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THE COMMUNION OF THE BODY

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Easter is a significant time of the year for Christians. And not for Christians only: the Roman King Herod acknowledged it was a time of significance to the Jewish people: *“Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church... And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people”* (Acts 12:1-4).

The Easter that Herod acknowledged was the “days of unleavened bread”; the days during which the Jews were not allowed, under the terms of the Law Covenant received at the time of their exodus from Egypt, to eat leavened bread: *“And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house... And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening... And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and **unleavened bread**; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it... and ye shall eat it in haste: **it is the Lord’s Passover**... And **this day shall be unto you for a memorial**; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. **Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread**; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel... And **ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread... by an ordinance for ever**. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at*

*even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel... Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations **shall ye eat unleavened bread**”* (Exodus 12:1-20).

Jesus kept the Passover

In keeping with God’s ordinance, Jesus kept the Passover, firstly with His parents (Luke 2:41-43), and later of His own accord: *“And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem... Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day... the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?”* (John 2:13, 23; Matt. 26:17). It was at that feast that Jesus introduced them to a new feast: *“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of*

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sins” (Matt. 26:26-28). Jesus related the bread of the Passover memorial feast to His body and the cup to His blood.

The Christian observance

Jesus also changed the focus of the bread and cup from a memorial of their exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12:24-27) to a memorial of Him: “*And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: **this do in remembrance of me***” (Luke 22:19).

The Apostle Paul explains that remembering Jesus in that way is the Christian’s Passover: “... *Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (1 Cor. 5:7-8); and hence for centuries Christians the world over have remembered Him at this season of the year.

When

However there are several opinions and practices amongst Christians regarding the details of Jesus’ request to remember Him.

Since Jesus instituted the feast to remember Him during the Passover feast, many conclude the appropriate time to remember Him in this way is at the time of the Jewish Passover feast—that is, once a year, and on precisely the same day of the year as the Jewish Passover is celebrated.

Further, some believe that, since the Passover feast was eaten after sunset, Christians should also conduct the memorial service after sunset, the precise hour varying with their location around the world.

However other Christians believe Paul’s later words give more liberty: “*For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: **this do in remembrance of me.** After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: **this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come***” (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The phrase “*as oft as ye drink it*” is taken to mean not necessarily annually and so they celebrate Jesus’ death more than once a year.

The Greek word from which “*as oft as*” is translated is “*hosakis*” which occurs only three times in the Bible. Hence little guidance regarding its meaning can be gleaned from other verses. Dr. Strong (#3740)

defines it as “*how many times as*”, whereas Young’s Concordance and *Vines’ Dictionary of New Testament Words* do not expand on its meaning. However perhaps some guidance regarding its meaning is given by the fact that other Greek words are used when frequent repetition is meant:

- “*polla*”: “*Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast **oft**, but thy disciples fast not?*” (Matt. 9:14—refer Luke 18:12);
- “*pollakis*”: “*Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for **ofttimes** he falleth into the fire, and **oft** into the water*” (Mat 17:15);
- “*pukna*”: “*And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast **often**, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?*” (Luke 5:33).

Consequently, although the evidence is not conclusive, there is some evidence that suggests the appropriate frequency implied by the Greek *hosakis* is less often than that which other Greek words imply, and hence the appropriate frequency of the feast to remember Jesus in this way is once every year, as was the case with the Passover memorial.

However, on the other hand, the last occurrence of “*hosakis*”, in Revelation 11:6, does not seem to restrict the frequency of the referenced action to once a year: “*These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, **as often as they will***”.

Who may celebrate

Another aspect of fulfilling Jesus’ request to remember Him is who may eat. The question was addressed by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: “*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup*” (1 Cor. 11:26-28). The responsibility accrued by eating is solely that of the individual.

The responsibility

In order to appreciate the responsibility which attends partaking of the memorial emblems, it is necessary to understand the symbolism of the emblems and the meaning of eating and drinking them.

There are at least three different concepts amongst Christians of the significance of the bread and cup.

Perhaps the simplest concept is derived from Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:26: “*ye do shew the Lord’s death till He come*”. The word “*shew*” is translated

from the Greek *kataggellō* (Strong #G2605) which he defines as “to *proclaim, promulgate*”. In the King James Version it is variously translated as “declare”, “preach”, “shew”, “speak of” and “teach”. Hence Paul told the Corinthians that those who partook of the bread and wine were witnessing that they believed Jesus gave His life for the world.

Koinonia

The other two meanings that may be given to eating and drinking may be derived from 1 Corinthians 10:16 where Paul used another Greek word to convey the significance of the bread and the cup. The word is *koinōnia* which Dr. Strong (#G2842) defines as “*partnership, that is, (literally) participation, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary) benefaction*”.

Young’s Concordance defines *koinōnia* as “using a thing as common”.

Vines’ Expository Dictionary defines *koinōnia* (in the section headed “fellowship”) as “communion”, “fellowship”, “sharing in common”; “that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution”.

In the King James Version, *koinōnia* is translated “communicate”, “communication”, “communion”, “contribution”, “distribution” and “fellowship”.

The definitions of *koinōnia* and the various English words used to translate it allow a wide range of understanding of the meaning of the word and hence of the meaning of “*the communion of the body*” in 1 Corinthians 10:16. However in essence they distil to only two meanings.

Benefactor

Perhaps the simplest meaning is that of benefactor, that is, one who benefits from the sustenance provided without making any contribution to it. In that vein the concept of communion may be interpreted to mean that all those who partake of the emblems share the benefits of Jesus’ sacrifice. Three texts that support this meaning are:

- Philippians 2:1: “*If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship (koinōnia) of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies*”. All Christians are benefactors of the Holy Spirit; they do not contribute towards it;
- 2 Corinthians 13:14: “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion (koinōnia) of the Holy Ghost (Spirit), be with you all. Amen*”. Again all are benefactors of the Holy Spirit, that is, profit from it without adding to its substance;
- 2 Corinthians 6:14: “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion (koinōnia) hath light with darkness?*”.

This argument is in the negative—in other words, light does not, indeed cannot, share any space with darkness—light destroys darkness.

Contributor

The third meaning that may be ascribed to *koinonia* is that of communion **by way of contribution**, in contrast to taking part by availing oneself of the benefits without making a contribution.

Two texts which exemplify this meaning are:

- “*Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship (koinōnia) of the ministering to the saints*” (2 Cor. 8:4). Fellowship of their ministry required them to contribute to the relationship;
- 1 John 1:7: “*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship (koinōnia) one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*”—the exhortation is for each one to contribute—a two-way relationship.

Both of those verses imply that *koinomia* has a sense of contribution, and if that meaning is adopted in 1 Corinthians 10:16, it means Christians contribute to the body and blood of Christ—a concept sometimes termed the “sin offering”.

Jesus’ unique role

Any consideration of the meaning of “*communion of the body of Christ*” should take into account Jesus’ references to the relationship between Himself and mankind and His use of the picture of bread as it applies in that relationship.

John 6:32-35 reads (in part): “*Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life...*” (John 6:32-35).

And John 6:41-58 which reads: “*The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven... I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso*

eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever”.

Jesus declared that He alone was the bread of life, and that He gives life to the world (the *kosmos*—the world, note not only to His followers). The question must be asked whether Paul was referring to those words of Jesus in his letter to the Corinthians.

The context

Finally a consideration of the context.

In 1 Corinthians 10:14 Paul exhorted the Corinthians to flee from idolatry, and immediately he followed that with the exhortation not to wittingly eat the sacrifices that had been offered to idols: *“Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question*

for conscience sake... If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof” (1 Cor. 10:25-28).

In the context of the chapter it seems Paul was reminding the Corinthians they could not partake of idolatrous sacrifices and also profess to be followers of Jesus, and further that Paul was diligent to ensure he did not give any reason to anyone to doubt his allegiance to God—his rebuke of Peter being evidence of that endeavour (Gal. 2:11-14).

When seen in that light, the thrust of Paul's message to the Corinthians was to remind them that they were all partakers of the same bread of heaven—all of them were to “eat” of it as Paul was eating of it, just as he exhorted them to be followers of him just as he was of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). All Christians receive their sustenance from the same source—in other words, it was (and is) a common loaf.■

NOW CONCERNING THE THINGS...

Jesus' coming to earth brought many changes for the Jewish people. Matthew 5 records Jesus explaining six of those changes to His disciples. In each case He introduced them to a higher standard than was applicable under the Law Covenant. The changes related to:

- Murder (verses 21-26);
- Adultery (verses 27-30);
- Divorce (verses 31-32);
- Swearing (that is, oaths) (verses 33-37);
- Justice and forgiveness (verses 38-42);
- Brotherly love (verses 43-48).

Consequently it is not surprising there were other changes about which the brethren were undecided, as evidenced by Paul's instructions to the Romans: *“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations”* (Rom. 14:1). Some of the issues about which the Romans were unsure were:

- what they were permitted to eat (Rom. 14:2-3);
- their attitude towards servants (verse 4);
- the day of the week when they were to worship (verses 5-6).

Consequently the general principles they were to apply were not to put a *“stumblingblock in their brother's way”* (Rom. 14:13), and to *“follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another”* (Rom. 14:19).

Hence it should not be surprising that the brethren in Corinth had several issues about which they were uncertain, and so they wrote to Paul about them. He responded: *“Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me...”* (1 Cor. 7:1). Paul gave comprehensive answers to their questions as shown by verse 1 in each of the chapters 7, 8, 12 and 16:

- Chapter 7 relates to marriage;
- Chapters 8-11 relate to *“things offered to idols”*;
- Chapters 12-15 relate to spiritual gifts;
- Chapter 16 relates to collections for the saints.

When viewed in this context, idolatry takes on a wide perspective, embracing the seeking of esteem in the church, seeking material goods, and the disregard of God's order in the ecclesia.

Likewise chapters 12-15 illuminate the diversity of the body and how various members have different abilities and characteristics; the relative offices in the church; and how the truth concerning the resurrection renders null and void all speculation about other sources of spiritual insight.

Finally (and appropriately after all the previous matters), he gives instructions regarding contributions to the welfare of the saints. It is not until the previous matters are understood and applied that the matter of contributions can be properly considered.■

WITH ONE MIND

Unity of the believers was always in the forefront of the Apostle Paul's mind:

- To the Romans he wrote: *"That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 15:6);
- To the Corinthians he wrote: *"That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another"* (1 Cor. 12:25);
- To the Galatians he wrote: *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"* (Gal. 5:13-14);
- To the Ephesians he wrote: *"I therefore... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called... Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph. 4:1-3);
- To the Philippians he wrote: *"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind"* (Phil. 2:2);
- To the Colossians he wrote: *"And above all these things put on charity... And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body..."* (Col. 3:14-15)

The Apostle's words were not just nice words for them to read—he also gave them detailed guidance regarding how to achieve unity amongst themselves.

Bearing infirmities

One of the first things Christians must exercise in order to promote unity amongst themselves is to bear the infirmities of the other (Rom. 15:1). The Christian is helped in this regard by remembering that all are weak in some respect, if for no other reason than everyone is of the flesh: *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matt. 26:41). And so every one will, at some point, be confronted by *"the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh or the pride of life"* (1 John 2:16). Disunity is thwarted to a large extent when each one appreciates that each other is striving against the weaknesses of the flesh. Indeed, as Paul wrote: *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"* (Gal. 6:1-2).

One pointed application of bearing another's burdens is accommodating their weakness in understanding. Paul addressed this issue in 1 Corinthians 8 regarding which foods the Christian may eat. He summed up his argument in verses 8-12: *"But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better;*

neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ". The challenge is to always do those things that will *"please his neighbor to his good to edification"* (Rom. 15:2). Indeed, as Paul wrote: *"let all things be done unto edifying"* (1 Cor. 14:26).

Not pleasing oneself

Bearing another's burden with the objective of edifying them might require one to deny oneself—that is, not pleasing oneself (Rom. 15:1)—just as Paul taught regarding which foods one may eat.

The same principle of denying oneself applies to seeking prominence, regarding which Paul wrote: *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others"* (Phil. 2:3-4). In this vein Paul also wrote: *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith"* (Rom. 12:3).

Likeminded

Finally it must be noted that unity of the brethren is not achieved by the actions of only some—it is incumbent on all to develop the same attitude of mind towards each other: *"Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God"* (Rom. 15:5-7). In common language, unity of the brethren may be achieved only if each one realizes it is a "two-way street".

Such unity might be regarded as being beyond human capacity, especially when one considers the diverse characteristics of the believers, but that in itself is testimony that the body is not of Man's doing but the Lord's. And so the Apostle concludes: *"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you"* (2 Cor. 13:11).■

THE LAST WORD

In the ages before Jesus came to earth, God spoke to His people through the prophets, but when Jesus came to earth that was changed—“*God, who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds*” (Heb. 1:1-2). The implication is that Jesus’ message was superior to that of the prophets, and the principal theme of the book of Hebrews is to explain the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ pre-eminence

Jesus said: “*He who has seen me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9), which means that Jesus, as God’s only begotten Son, is the complete embodiment and expression of God’s character, and that, in turn, is consistent with there not being anyone coming after Christ who is superior to Christ, who can supplant and more accurately express God’s nature and His plan for the world—Jesus is the “last word” concerning God’s plan for the earth and mankind; He is the pre-eminent One.

One factor which contributes to the establishment of Jesus’ superiority over all God’s creation is that He existed with God in the heavens before He came to earth: “*And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was*” (John 17:5).

Another factor which established His superiority was His knowledge. At age 12 He confounded the doctors of the Law: “*And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?*” (Matt. 13:54-56).

His pre-eminence was exemplified also by the miracles He performed: “*Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did*” (John 2:23). They could not imagine anyone having greater powers: “*And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?*” (John 7:31). However not all were convinced He was the Messiah: “*But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him*” (John 12:37).

It was not their fault that they did not recognise who He was: “*Jesus asked his disciples, saying, who do men say I am? and they said, Some say thou art John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets. And he saith unto them, But who say you that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art Christ, the Son of the Living God! Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee but my Father who is in heaven*” (Matt. 16:13-16). It was only by the grace of God that Peter believed that Jesus was the Christ.

The Holy Spirit

Jesus’ followers have been blessed with a knowledge of God’s plan ever since Jesus came to earth: “*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:31-32). The medium by which they would know the truth is the Holy Spirit: “*And I will pray the Father and He give you another comforter that it may abide with you **for ever**, even the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive, but the comforter, which is Spirit, whom the Father shall send in my name, it shall teach you all things*” (John 14:16-17). Just as it was in Jesus’ day, the Holy Spirit is the means by which Christians are able to understand “all things”.

However the Apostle John explains that the Holy Spirit was not given until Jesus “**was glorified**” (John 7:39), and the Apostle Paul explains that if Jesus had not been resurrected there would not be any hope of a future life for the world of mankind: “*And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain*” (1 Cor. 15:14). Jesus was resurrected and ascended to His father in heaven (Acts 1:9-10), and consequently the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost: “*And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit...*” (Acts 2:1-4).

Peter explained that the giving of the Holy Spirit was testimony that God had glorified Jesus: “*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know... Whom God hath raised up... This Jesus hath God raised up,*

whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost (Spirit), he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:22-36).

The effect of the Holy Spirit included gifts that were attractive to the natural man—wisdom, knowledge, healing, prophecy (1 Cor. 12:1-10)—and consequently were sought by many: “And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost (Spirit) was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost (Spirit) (Acts 8:18-19). Simon’s understanding was in error because it was God’s prerogative to give the Holy Spirit to whomsoever He wished and it was not the province of any human being to buy it.

As well as the Holy Spirit, there were also spirits preaching falsehoods, and hence the need arose for the believers in Jesus to test the message they received: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Such false spirits have continued to this day, in fact they have become worse, as Paul warned Timothy: “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them” (2 Tim. 3:13-14). And that is the challenge that faces Christians in 2014.

Pastors and teachers

It’s nice to have teachers whose books and magazines one can read, and which may help one to better understand the truth. Ephesians 4:11-12 makes it clear that there has always been different ministers to expound the Word: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

However no teacher must ever supplant the necessity for conviction from the Bible itself. The value of any teacher is limited to pointing one to the real source of truth—God’s Word: “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). No one obtains the truth simply because of the efforts of any man.

The example of the Bereans should encourage every individual to pursue the truth for themselves. Regarding Paul’s ministry it is recorded that “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and

searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so” (Acts 17:10-11). In spite of the fact that it was an Apostle who had preached to them they did not relax their examination of what they had been told. And the same challenge faces every Christian—regardless of the temporal status of their teacher, all must always remember it is the Lord’s Word that is the last word.

Searching out whether what one has been told is true is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed it is what the Spirit of Truth is all about; it is God exercising His power, in ways natural human beings cannot fathom, to enlighten their minds for the truth about Jesus Christ. Just as it was true of Peter that flesh and blood did not reveal it to him, so it is true of all Christians. Let no one ever think flesh and blood is the means through which anyone learns the truth. God uses teachers and instrumentalities to expound His words to those whom He has called, but ultimately it is not the expositors and it is not through them that anyone learns the truth—it is the gift of God: “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but **God gave the increase**” (1 Cor. 3:5-6).

There has been a multitude of books, literature, television presentations, internet websites, and publications that have gone throughout the world, but only a handful of people respond—only those whom God has called. Let it not be ascribed to human instrumentality that which God has accomplished through the enlightening power of His Spirit, lest that human instrumentality is accredited with an exclusivity regarding truth that prevents one from taking the journey with God’s Holy Spirit which Jesus said would guide into all truth.

The path of the just

The fact that the Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost does not mean there has not been an increase in knowledge of God’s plan since that time. Jesus said: “... when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors” (Mark 13:29). The implication is that knowledge of the details of God’s kingdom would become clearer as time progressed, as Solomon also wrote: “*the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day*” (Prov. 4:18).

For those who recognise Christ as the pre-eminent source of truth—the Word of God—their journey into the mysteries of God’s plan never ends because no one has learned all mankind can from Jesus Christ. Indeed such a contention would be the Laodicean spirit: “We are rich, we are increased with goods, and have need of nothing”.■

THE CITIES OF REFUGE

Numbers chapter 35 records God's instructions to Moses, and through him to Israel, regarding the provision of cities of refuge when Israel came into the land of Canaan, and Joshua chapters 20 and 21 record God repeating those instructions to Joshua after they entered the land. The purpose of the cities was to provide a safe haven for those who had unintentionally killed a person.

The fact that three chapters of Holy Writ are dedicated to these cities suggests there is some benefit to the Christian in being aware of them, as Paul reminded the Romans: *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..."* (Rom. 15:4). However the Scriptures do not contain explicit explanations of the benefit to be gained from a knowledge of the cities of refuge, and so research is necessary to ascertain God's purpose for the record.

Numbers 35 verses 2 - 12 reads (in part): *"Command the children of Israel that they give unto the Levites of the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in... And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites there shall be six cities for refuge, which ye shall appoint for the manslayer, that he may flee thither: and to them ye shall add forty and two cities. So all the cities which ye shall give to the Levites shall be forty and eight cities... And the cities which ye shall give shall be of the possession of the children of Israel... And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come over Jordan into the land of Canaan; Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person unawares. And they shall be unto you cities for refuge from the avenger; that the manslayer die not, until he stand before the congregation in judgment".*

The Levites

The six cities of refuge were part of forty-eight cities the children of Israel gave to the Levites, and so perhaps the place to begin a search for the significance of the cities is to establish the significance of the Levites.

There are 265 references to the Levites in the Bible, only one of which is in the New Testament: *"And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?"* (John 1:19). There is little to be gained from this reference except that in Jesus' day the Levites were still identified as a group separate from both the other Israelites and the priests.

Their father Levi was Jacob's third son by his first wife Leah (Gen. 39:16-34; 35:23), so the Levites were one of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 32:28).

Status

The Levites were given a unique role amongst the Israelites:

- they were not numbered with the other tribes (Num. 1:47-49;
- God selected them to replace the firstborn of Israel (Num. 3:11-13; 8:18);
- they attended the tabernacle (Num. 1:50-54);
- they were not given any inheritance in the land (Num. 18: 20-24).

In the absence of any Scriptural statements regarding the symbolism of the Levites, one can only speculate regarding any symbolic significance.

One possibility is that they picture the Gospel Age church, which symbolism is "supported" by the fact that they were separated from the rest of Israel, as is the church separate from the rest of the world of mankind: *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you"* (2 Cor. 6:17).

To that argument may be added that, just as God chose the Levites to replace the firstborn of Israel, so He has chosen the church to be His firstborn: *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God... To the general assembly and church of the firstborn..."* (Heb. 12:22-23).

The high priest of the earthly tabernacle was the man Aaron, in contrast to Jesus who is the High Priest of *"the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched and not man"* (Heb.8:1-2). The symbolism is strengthened by the fact that the Levites **served** the earthly tabernacle, whereas the church of God **is the spiritual temple**: *"... for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them..."* (2 Cor. 6:16).

Finally, the church does not have any inheritance in the earth just as the Levites did not receive any inheritance in the land: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope... To an inheritance incorruptible... reserved in heaven for you"* (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

However the symbolism cannot be adopted in every detail because the Levites were not tasked with serving in the tabernacle until they were 25 years of

age and they ceased active service in the tabernacle when they reached 50 years: *“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from twenty and five years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation: And from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting upon the service thereof, and shall serve no more: But shall minister with their brethren in the tabernacle of the congregation, to keep the charge, and shall do no service. Thus shalt thou do unto the Levites touching their charge”* (Num. 8:23-26). There is no restriction of either the minimum age or maximum age at which the “spiritual Levites” may serve the temple of the Living God.

Names of the cities

Coming now to the cities of the Levites, and particularly the cities of refuge, the first characteristic investigated in an endeavour to establish the benefit to the Christian of a knowledge of the cities of refuge was the meaning of their names:

- Hebron (Josh. 21:13)—association (Strong #H2275);
- Shechem (Josh. 21:21)—ridge (Strong #H7927);
- Gezer (Josh. 21:21; 1 Chron. 6:67)—a place in Palestine (Strong #H1507);
- Golan (Josh. 21:27)—captive (Strong #H1474);
- Kedesh (Josh. 21:32)—a sanctum (Strong #H6943);
- Ramoth (Josh. 21:38)—heights (Strong #H7216).

The meaning of each of the names can be symbolized, however in the absence of Scriptural interpretation, all such meanings are arbitrary.

One arbitrary symbolic meaning that has been ascribed to the cities of refuge is that the cities represent Jesus Christ, He being the only safe refuge for the Christian after they leave the world. Further arguments are that those who seek refuge in the city,

but leave before the high priest has died, are liable to be killed by the “avenger” (Num. 35:26-28), the “spiritual symbolism” being that they are in danger of losing their spiritual life. However such a construction must take into account that the danger ceases after the high priest died, and while some ascriptions that accommodate that provision have been formulated, they are arbitrary and without Scriptural support.

Other features of the cities which may be interpreted as having spiritual significance for the Christian are:

- there were six cities out of a total of 48 (Num. 35:6-7);
- the cities were provided by the whole nation of Israel;
- The cities were part of the cities of the Levites;
- After the death of the high priest the offender had to return to this original city (Josh. 20:6);
- the distance of the boundary from the city—2000 cubits (Num. 35:5);
- those who had sought refuge in a city had to appear before the congregation in judgment (Num. 35:12);
- That the cities were available for anyone, not just Levites or Israelites, but also to strangers (Num. 35:15);
- Refuge was available only to those who unintentionally killed another person (Josh. 20:3);
- There were 3 cities on each side of the Jordan River (Num. 35:14);

Summary

After summing up all the arguments for a symbolical meaning to be ascribed to the cities of refuge, it seems the lesson for the Christian to learn from the cities of refuge is to profit from the various features of the Old Testament arrangement without being constrained by the necessity to apply every feature to the spiritual church.■

ALIYAH

Arutz Sheva (www.IsraelNationalNews) reported that tears flowed freely on 27 December 2013 as a group of 38 Bnei Menashe arrived in Israel after making Aliyah from India. The Bnei Menashe are descendants of the tribe of Menashe (or Manasseh), one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel which were exiled by the Assyrian empire after the death of King Solomon more than 2,700 years ago.

Shavei Israel Chairman Michael Freund, who accompanied the group of immigrants on the flight from India, called it “an historic moment”. The immigrants, who hail from the northeastern Indian

state of Mizoram, were brought to Israel by the organization, which recently received permission from the Israeli government to bring 900 Bnei Menashe to the Jewish state over the next 15 months.

“This is the beginning of Operation Menashe, the return of this Lost Tribe back to our people and our Land. The Bnei Menashe braved 27 centuries of exile, and just as the Prophets of Israel foretold, they are now coming home,” he said.

[*Aliyah* is the immigration of Jews from the diaspora to the land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael). It is also defined as “the act of going up”.]■

THOUGH IT TARRY

"I will ... watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Habakkuk 2:1-3).

The Apostles longed for the Kingdom of God. They had been with Jesus as He travelled through Galilee preaching: *"Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel"* (Mark 1:14-15). One aspect of their hope was the blessings the kingdom would bring to Israel: *"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"* (Acts 1:6).

Jesus' followers were confident God would fulfil His promise of the kingdom: *"Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom"* (Matt. 20:20-21).

Expectation

As well as Jesus' disciples being confident God would fulfil His promise, the people also were confident the kingdom would come soon, to the extent they thought John the Baptist might be the Messiah: *"And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not"* (Luke 3:15).

The reason for their expectation that the kingdom was near is not given in the Scriptures, but it might have stemmed from Daniel's prophecy: *"And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding... I am come to shew thee... therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision. Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. **Know therefore and understand**, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times"* (Dan. 9:22-25). The prophecy included prosperity for Israel—that Jerusalem would be rebuilt even though it would be in difficult times.

However the people's suspicion that John the Baptist was the Messiah is evidence they overlooked Isaiah's prophecy that He would come as a child: *"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, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. 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..."* (Isa. 9:6-7).

However the priests and scribes were aware not only that He would come as a child, but also of Micah's prophecy regarding where the Messiah would be born: *"When Herod the king had... gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel"* (Matt. 2:3-6; Micah 5:2).

The Jews' hope that Jesus was their Messiah who would deliver them from the Roman yoke and give them temporal power and wealth is manifest by the welcome they gave Him when He entered Jerusalem: *"On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord"* (John 12:12-13). However again, in accordance with God's plan, the people were unaware Jesus would first suffer the ignominy that awaited Him: *"Who hath believed our report? and **to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?**... He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted"* (Isa. 53:1, 3-4). It was after His suffering that He would be God's agent and bring prosperity: *"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied... for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto*

death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:11-12).

The Jew’s hope that Jesus was their Messiah was finally manifest by His two disciples after His resurrection: *“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done”* (Luke 24:13-21).

Jesus’ second coming

A similar situation existed some 1800 years later, when some thought the time had come for the Deliverer to release mankind from the tyranny of sin and death. Students of the Bible were starting to understand the prophecies that had been hidden: *“But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased... Then I Daniel looked, and, behold, there stood other two, the one on this side of the bank of the river, and the other on that side of the bank of the river. And one said to the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end... the wise shall understand. And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the*

thousand three hundred and five and thirty days. But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days” (Dan. 12:4-13).

In September 1822 William Miller stated “I believe that the second coming of Jesus Christ is near, even at the door, even within twenty-one years,—on or before 1843”. Later he revised the date to 1844 and when that date passed he wrote “I confess my error, and acknowledge my disappointment; yet I still believe that the day of the Lord is near, even at the door”.

There were many who were sceptical of Miller’s predictions, as He wrote: “To my astonishment, I found very few who listened with any interest. Occasionally, one would see the force of the evidence, but the great majority passed it by as an idle tale”.

Such an attitude reflects the relevance of the Apostle Peter’s warning: *“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”* (2 Pet. 3:3-4).

Nelson Barber was another who predicted dates of Jesus’ return. Firstly he predicted 1873, revised it to 1874, then in 1875 declared that Christ had returned invisibly, that 1881 would see the return of the Jews to Palestine and 1914 would see the installation of God’s kingdom on earth.

The outbreak of World War in 1914 certainly gave credence that the year was a dramatic date in God’s Plan. However 2014 is 100 years later—a whole century—and mankind is still afflicted with sickness, death, hunger and war. The time has not yet come for the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and 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... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”* (Isa. 2:2-4).

There are many signs in the world today that many Bible prophecies are currently being fulfilled. However the full manifestation of Isaiah’s prophecy is not yet manifest, and so in 2014 the Christian is urged to hold fast to Habakkuk’s prophecy: *“though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry”* (Habakkuk 2:1-3).■

THROUGH THE EYES OF JOSHUA (PART 2)

The story so far: Joshua has described his heritage and the plight of the Israelites immediately prior to their exodus from Egypt.

Then, one day, I heard someone say, ‘Moses is back!’ Moses? – I’d heard the name mentioned, and I did vaguely remember some story about this Jewish baby who had been brought up by Pharaoh’s daughter, had tried to help his Israelite compatriots, but then had been forced to flee from Egypt under some sort of a cloud. But all that had happened some forty years before, so it seemed to me like ancient history! True, Moses’ elder brother, Aaron, he was still around – an impressive figure with a long white beard, in his mid-eighties – but I think everyone had assumed that Moses was long dead.

Anyway, next thing we knew, Moses was very much ‘around’ – eighty he may have been, but you would never have guessed it – so vigorous, so authoritative! It seems that God spoke to him, out in the Sinai Desert, where he was working as a shepherd for his Kenite father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, and told him that he was to lead us all out of Egypt. Amazing!

Later, we began to hear rumours about the way in which Moses and Aaron went, time after time, to tell the Pharaoh to ‘Let my people go’, and we heard how stubborn and obstinate the Pharaoh was. We heard all about those terrible Plagues of Egypt which resulted, and we saw their effects on the Egyptians at first-hand, though – remarkably! – we weren’t affected by them at all, ourselves.

We experienced that first Passover, and we witnessed how God spared our people when he destroyed all the first-born in Egypt; then we had the unspeakable joy of leaving our long captivity, and walking out into the desert as free men and women! My family knew some of the Egyptian families quite well, and some of them brought us valuable gifts, to see us on our way. They were all much distressed by the death of the first-born in their families, of course, and we felt genuinely sorry for them; I mean – you wouldn’t wish that on anyone, would you!

It took us all day to pack and get ready for the long march ahead, but eventually word came through that we were to set out. We had no idea where we were heading, but that soon became clear – God appeared, in the form of a swirling pillar of cloud (during the daylight hours) and as a huge pillar of fire (at night). Pretty impressive, and big enough for us all to see. When the pillar moved on, we moved on; when it stopped, we made camp.

I’m sure you’ve heard about how we crossed our first barrier – The Sea of Reeds. Even at that late stage, Pharaoh had changed his mind about letting his main work-force go, so he sent his army after us – highly-trained professional soldiers, with fast chariots; they didn’t want to destroy us, of course – they just wanted to round us up and herd us back, so that we might resume our lives of slavery in Egypt.

Seeing where we were heading, they must have thought that we had – as they say – ‘painted ourselves into a corner’, with the sea in front of us and the Egyptian army behind us – and I must admit, that’s what most of us thought too, at the time! But – although the Egyptians ought to have learned their lesson by now, after all those plagues, they had reckoned without Moses, and they’d reckoned without God! Word came to us from Moses: ‘Stand firm, and you will see the deliverance that the Lord has planned for you today’.

The pillar of fire moved around behind us, and kept the Egyptians at bay, all night. On their side of the pillar, it was pitch black, but on our side it was just like daylight. Sounds impossible, doesn’t it, but – believe me! – that’s how things were! In the morning, Moses stretched out his staff over the water and it parted left and right, leaving a wide, dry pathway in between, through which we all marched over to the other side – a huge company of people, with our flocks and herds. Absolutely amazing!

As soon as we were all safely across, the pillar moved again, to our side of the water. The Egyptian charioteers saw what had been happening, spurred up their horses and charged into the dry roadway; but suddenly, it all became muddy and the wheels of their chariots began to bog down; Moses dropped the staff he had been holding out, and the waters came rushing back over the Egyptians, drowning them all instantly. Wow! (To be continued)■.

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