

“Thus Saith the LORD”

***“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written.”
—Luke 24:45,46***

THE EXPRESSIONS, “THUS saith the Lord” and “It is written,” are used nearly five hundred times in the Bible. Additionally, there are many similar expressions used, such as: “The Word of the Lord came unto me,” or “I, the Lord, have spoken it,”

calling attention to specific statements, messages, and lessons from God. It is as though the prophets, or other spokesmen, are telling us: “What I am going to say now is not my opinion, or of my own wisdom, but it is from God Almighty—it is he that is speaking, and these are his words.” These are wonderful expressions, and full of meaning for sincere students of the Bible. We have a reverence for God’s Word, and a “Thus saith the Lord” is the end of all controversy with us.

Such a basis for belief seems to be very simple. All we have to do is to prove everything by the Word of God. All we have to do is to accept what is in harmony with that Word, and reject that which

is not. However, it is not so simple as it seems. If it were, everyone would understand and agree as to what the Scriptures truly say. This, we realize, is far from the case. Because the interpretation of many of the most basic subjects of the Bible is so widely different among professed believers, we must conclude that much in the way of present Scriptural understanding constitutes false doctrine. Indeed, there are many false doctrines—"doctrines . . . of men," "strange doctrines"—and each one is claimed to rest upon the Word of God. (Matt. 15:9; Heb. 13:9) Moreover, for nearly every false doctrine, there is a purported, "Thus saith the Lord."

LEARNING TO PROPERLY INTERPRET SCRIPTURES

It is first important to understand that the Lord does not reveal his plans and purposes to everyone. The truths of the Bible are only made known to those whose hearts are in tune with him, and who are willing to "search the Scriptures" to discover what kind of God we have, and what are his plans for the future in connection with his Creation, animate and inanimate. (John 5:39; Acts 17:11) Thus, to determine what the Lord is saying, we must often dig beneath the surface. We need to analyze, compare and assemble, learning "line upon line; here a little, and there a little." (Isa. 28:10) We must interpret and coordinate, and apply certain inflexible rules and guides. When in doubt, it is essential that we consider the preponderance, or weight, of evidence. We must also arrange according to the time elements of God's plan, and not confuse one age and its work with another age and its work. Paul admonished,

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”—II Tim. 2:15

Above all, we are to remember that the Scriptures in their entirety declare the plan of God, and we must learn to interpret them according to his perspective and purpose. His plan is not subject to change at our whim. The prophet states: “The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.” (Isa. 14:24) We must learn to think as God does, remembering his invitation, “Come now, and let us reason together.” (chap. 1:18) It is also essential that we be filled with his Spirit of truth, and approach the Scriptures in that spirit—humbly, prayerfully, and reverently. We must be on guard against any form of willful misinterpretation, which could easily mislead and stumble others, remembering that the penalty for stumbling others is extremely severe. (Matt. 18:6) This is the great Creator’s sacred Word we are dealing with, and it is not to be handled carelessly or flippantly.

The study of the Scriptures is not done simply for pleasure, nor for the purpose of appearing scholarly. This is a serious matter. Reading again from the Prophet Isaiah: “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: . . . All those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” (Isa. 66:1,2) What humility and reverence is thus implied when considering God’s Word!

Paul said to Timothy, “All scripture . . . given by inspiration of God, . . . is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect [that is, complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (II Tim. 3:16,17) This being the case, we are expected to pursue our study of the Scriptures in a methodical and workman-like manner, in order to be approved by God. This is what we must do in order to truly ascertain what the Lord is saying—in order that we may discern precisely, “Thus saith the Lord.”

A methodical, orderly, step-by-step study of the Bible, suggests that we may gain a greater understanding of its teachings by a topical consideration of its key doctrines. That is, in considering important elements of God’s Word—such subjects as ransom, resurrection, soul, death, and many others—we will be greatly assisted by taking all the scriptural testimony on each topic, in order to get a complete picture of its import and meaning in relation to God’s plan as a whole. This topical method of study also helps to bring consistency and harmony to subjects which may seem confusing or even impossible to understand when viewed only through a single, or narrowly focused, instance of Scripture. The psalmist said, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. . . . Order my steps in thy word.”—Ps. 119:105,133

DETERMINING CORRECT INTERPRETATION

Here is a suggested list which can perhaps assist us in determining whether our interpretation of

Scriptures is correct or incorrect. Let us ask these questions:

Does the proposed interpretation concur with our understanding of God's character attributes of wisdom, justice, love, and power?

Does it square up with the doctrine of the Ransom—Christ's life sacrificed as a substitute for Adam's forfeited life?

Is the Scripture correctly translated, or is it not found, in whole or in part, in earliest Bible manuscripts?

Does its context affect its interpretation?

To what age, or time period, in God's plan does the Scripture apply?

To what group of persons does it apply—heathen, faithful men and women, angels, others?

Is it a historical record, having already had its fulfillment in the past? If already partially fulfilled, does it have an additional, or completed, fulfillment in the future?

Is it to be understood in a literal manner, or is its meaning symbolic? Does it possibly have both a symbolic or pictorial significance, as well as a literal meaning?

Is the verse a statement of irony or a rhetorical question to illustrate a point, or is it a factual or straightforward expression?

Does it employ an archaic idiom not in use today?

Is its correct application suggested by partially fulfilled prophecies?

Does it teach something by inference rather than direct statement?

Does incorrect punctuation provided by the translators alter the true meaning?

Does the Scripture seem to conflict with other texts on the same subject? Is there more than one Scripture—another witness—to confirm the proposed interpretation?

From this long list of items which can greatly affect how we understand God's Word, we can quickly see that often a correct interpretation is not an easy matter, simply gained by a casual reading of the Bible. In fact, a pure, accurate understanding of the Scriptures is gained only through a lifetime of dedicated study and reflection upon God's great gift to us—his Word. Even then, a clear grasp will not be secured unless it is done in the proper spirit of humbleness and acquiescence to God's will. In other words, the bestowing of the Holy Spirit by God to enlighten us is absolutely necessary to the understanding of his Holy Word. This "Spirit of truth," Jesus said, is what will guide us "into all truth."—John 16:13

Let us now look at some of the fundamental doctrines taught throughout much of Christianity which, at least on the surface, seem to have support from the Scriptures. Let us do so, however, by applying some of the foregoing tests, to determine what the Lord truly desires that we understand as his Word on these subjects. Thus, may we prove whether or not these teachings are, in fact, supported by a correct interpretation of a "Thus saith the Lord," although with a casual glance there may appear to be little doubt as to their verity.

DO THE SCRIPTURES TEACH THE TRINITY?

One of the most prominently disseminated doctrines of Christendom is that of the trinity. God is

claimed to be triune—the union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three persons, in one God. One expression of the trinity, used by many Christian churches since the sixth century, is the Athanasian Creed, which states, in part: “That we worship one God as Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance; For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.”

The above words are apparently insufficient, for the creed continues: “Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.”

Even the most enlightened mind must conclude that the above statements are so convoluted so as to be virtually impossible to understand, or to explain. As a result, most are content to simply say, “It is a mystery,” which is to be believed, for certain, but cannot be understood. Thus, forgotten are

Jesus' words to his followers that it was "given unto" them to "know the mysteries" of God's Word, and "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."—Matt. 13:11,16

Despite the great confusion of words in the above creedal statement, certain verses from the Bible are used to "prove" the teaching of the trinity. One such text reads as follows: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one." (I John 5:7) Here, many will conclude, a clear "thus saith the LORD" is given. As further proof that Jesus, as a member of the trinity, is equal with God, another verse is cited. Concerning Jesus, Paul said, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God." (Phil. 2:6) Another "thus saith the LORD" is here provided—what further proof is needed?

SCRIPTURES EXAMINED

Let us now examine the Scriptures which have been cited to prove that God is three persons, and yet only one God. The words of I John 5:7 certainly appear to be an unanswerable argument to support the doctrine of the trinity. However, since it is so contrary to reason, and we know God to be eminently reasonable, we suspect something is wrong with this understanding.

This is an occasion when it is appropriate to examine the Scripture in its original form. *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott* is an excellent authority for this purpose. There, we find the text omitted, and a footnote which reads as follows: "This text concerning the heavenly witnesses is not contained in

any Greek manuscript which was written earlier than the fifteenth century. It is not cited by any of the Greek ecclesiastical writers; nor by any of the early Latin fathers, even when the subjects upon which they treat would naturally have led them to appeal to its authority. It is therefore evidently spurious." With these comments nearly all Bible commentators agree, and as attested by nearly every translation of the New Testament written in the past century and a half. We see, then, that these words do not constitute a "thus saith the LORD."

We have, however, in Philippians 2:6, a Scripture which appears to say of Jesus that he was equal with God, or at a minimum, did not consider it wrong to be so. He did not consider such equality as robbing God of anything, the verse seems to say. Here again, we sense that something is wrong, and ask whether such a prideful view of his position before God harmonizes with the totality of Scriptural testimony concerning the character of Jesus. Going back to the original Greek, we find that, in the *King James Version*, one small word has been added, and another one omitted. The insertion and omission completely reverses the meaning of the text. Thus, the expression "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," should properly be understood to say, "thought not by robbery to be equal with God." Accordingly, the *Diaglott* correctly renders the text: "Who, though being in God's form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God." A majority of other translations render the verse similarly.

With the correct understanding of this text and its meaning within its context, we have an important truth. Here the humble and obedient Son of

God, Jesus, is contrasted with the arrogant and disobedient Satan, who is quoted as saying: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: . . . I will be like the most High." (Isa. 14:13,14) Thus, when properly translated and understood, instead of proving the equality of God and Jesus, these texts disprove it.

Let us get further insight on this subject by looking at additional Scriptures. Jesus said on one occasion, "I and my Father are one." He also prayed on behalf of his disciples, "that they may be one, even as we are one." (John 10:30; 17:21,22) How was Jesus one with the Father? It was in the same way that he prayed for his disciples to be one with him. In both cases he spoke of oneness in mind; oneness in purpose; oneness in sympathy and love; oneness in good works—in other words, oneness in character. That is why Jesus could say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." (John 14:9) In other words, he was patterned after the Father, having the same character qualities. Yet, only a few verses later, he plainly stated, "My Father is greater than I.—vs. 28

Properly understanding the subject of the unity between God, his son Jesus, and his church, we are spared such irrationalities in our thinking as the following: That God himself was out of conscious existence for nine months after the conception of Jesus; That the child Jesus was God; That the man Jesus prayed to himself; That his agony and prayer in Gethsemane was a charade because he was asking for help from himself; That God died on the

cross himself and remained dead for parts of three days until he raised himself from the dead.

Finally, the doctrine of the trinity does not square with the ransom, which requires the sacrifice of a perfect human life in place of Adam. It is not in accordance with God's plan, which places Jesus in the future role of Mediator between God and man—another impossibility if he is God. The Scriptures state: "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."—I Tim. 2:5,6; I John 4:9

Part 2 of our consideration of this subject will appear in next month's Highlights of Dawn article. In it we will examine two additional and well-known teachings of Christianity to determine their veracity in light of the truth of God's plan. May our desire always be, when studying God's Word, to have a "thus saith the LORD" as an "anchor, . . . both sure and stedfast."—Heb. 6:19 ■