the kingdom of God (embodied in the spiritual seed), but heavenly Jerusalem would include this (just as Mount Zion was part of typical Jerusalem) and all the spiritual executive institutions. This last point is strengthened by the presence of innumerable angels. Angels are in the most basic sense messengers, and only Jesus and his body constitute the spiritual seed, which will reign on David's throne, on Mount Zion. Therefore, it seems unlikely that these innumerable angels would be on mount Zion. But if heavenly Jerusalem refers to the whole spiritual governmental apparatus, as has been suggested, then they would appropriately be part of this picture.

### **O Jerusalem, Jerusalem.**

We have already seen some of the references in the NT to the antitypical Mount Zion, that is, the heavenly reality that actual and physical Mount Zion reflects. Let us see if the scriptures can help us again in this regard in reference to Jerusalem the actual city. In Matthew 23, we see that Jesus refers to the house of Israel as Jerusalem. It was the nation of Israel as a whole that rejected him. We have this reinforced in John 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. It was the nation of Israel that rejected and killed the prophets that were sent to them. This house was destroyed, as predicted by Jesus. It is interesting to note however that Jesus does also predict that the house will see him again and this therefore implies a rebuilding of the house of Israel when their national attitude has changed and they welcome “he that cometh in the name of the Lord”

So Jerusalem, as Jesus points out is a type for the nation of Israel. This type had relevance in the day of Jesus and given the prophecies regarding it for the future, and the proof of history, has application to today and probably the near future. This application of

Jerusalem to the nation of Israel and hence to all under the law covenant is reinforced by the words of Paul when he points out that all under the covenant of law established by God with Moses at Mount Sinai answereth to Jerusalem Jerusalem, therefore refers not only to the nation of Israel but to the law covenant. This law covenant is described as a mother (Hagar) which has produced progeny. And so Jerusalem is not only a type or shadow of the nation of Israel but also of the covenant that gave birth to it.

We have already seen that a fundamental aspect of a city and especially a capital city is rule or governing. This would suggest that the nation of Israel would not only be rebuilt; as attested to by history but that it would have a governing role. One may suggest that this rule is limited to itself as a reborn nation. The scriptures however, suggest that this will extend to other nations. The promises made to Abraham contained promises regarding the inheritance of the land of Israel as well as being blessed and blessing the nations of the earth. The promises regarding the land are clearly earthly and therefore require an earthly seed to inherit. This would be the seed of Abraham according to the flesh ie Israel. We might think that this is the end of Israel's part in these promises, but these promises, particularly those regarding the blessing of the nations of the earth may have a double fulfillment.

Paul clearly includes Israel as part of "all the seed" and therefore at least potentially qualifies for some fulfillment of these promises although it may not be the ultimate fulfillment. This potential aspect of blessing the nations of the earth from the position of an earthly channel for the blessings of God is referred to in a number of Old Testament prophecies. Zechariah tells us that representatives of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew and go with them because they have heard that God is with them.

And in Micah we are told that nations shall come and go to the house of the God of Jacob to be taught his ways and they shall walk in his paths.

These are but a few examples of the prophecies that suggest that God will use Israel as his channel of blessing on the earth in the Kingdom. This would suggest that at least one fulfillment of the Abrahamic blessing of the nations of the earth will occur in Israel. And this earthly governing role of Israel (once God is with her) in the kingdom makes clear why Jerusalem is used as a type.

### **Heavenly Jerusalem**

Just as Israel is a type of spiritual Israel or specifically the Israel of God, we would expect that Jerusalem has an application in regard to this true promised spiritual seed. And so it is. It has already been mentioned that the New Testament contains references to a heavenly

Jerusalem. This is mentioned directly as "heavenly Jerusalem" or as "new Jerusalem" or "Jerusalem from above" or as "Jerusalem descending from above"

In Galatians 4, Paul makes clear what this heavenly Jerusalem refers to. Unlike the law covenant, the Abrahamic covenant typified by Sarah the chosen or free wife of Abraham, would produce the real heir of the promises made by God to Abraham. This spiritual seed would not only be blessed itself but would bless all the nations of the earth and is the progeny of that covenant; hence the reference to it as the mother of us all.

This covenant is called variously, the grace covenant, the covenant by sacrifice, the Sarah covenant, and here by Paul identified as the "heavenly Jerusalem covenant". It is called such because it produces the real Israel of God. A spiritual class that sits on the anti-typical throne of David, and which will bless all the families of the earth. It will sit on the throne of David, on the anti-typical Mount Zion and rule, and it will be a sacerdotal or priestly government, because of their sacrifice of their earthly rights and ambitions. We have already seen that a city represents a government, and because of the connection with typical Israel we see the appropriateness of using the city of Jerusalem.

This ruling or governmental aspect of the heavenly Jerusalem is made clear in the vision of the Holy City in Rev 21. In verse 24- "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it" It is this divine government that Abraham longed for: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God

We note that this heavenly Jerusalem is clearly identified as such by the context. It is identified as "heavenly Jerusalem" or as "new Jerusalem" or "Jerusalem from above" or as "Jerusalem descending from above" And this differentiates it from the use of Jerusalem in isolation; which renders it an earthly application ie to the nation of Israel and specifically to its role as the earthly governmental representation of the kingdom of God.

### **Connecting the Historical and Geographical Data with the anti-types**

#### **Jerusalem**

As outlined, Jerusalem seems to have two anti-types. Firstly, the ruling function of the nation of Israel in the kingdom when Jerusalem is used in isolation. And secondly, the ruling function of the spiritual phase of the kingdom when the concept of heavenly Jerusalem is used. Both are closely linked to their respective covenants.

Like the actual city of Jerusalem, which contained the

executive institutions that carried out the orders and edicts given by King David on Mt Zion, so the spiritual phase of the kingdom would require executive channels. This would presumably be largely the role of the great company and angels. On the earth this appears as though it will be carried out by the ultimately converted nation of Israel. Like the name of Jerusalem which means possession of peace; these executive institutions would bring about true peace on the earth.

The walls of Jerusalem suggest the protection of these institutions by the power of God. The walls of Jerusalem were never assailed during the reign of David and Solomon. This suggests that given the protective power of God these executive channels on the earth and in the heavenlies, will never be assailed.

## 2 Zion

Mount Zion on the other hand appears to have only one anti-type, viz the seat of real power of the spiritual aspects of the kingdom of God (embodied in the spiritual seed sitting on the throne of David)

Mount Zion was of course a mountain. This suggests permanence and pervasiveness, since mountains are usually made of hard rock and a prominent mountain is seen from any vantage point. We know that the spiritual seed will not only have spiritual bodies but they will possess immortality or life welling up from within. Their rule will pervade the earth ultimately, For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

Mount Zion was the site of David's palace and throne. Similarly, the anti-typical Mount Zion refers to the dwelling place and rule of the Lamb and his 144,000. The spiritual seed constitutes the anti-typical David and it is in this anti-typical David that the sure mercies of David will be fulfilled.

It was on Mount Zion that David built a tabernacle for the ark of the covenant. The ark represented the presence of God. And so it will be the anti-typical

Mount Zion that God will specifically be associated with. This tabernacle was a shadow of the true tabernacle through which God will relate with humanity. This tabernacle, the spiritual house made up of the true seed of Abraham. Jesus being the chief cornerstone, laid in Zion.

Mount Zion was a fortress, considered almost impregnable. Given the power of the divine nature, which all the spiritual seed will possess, as well as the presence of God, it is hard to imagine a more fitting picture of true Zion's endurance and strength.

Isaiah chapter 9 brings some of these concepts together. We note that vs 7 juxtaposes government and peace together. This idea of government and peace lies at the most basic level of the meaning of Jerusalem. Also, the throne of David is linked to the kingdom here. The throne of David was located on Mount Zion; in anti-type the spiritual seat of power of the kingdom of God.

## Conclusion

So in summary, It seems that from the historical and geographical point of view although there are close links between Jerusalem and Mount Zion, there are significant differences. The similarities explain the close association of the two in a significant number of scriptures. The differences, however give an insight into the subtly different usage of the two in the scriptures. Jerusalem, when used in isolation appears to refer to natural Israel especially in relation to the earthly governmental phase of the Kingdom. Heavenly Jerusalem, however, appears to refer to the spiritual governmental phase of the kingdom. This meaning is usually clear from the context.

Zion primarily refers to a mountain whereas Jerusalem a city. Zion was a fortress and associated with the real seat of power during the reign of David and Solomon in particular. *Antitypical Zion therefore aptly represents* the real seat of power of the spiritual unseen phase of the kingdom.

(ES/05/06)

## PROVE AND HOLD FAST

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians he says in chapter 5, verse 21: "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good." Many admonitions are given in the Bible which encourage continued zeal, encourage patient endurance. Our first love and our initial enthusiasm is to be maintained, not for a few months, not for a few years, but to the end of our sacrifice. It is only those who endure to the end of life's way and are faithful unto death who will receive that crown of life. They will then live and reign with Christ a thousand years. What a promise! If we endure to the end of life's way, if we are faithful until death, we will receive that kind of life and we will live and reign with Christ a

thousand years. What a promise that God has given us!

This letter to the Thessalonians was written by Paul on the occasion of Timothy's visit to Thessalonica. In 1 Thess.3:6-8 it reads: <sup>6</sup>"Now when Timothy came from you to us and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: <sup>7</sup>Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith; <sup>8</sup>For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." Timothy's good report of the faith and love of the Thessalonians prompted Paul to write this very touching and very

intimate letter in which he commends them for their steadfastness and remembrance of the truth he has taught them. In 1 Thess.5:14-22 he exhorts them regarding their walk in the narrow and wonderful way. In it, He says, Now we exhort you, warn them who are unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient unto all men, do not render evil for evil, follow that which is good, rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, give thanks, quench not the spirit, despise not prophesying, prove all things, hold fast that which is good and abstain from all appearances of evil. Of course, included is the verse in our lesson today: prove all things, hold fast that which is good. We are admonished to test and examine God's word by our personal individual study to determine the things which are worthy to keep in our memories, to determine which things are virtuous and retain those which are honest. All of these enable us to grow in truth and to grow in knowledge of God's divine plan. They enable us to spread forth the gospel to any who have a hearing ear, and they certainly contribute to make our calling and election sure.

We would like to look at a few different versions of that scripture. The RSV and NIV use the word 'test' instead of 'prove'. It gives us the idea of proving something by testing it to see if it holds to the truth. Let's look at the RSV first (1Thes.5:21): "Test everything, hold fast that which is good." The NIV reads: "Test everything, hold on to the good." Now the NIV uses 'hold on to' and that gives the thought of never letting go of something that is worth it to you, something that is valuable to you as new creatures. The Living Bible reads: "Test everything that is said to be sure it is true, and if it is then accept it." Again it emphasizes testing everything but it has the important thought 'to be sure it is true', to be sure it is verified by God's word. Then if it is the truth, accept it, enter it into your heart and mind as part of your faith. The NAS reads "Examine everything carefully, hold fast that which is good." As we examine everything as admonished in NAS, do it carefully. Examine everything in detail making sure that the words are harmonious with other scriptures and determine who said it, what were they saying it for, where did they say it, why did they say it, and when was it used? That reminds us of 2 Tim:2:15, reading from the Living Bible: "Work hard so God can say to you, Well done. Be a good workman, one who does not need to be ashamed when God examines your work; know what his word says and know what it means."

When we say 'prove all things', what are 'things'? What's the best definition of the word 'things'? Strong defines 'things' as 'a communication, usually by speech. It could be a thought, a topic the subject of a discourse, it could be a communication concerning doctrine for our purposes; (and I like this)

communicating can also be accomplished by seeing or reading.' Therefore the things referred to in our scripture are doctrine, God's word and the truth to us, the gospel. If we turn to Phil. 4 (RSV), we will see why when we talk about these things: "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious; if there be any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about those things <sup>8</sup>Which you have heard, and learned and seen in me, do: and the God of peace will be with you." Hebrews 2:1 (KJV) "Therefore we ought to give the most earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." Those things that we have heard are of vital importance because of their source. The source is described as God in the first verse of Hebrews. Paul reminds us in Heb.1:1 that God had previously spoken to his people through His holy prophets, but now he was speaking through His Son. What a high position of authority to give His Son! God had given this to His only begotten Son and appointed Him heir of all things. He anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellow members. Through the divinely appointed channel, He spoke to His called out ones at the beginning of the Gospel Age and He has continued to speak to them throughout the entire Age.

In a special sense this is true at the present time when the Son is serving the brethren with 'meat in due season'. That is what He has promised to do when He returns. It tells us in Luke 12:37: "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he comes, shall find watching. Verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself and make him sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." So it is important that we take earnest heed to the things which we have heard. They have come from the glorified Jesus who has been exalted to the right hand of God, and by the grace of God we have been given that same Holy Spirit given to Jesus and the Apostles, and by God's grace the Holy Spirit enables our eyes and ears of understanding to open to us the precious words of truth. We can not only read these but hear them too. We can understand the truth, and we need this to make our calling and election sure. And when we have that, we need to hold fast to that which we have seen and heard. We read in Eph.1 (RSV): <sup>17</sup>That the God of our Lord Jesus, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: <sup>18</sup>Having the eyes of your heart enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope to which he has called you."

The Lord's people should not accept what they hear without proper examination. They should use sound judgment as to whether it is supported by the scriptures. The searching of the scriptures in proving these things will be of everlasting benefit to us. It is the duty of every child of God to judge what is right and to

judge what is wrong; to judge what is true and to judge what is false. It is possible to discern the truth if this desire in your heart is paramount. If it is our desire, we will direct every circumstance to make opportunities for study and further investigation of the truth. Each individual should prove his understanding of the doctrine. How? By God's word. Every doctrine having a claim on our faith should be brought to this test of the word and the testimony. The foundation of our faith is carefully fitted together, founded upon the solid rock of the ransom. Therefore our faith will be harmonious, it will be strong, it will be secure, it will be a beautiful structure, and no wind of false doctrines will damage or overturn our faith and our trust in God because our faith is founded upon the solid rock of the ransom.

In part the Manna for August 18<sup>th</sup> on this scripture, 1 Thessalonians 5:21 – “The Lord’s people should learn proportionately not to receive what they might hear without proper examination...they should prove all things that they hear, exercise discrimination as to what is logically and scripturally supported against what is mere conjecture....They should prove what they hear with a view to holding fast everything that stands the test of the divine Word, and shows itself to be in accordance with the Holy Spirit; and they should promptly reject whatever will not stand these tests.” Let us earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints, with the ransom as the very central hub onto which the other truths must fit perfectly. Whatever assists us in this direction is a teaching from God, and whatever leads us in any other direction will not be of God but of the Adversary. Our Heavenly Father wants us to be very attentive to His word and not to think for a minute that we can improve on that word. Times and circumstances will never alter His word.

After we have proved all things, we are admonished to ‘hold fast that which is good’. In this case Strong’s 2570 describes ‘good’ as ‘valuable, virtuous’. ‘That which is good’ – here again, we want to look at the word ‘that’. It would seem to refer back to a former person or thing, so this seems to point back to hold fast to the good things we have proved. That which is good is whatever stands the test of the divine word, that which shows itself to be in accordance with His Holy Spirit, not with enticing words of man’s wisdom or false philosophy because the faith of the church stands in the wisdom and power of God. Referring to ‘hold fast’, let us turn to a couple of scriptures in the Old Testament, in Job. I think he gives a good lesson on holding fast through adverse circumstances. The first one is Job 27 (RSV): “<sup>3</sup>As long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils: <sup>4</sup>My lips will not speak falsehood...<sup>5</sup>...till I die will I not put away my integrity from me. <sup>6</sup>I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go.” I heard a brother once who in discourse mentioned integrity as ‘your integrity is who

you are’. Job in these scriptures speaks of his undying faith in God and His plan. Job was always an honest man. He held fast that integrity, which is a very good example to the church. Now turning to Job 13 (NIV): “<sup>15</sup>Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him: I will surely defend my ways into his face.” He did not curse God as Satan and his like urged him to do. He had lost all but he kept his faith in God. A couple of other scriptures on holding fast. The first is 2 Tim.1:13 (NKJ): “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and in love which are in Christ Jesus.” And part of Rev.3:3 (KJV): “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast.”

These scriptures indicate that ‘holding fast’, means not letting it slip, not letting slip the things we have heard and we know to be true. If we hold something fast, we grip it tightly; it cannot be taken from us. Why? Because we value it and are determined to keep it. The purpose of the truth is to guide into knowing and doing God’s will. Only through studying the instructions clearly outlined in the word of truth do we know what our Heavenly Father wants us to do and know what He wants us to be. Let’s take another look at Hebrews 2:1 (KJV): “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to these things which we have heard lest at any time we should let them slip.” To let the truth slip would be like a builder who neglects to consult his blueprints. As the builder continues without the blueprint he could not be sure that the building erected would be in harmony with the architect’s plans. The blueprint of the Divine Plan of the Ages was designed by our Heavenly Father, that Great Architect. We are also admonished to hold fast our profession of faith in Hebrews 4:14 (KJV): “Seeing then that we have a great high priest that has passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.” Hebrews 10: “<sup>22</sup>Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for he is faithful that promised.)” In Hebrews 10:23 some other versions read “Hold fast the profession of our hope.”

God is faithful. We know that the Lord will do His part. If there be any failure, it will be on our part. The responsibility rests with us. Responsibility is the ability to respond in a responsible way. We have proven God’s great and precious promises in times of stress. We have proven God’s great and precious promises in times of danger, and we know that He will not fail us. The responsibility rests with us; He will not fail us! We need to have faith in our hearts before we make an outward profession of our faith, before we confess our Lord with our mouth. ‘Profession’ in Strong’s 3671 means ‘to confess, to acknowledge’. So we cannot

profess in our words until we have believed in His righteousness. If we turn to Romans 10:10 (KJV) we read: "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation." The Lord has declared that if we refuse or fail to confess Him before men, He will count us as unworthy. There is no salvation without a confession of the Lord. If we hide our light under a bushel, if we shrink from the reproach of the Cross, there is no hope of being accepted of the Lord.

All who have received the truth, all who love it, will gladly let their light shine. And we rejoice to carry the living water to other thirsty souls. Why do we do this? We do this because the glorious message has filled our hearts and that glorious message has blessed our lives. In harmony with our terms of consecration, we tell of our faith to others. Our faith reaches beyond the present life. We confess our hope that we will have a part in the first resurrection. It is our hope that we will be like Him and see Him as He is. We confess that we hope with Him to be instruments in the Father's hands, bringing life, joy and blessings to all the world of mankind. What an awesome thought, that we might have a part in bringing these blessings to the world of mankind. Truly, ours is a wonderful hope and we rejoice to tell it. It is a wonderful hope. If we have this faith, this hope, let us hold fast to it and properly confess it before men because we know the Adversary will take advantage of these circumstances to try to discourage us. There will be temptations along the line of our faith and hope, there will be reproaches and persecutions permitted, but why are they permitted? All for the purpose of proving our obedience. We have a marvellous calling to be overcomers, however only those who have the spirit of the Master are overcomers and these will fill the places in the elect class.

We are also told to hold fast our confidence in Hebrews 3:6 (KJV): "Christ as a Son over His own house; whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." You will see it says not only to hold fast but to be firm. And for how long? Unto the end! Strong's 3954 gives the meaning for 'confidence' as used here meaning 'frankness, by implication assurance'. Some versions use 'courage' instead of 'confidence'. All of these seem to imply that we have a full assurance of our faith and hope in the Lord and His promises. We can have that full assurance in the Lord and His promises. Hebrews 6:11 (KJV): "We desire that every one of you show forth the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." And Hebrews 10:22 "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." Through all the Ages there have been times of misplaced confidence. People have trusted in leaders

who have abused them or led them astray. People have trust in their own abilities, to build fortunes, to have power, to have a following. But there is only One in whom we can have complete confidence, there is One who can and will keep His promises, and that is our Heavenly Father. Joshua 23:14 (NIV): "You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed." Not one has failed!

Many times in the Old Testament His people lost their confidence, they lost their trust in God. But when they did, what happened? They suffered. Then when they renewed their confidence and trust in the Lord He blessed them. This is a lesson for us. We trust Him where we cannot see Him, we trust in the Lord with all our hearts, we have faith in His promises, we have confidence in His words, we patiently endure under all circumstances, trusting His ability to complete the good work He has begun. Trust in the Lord, have faith in His promises, have confidence in His words, patiently endure, trusting His ability - He will complete that good work. Phil.1:6 (KJV): "Being confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in you, he will perform it." In proportion as we grow in knowledge and grace, in the same proportion our confidence grows stronger. Don't lose your confidence, don't lose your faith, don't lose your trust in God. Keep your confidence in the outworking of God's plan, keep your confidence in our Leader, the Great Shepherd – keep your confidence in His work. Hebrews 10:35 (RSV): "Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward." God will reward us according to our faith, He will reward us according to our confidence, He will reward us according to our zeal, and He will reward us according to our sincerity. That reward will be to be joint heirs with Christ and receiving that crown of life. I would like to think our main goal is to bring honour and glory to our Heavenly Father.

In our lesson, Paul reminds us to prove, to test, to examine carefully, testing everything to be sure it's true and verified by God's word. Then, if it is the truth, accept it and enter it into your hearts and your minds as a part of your faith. Determine which things are virtuous, honest and worthy. Let us hold fast to the truth that we have proven by God's word. Let us hold fast to the Lord, let us hold fast to His exceeding great and precious promises, and let us hold fast to His people, as together we press on towards the glorious prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 2 Peter 1:10-11 <sup>10</sup>Therefore, brethren, be the more zealous to confirm your election; for if you do this, you will never fail: <sup>11</sup>For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." So, brethren, prove all things, hold fast to that which is good. (AA 05/06)

# WISDOM

## What is wisdom? Is it to be desired? Is it to be wise?

The dictionary definition of wise is that it is "dictated by wisdom". Crudens' Concordance says that wisdom is having discretion, to be discreet, to be prudent and avoid being rash; having spiritual insight; with the power of judging right.

Proverbs 3 verse 13 says, "Happy is the man that fin-deth wisdom; and the man that getteth understanding", and verse 15 says. "She is more precious than rubies" (also in Proverbs 8:11). So is it something to find and something precious? Proverbs 9:10 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding". These verses are saying that we can have wisdom through experience and knowledge; and with the correct knowledge we can make the correct judgements. Proverbs 8:10 says, "Receive my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold". So knowledge and instruction are also very precious.

How do we acquire this knowledge, and when we have it, how do we handle it so that we do the Father's will and not our own? This would be based on our understanding and knowledge of scripture. Then we may have some ability to judge correctly and to know and follow the best course of action.

We are told in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness". Instruction here means discipline, education and correction. To be rightly instructed we need the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2: 12 to 15 says, in part, "We have received not the spirit of the world but the spirit which is of God ..... which things we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Spirit teacheth ..... Natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God ..... but he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man".

Solomon became a wise judge. We all know the story of Solomon recorded in 1 Kings 3 from verse 5, when God appeared to Solomon in a dream one night and asked, "What can I give thee?" As the new king of Israel Solomon wanted to be able to be a good judge and ruler of a great people (v. 9). He felt that he lacked wisdom and experience, so he asked for an understanding heart and mind to be able to discern between good and bad. He had not asked for a long life, or for riches for himself, but for understanding to be able to recognise what is just and right. God was

pleased with him and rewarded him. Besides giving him a "wise and discerning mind" (verse 12, Amplified) he also gave him riches and honour; things he had not asked for.

Solomon was soon able to use this new wisdom and judgement when two women came to him claiming the baby as theirs. You know the story, how that two women had babies at the same time and one lived and the other died. To determine who the rightful mother was, Solomon said to cut the baby in half. Of course, the real mother pleaded for the baby's life. "All Israel heard of the judgement made by the king, and they feared him, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice" (1 Kings 3:28).

How can we show that we have this wisdom? "Which of you is a wise and well instructed man? and endued with knowledge? Let him prove it by a good life, evidenced and manifested by good conduct, good conversation, good behaviour and works; with meekness of wisdom" (James 3:13).

Meekness is the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest. Meekness, according to the concordance, is being gentle, kind, not easily provoked, ready to yield rather than cause trouble. Our Lord Jesus was meek and lowly, gentle and humble of heart (Matthew 11:29). He relied on his heavenly Father, and we too, if we want to be conformed into the image of his dear Son, are to have the same kind of meekness. To be meek is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23), and we are told in the beatitudes that the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5), and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace (Psalm 37:11). To have the meekness of wisdom in James 3 is to have a wisely teachable spirit with humility (Weymouth and Amplified James 3:13).

To be against meekness is described in James 3:14 as having bitter envying and jealousy, strife or selfish ambition. This is not wisdom that comes from above (verse 15), which is first pure, for where there is envying and strife (verse 16) there is no wisdom shown, and there will be confusion and misunderstanding of scripture (verse 16).

We are to act and speak with all wisdom, doing things wisely. By our words and works we show by outward manifestation our faith. Our faith, words and works demonstrate the quality of our characters. We have no time for idle words (idle here meaning inactive, not working). Our words are an index of the heart which determines our characters. Our heart condition is regulated by the spirit of love and in the spirit of meekness (1 Corinthians 4:21). How often have we not spoken

wisely? We have said things hastily and wished that we hadn't. Perhaps we have lacked wisdom; then we are to ask of God, "And it shall be given to you" (James 1:5).

How many professed Christian leaders and teachers have shown their characters when their authority or teaching has been questioned? Sometimes we find it difficult to admit to ourselves that we might be wrong and our brother or sister is right, through our own conceit. We may be prejudiced on a subject due to a pre-judgement based on a previous decision we have made, making a conclusion that may be wrong. We need to have the patient willingness of heart to be prepared to listen attentively to others' different points of view, however strongly we may disagree with them, having an earnest desire to arrive at the truth at all times, and to be prepared to receive it, at whatever personal cost it may be to our pride and self-interest, or disadvantage. We all see through a glass darkly, and only see in part, so we should always be ready to hear the truth. "God shames the wise with their own cunning or craftiness" (1 Corinthians 3:19). And in Psalm 94:11 "The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are vain, empty and futile". "Therefore let no man glory in men, boasting of having this or that man as a leader, for all things belong to you; and you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God" (1 Corinthians 3:21 and 23, amplified).

We are told in 1 Corinthians 3:19 that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. Those whom the world regards as poor, God has chosen to be rich, not with silver and gold, but rich in faith, and to be heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those that love him (James 2:5). Has not God chosen the things that the world regards as foolish to confound the wise? (1 Corinthians: 27 ,29) To reduce to nothing things that do exist, to prevent any mortal man from boasting in the presence of God. You who are in Christ, he has made unto you wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and deliverance, - in order that "He that glorieth or boasts - will glory in the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:24). "That your faith and trust should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God; setting forth a wisdom of God once hidden from human understanding and now revealed to us by God. Truths which were kept secret, which God hath revealed unto us by his Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2: 5, 7 and 10).

"We are looked upon as fools in the world on account of Christ and for his sake, but you are amazingly wise and prudent in Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:10, amplified). "In the midst of wolves, we are but sheep, so prove yourselves and be wary and wise as serpents. Be on your guard against men whose nature it is to act in opposition to God" (Matthew 10: 16 and 17, Amplified).

"But be innocent, harmless and guileless as doves, that the wisdom that is coming from above being pure will make us to live peaceably with all men. Promoting peace with a gentleness of heart, easily to be entreated and open to reason. For the kingdom of God does not consist of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, or right conduct, peace and joy through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). "So let us follow after the things which make for peace, and things with which one may edify another" (Romans 14:9). "Full of compassion and good fruits; sown in peace and goodness by those who work for and make for peace. Wherefore, be not unwise, vague, thoughtless and foolish, but understanding and firmly grasping what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17, Amplified). "Looking carefully how you walk; live purposefully, worthily and accurately, not as unwise and witless, but as wise, sensible intelligent people; making or redeeming the very most of your times; Buy up your opportunity because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5: 15 and 16, Amplified). Not wasting the seasons. Using the space we have to full advantage; to use what is within our grasp, before it goes beyond our reach. Sometimes we may feel we are not making the most of our time when we may be suffering from some kind of illness or physical disability, but that time is not lost. We learn from those experiences, with gentleness, forbearance and patience. These attributes can be more pleasing to God than rushing about doing works. When under trying circumstances, we can at all times show our love and obedience to God by our attitude towards others, thus offering to him a much more acceptable sacrifice than attempting to accomplish some great thing. We can show full sympathy with one another, not giving our minds to high things but giving ourselves to humble tasks. As Romans 12:16, from the Amplified, says, "Never overestimate yourselves or be wise in your own conceits". Our days are too few to let the trifles of the day delay us. Let us be wise today and not defer until tomorrow. Every day of our lives belongs to God, and we should consecrate each one freely and entirely to his love and service.

The Christian conduct as followers of Christ has a very high standard; so if we have this sound wisdom, sound knowledge, sound understanding, we have strength; "For whoso findeth him, findeth life and shall draw forth and obtain favour of the Lord" (Proverbs 8: 14 and 35). For "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, for the gain thereof is more than gold. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Proverbs 3: 13 to 20, in part). (SG:06)

"So let us then refrain our tongues from evil,  
Keep our lips from speaking guile.  
Daily let us seek the heavenly wisdom,  
And therefore gain the Father's smile."  
(Hymn No. 50, Zion's Glad Songs)

# LOVE ...SURPASSES MATERIAL GIFTS

The giving of gifts has been part of the culture of all races, nations and societies since the beginning of Man's habitation of the Earth. So common and widespread is the practice that in Western societies there are several occasions during each year when the giving of gifts is expected. Some examples are birthdays, wedding anniversaries and Mothers' Day.

The Scriptures also record the giving of gifts. The first instance is recorded in Genesis 25:6 where we read that "*Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac. But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country*". Isaac was the "*child of promise*", (Gal. 4:28) and Abraham knew that it was with Isaac that God would "*establish his covenant*" (Gen. 17:19). In this context it is easy to imagine that, of all his sons, Isaac had pride of place in Abraham's heart.

## Motives

There is a variety of reasons why people give to others. Genesis 34:12 records Shechem offering a dowry and a gift to Jacob for the hand of Dinah. This instance occurred before the customs of the day were recorded in Scripture so we don't know exactly what the customs were at that time. Nevertheless it is likely there were different motivating factors relating to the two gifts - the dowry might well have been obligatory and the gift voluntary.

Whatever the situation with Shechem, it was certainly love alone that prompted Jacob to give Joseph a coat of colours: "*Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, he made him a coat of (many) colours*". (Gen. 37:3)

Also it was love alone that was the motivating factor in the case of Esther. King Ahasuerus "*loved Esther above all the women*", so much so that he "*made a great feast ... and gave gifts ...*". (Esther 2:17-18)

## Celebration

Later, after the devious plot of Haman had been foiled and the threat to the Jews had passed, Mordecai "*sent letters unto all the Jews ... that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor*". (Esther 9:20-22) This was a time for celebration, and their joy was expressed by giving gifts.

## Benevolence

The giving of gifts to the poor has been perpetuated down through history. That such giving was common practice in New Testament times can be deduced from the disciples' reaction towards the woman who anointed Jesus with the "*alabaster box of ointment very precious ... When His disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, 'To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor'*". (Matt. 26:7-9) The disciples would not have had that reaction if giving to the poor was something with which they were not familiar.

Another example of benevolence is that "*it pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem*". (Rom. 15:26) The Corinthian brethren were also very benevolent, so much so that the Apostle Paul held them up as an example even to

the Macedonians - "*For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you. For I know the forwardness of your mind for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia ...*". (2 Cor. 9:1-2)

## Giving to be from the heart

However Paul goes on to say that he "*thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty and not as of covetousness*". (2 Cor. 9:5) "Covetousness" here means "avarice, i.e. (by implication) fraudulence, extortion". (Strong #4124) In other words, Paul wished their gift to be ready before he arrived, because he did not want their giving to appear to be obligatory nor fraudulent ("to be seen to be giving" we might say) should any of the Macedonians accompany him to Corinth. Their giving was to be done cheerfully "*according as he purposeth in his heart... for God loves a cheerful giver*". (Verse 7)

On the other hand, in certain situations "giving" is necessary to demonstrate our faith - "*If a brother or sister ... be destitute of daily food ... and ye give them not those things that are needful to the body, what doth it profit? ... Even so faith, if it hath not works is dead*". (Jas. 2:15-17)

## Regular contributions

It is possible that not all churches were sure of an appropriate procedure. This uncertainty caused Paul to give an "*order to the churches of Galatia*" that "*upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come*". (1 Cor. 16:1-2)

In 1 Corinthians 13:3, the Apostle Paul writes "*though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor ... and have not love, it profiteth me nothing*". The thought behind "bestowing" is to "*supply with bits i.e. (generally) to nourish*". (Strong #5595) The word "*psomizo*" occurs only in 1 Cor. 13:3 and Romans 12:20 where it is translated "feed". The thought of "supplying by bits" or "feeding" gives the idea of a continual contribution, and not just a single or "one-off" gift and thus corresponds to Paul's instruction for weekly "*laying aside*" by the church at Galatia.

Giving smaller amounts on several occasions is less noticeable than giving a larger amount. Consequently **bestowing** one's gift is less ostentatious than giving one lump sum. So in 1 Corinthians 13:3 Paul is saying that, even if he had given all his material goods in small (inconspicuous) amounts (and not have sought honour and glory for doing so), and not have love, it would profit him nothing.

Thus it is clear that love surpasses all motivating factors behind the giving of material gifts. It is indeed the premier quality that all Christians must strive to develop.

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*While it is our intension that these columns be used for teachings strictly in accord with the Lord's Word, we cannot accept responsibility for every expression used,*