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WHEN YE SEE THESE THINGS

“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28).

So far the 21st century has been characterised by turmoil, so much so that one might wonder if the earth will be peaceful ever again. Events have occurred in every sphere, and the number of them, combined with the speed with which they have occurred, has the potential to cause uncertainty in the minds of those who ponder the future.

Physical events

Some of the events have been termed “natural disasters”. They have caused severe suffering, their magnitude, if not exceeding at least equalling, the most severe on record. In Australia there have been floods in areas which previously have been characterised by drought. There have also been extensive bushfires which have caused loss of life and huge losses of property. In USA there have been typhoons and cyclones that have caused deaths, with some damage not yet rectified, even after several years. There have been earthquakes in several parts of the globe, some of which have caused tsunamis which in turn have caused extensive damage and loss of life. In other areas, specifically New Zealand, Spain and Japan, some earthquakes have not caused tsunamis but have caused other significant damage. In the gulf of Mexico there was a problem with an oil well which resulted in the spillage of large amounts of oil into the sea, killing much marine life. An earthquake in Japan damaged a nuclear power station from which harmful radio-active material escaped. The polar ice caps have continued to melt with huge pieces breaking off; some marine biologists believe the molten ice has diluted the local sea such that the concentration of salt in the local ocean is now so low that some salt water fish cannot survive in that area. Debate continues whether the phenomena are consequences of mankind’s industrial pursuits or whether they are part of a long term “natural” cycle.

Social changes

The events have not been confined to the physical environment. There has been, and it is continuing,

social and political unrest in several countries, particularly in the nations in the mid-East (Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Sudan). The conflicts in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan continue, and it is alleged that, in some countries, the military has fired on and killed some of their own citizens.

Finance

The financial framework also has suffered crises. One period of instability has been termed the Global Financial Crisis. The monetary imbalance is such that some countries have required support from others, some of the more notable ones being Greece and Spain. The USA is heavily in debt to China.

Religious turmoil

The religious arena also has experienced dramatic changes. Religious organisations, particularly in the Western World, have struggled to maintain viability; the Roman Catholic Church has a crucial shortage of priests, so great is the crisis that some priests have been recruited from Nigeria to serve in Australia. Further to that, the very structure and authority of the Roman Catholic Church is under challenge. One example is the publication on the internet by a Catholic faction (www.vaticancatholic.com) of

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allegations that some of the recent popes of the Roman Catholic church were imposters, and that Vatican II was anti-Catholic. The publication of such material constitutes a stark contrast to the unilateral authority of that Church which it exercised for centuries—unilateral to the extent of being suppressive. The thought of an organisation within the church explicitly declaring that any one of the popes was an imposter constitutes a rebellion and may be interpreted as a fracturing of that Church. And it is not just the Catholic church that is undergoing change. In the early years of this century the Anglican Archbishop of Perth, West Australia (who at that time was the primate of the Anglican Church in Australia), invited a Muslim mufti to preach in the Perth Cathedral. Such inter-faith events provide grounds for adherents to wonder where the trend is going to stop, and to query the principles upon which their institutions were founded.

Computers

The contribution of computers to the present turmoil cannot be overlooked. The internet is an innovation of the last 20-30 years or so and already its influence is world-wide. While it is a marvellous resource for the promulgation of information it has also provided a ready means for the dissemination of immoral and Satanic material; such material undermines many of the moral and social principles upon which many western societies are built.

Confusion

Such rapid and far reaching changes in the constitutional platforms of many countries provokes some to wonder what they should believe and, ultimately, what is Man's destiny. Such a quandary highlights the importance of a standard upon which to base belief.

There are a number of different standards that may be considered. One of them is the Bible. However there are many different renditions (translations) of the original text which provide a variety of meanings. Another document which has widespread acceptance is the Quran which, to the Muslim, is the equivalent of what the Bible is to the Christian.

The question remains: which one is the ultimate authority—which one contains “the truth”—and how does one decide?

History and prophecy

One measure is the prophecies contained in The Book. If the events foretold in the script come to pass it can justifiably be concluded that the source of the prophecy (the author of “The Book”) has divine authority and therefore the message contained in The Book is “the truth”.

Another medium by which one may ascertain the truth is their personal experiences—some believe they have had personal experiences that testify to the authority of the message in “The Book” (“answers to prayer” being one example), and hence they regard the author of “The Book” as The Ultimate Authority.

The Bible record

The Bible contains many prophecies and records much history. Many of the events foretold in its pages have already come to pass, with current world conditions indicating that the fulfilment of many others is either happening now or is imminent.

One of the prophecies recorded in the Bible which has been fulfilled, at least in part, is the sequence of the kingdoms prophesied in the book of Daniel. In summary, the prophecies are that the kingdom of Babylon, under King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2:36-38), would be superseded by the kingdom of the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:5-28), then by Greece (Dan. 8:1-21) and finally by a fourth kingdom (Dan. 7:1-28), after which the kingdom will be given to the “*saints of the most high*” (Dan. 7:18). Several details of the transitions from kingdom to kingdom are given in the book; however it is sufficient to say here that the rise, fall and sequence of the first three kingdoms are testified by secular records.

And the story does not stop there. While the fourth kingdom mentioned in the book of Daniel is not named, that kingdom will be followed by one set up by the God of heaven (Dan. 2:44; 7:9-14). Many of the events occurring in 2015 may be deemed to be indications the world is in transition between the fourth kingdom and the kingdom that will be set up by the God of heaven. However some will argue that the events are merely part of a repetitive cycle.

Nevertheless there is one event occurring in the world today that has not occurred previously, at least not to the same extent and in the same manner. And that is the establishment of the nation of Israel, and the immigration of Jews from around the world. This event alone indicates the establishment of the kingdom of heaven is imminent.

Israel in the Bible

In the King James Version of the Bible the number of references to Israel is second only to the number of references to God:

- God: more than 4400;
- Israel: more than 2500;
- Jesus: approximately 980;
- Christ: approximately 570;
- Adam: approximately 30.

Thus it would seem that Israel is an important identity in God's overall dealings with humanity.

God's chosen people

The number of references to Israel is consistent with Israel being God's chosen people: *"For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth... because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy..."* (Deut. 7:6-9).

Those verses declare that the events that attended Israel's exodus from Egypt are testimony to God's preferential care for them—He *"brought them out with a mighty hand"*—exemplified by their crossing of the Red Sea and sustenance in the wilderness.

Likewise the current regathering of the Israelites from all the nations of the world is testimony that, in spite of their transgressions during the centuries past, Israel is still under the care of God's hand: *"Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered... then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob. And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence... and they shall know that I am the LORD their God"* (Ezek. 28:25-26). While that prophecy has not yet been fulfilled in every detail—Israel is not dwelling safely in their land in the fullest sense—nevertheless they are in process of being gathered to the Promised Land and are planting vineyards and other crops, and are exporting produce. Thus to deny that Israel is still God's favoured people is, in effect, a denial of the promises of God's Word.

Israel today

While it is not suggested God's promises regarding Israel are yet fulfilled, it is suggested that, in some circles, there is more faith among modern day Israelis regarding those promises than there is among the Gentile nations. An excerpt from *Israel Video News of March 7, 2015* reads: *"Then I will bring them to my holy mountain and make them happy in my house of prayer, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon my altar; for my house shall be called, House of prayer for all peoples"* (Isaiah 56:7). Those verses are not referring to the Jewish People but, rather, to the nations of the world. The prophet Isaiah declared there will come a time when all the nations will surge towards Jerusalem. And God Himself will bring them to the temple mount—His holy mountain. All people of the world will not only be

accepted but moreover, will be sought after and appreciated. The holy temple will become a House of Prayer for the entire world... There will come a time when all people of the world will surge to the holy mountain in Jerusalem, and they will bring their desires and intent with them in their hearts" (end of quote). Those words were published in 2015!

Israel's transgression

Notwithstanding the promises contained in the Bible regarding Israel's future prosperity, it must be acknowledged they have transgressed God's directions. However the Bible explains that God's promises will be fulfilled—He will forgive their transgressions—and further, their history will be used to instruct the Gentiles.

The Apostle Paul explains: *"I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid... God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew..."* (Rom. 11:1-2). The Apostle Paul declared that God has not cast off Israel. Indeed God had a higher purpose: *"According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day."* (Rom. 11:8). Paul declared that Israel's blindness was God's doing.

God's higher purpose is summarized in Ezekiel 39: *"So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies... According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel... Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD"* (Ezek. 39:22-29). Indeed, as the Apostle Paul explained in his letter to the Romans: *"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins... For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"* (Rom. 11:26-34). Yes indeed, Who?■

INTEGRITY AND CONSCIENCE

“Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Peter 3:16)

Conscience is the automatic or emotional sense that persuades an individual whether something is right or wrong. It is determined by what one knows. A lack of knowledge regarding an issue means there is no inner feeling about that issue; such ignorance is reflected in the common saying “ignorance is bliss”—that is, if one does not have any knowledge about an issue, they are not constrained by their conscience to react in any particular way regarding it.

Integrity is measured by how one’s actions reflect their conscience. One has integrity when they act in accordance with their conscience, and they lack integrity when they act contrary to their conscience.

In the Scriptures there are examples and exhortations regarding both conscience and integrity, and the relationship between them.

In the King James Version, all the verses that contain the word “integrity” are in the Old Testament (however some verses in the New Testament relate to integrity without using the word), and all the verses that contain the word “conscience” are in the New Testament, although some verses in the Old Testament imply they refer to conscience.

Conscience and knowledge

The relationship of conscience and knowledge is exemplified by the case of Saul before his conversion to Christianity. Before his conversion he persecuted Christians to the extent of consenting to the stoning of Stephen: *“And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:1-3).*

After his conversion Paul did not deny the persecution he had rained on Christians before his conversion: *“And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you... I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into*

prisons both men and women” (Acts 21:40—22:4). Nevertheless Paul did not consider he had acted contrary to his conscience, even though he recognised later that those he had “*persecuted (were of) the church of God*” (1 Cor. 15:9): *“And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1),.*

Another example of the relationship between knowledge and conscience is the advice Paul gave the Corinthian brethren regarding eating meat, some of which had been used in the heathen’s sacrifices 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... Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other...” (1 Cor. 10:25-29).* Eating meat that had previously been offered to idols was permitted **provided they did not know** of its previous use, because in that case they were not consciously aware of the significance that had been ascribed to it.

Paul’s instruction had a further significance. When eating those meats they were to consider the impression their eating would convey to others, that is, that when others saw them eating meat that had been offered to idols their eating could be construed by others to mean the Christians ate because they were also worshipping the idols. Thus they were to be circumspect regarding what they ate and who else would view them doing so. Paul did not tell them not to eat because its previous offering to idols had an effect on its status, but purely because of the impression their eating would give to others: *“Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. 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” (1 Cor. 8:7-12).

Paul’s instruction contains some dramatic concepts: such action not only had the potential to give a false impression to others but also it could defile their conscience to the extent their faith could be overthrown and they would “perish”.

One example of one being troubled by the improper conduct of another is when Paul rebuked Peter because Peter withdrew himself from eating with the Gentiles and caused doubt in Barnabas’ mind: *“But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Gal. 2:11-14).* So is established the importance of one’s conscience being governed by an accurate understanding of the truth.

Law abidance

The relationship between knowledge and conscience has particular application also to a Christian’s attitude towards the law of the land: *“Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour” (Rom. 13:5-7).* It is comparatively easy for those who live in a democratic and “free” country to give lip service to Paul’s instruction, but the hardship and persecution meted out by some more restrictive regimes makes it difficult to honour those words.

Nevertheless the admonition is that the Christian is to obey the law of the land. One aspect of doing so that might provide some courage and strength is to realize the temporary nature of Man’s current human existence, and also that all rulers are merely puppets in God’s hands, regardless of whether they recognise it—even Pharaoh was God’s instrument: *“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth” (Rom. 9:17).* Paul states that it was God who raised up Pharaoh, not to promote Pharaoh’s prestige but that God might shew

His power through Pharaoh; that is, when God’s purpose in restraining the Israelites in Egypt was accomplished, He caused Pharaoh to relent: The nature of Pharaoh’s “raising” is not clearly stated except that it is stated several times in Exodus that God *“hardened his heart”* (Exod. 4:21; 7:13; 9:12; 10:1; 11:10; 14:4). It was the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart that led to the Passover and fulfilled God’s plan.

Nebuchadnezzar

Likewise Nebuchadnezzar was the human agent God used to fulfill His plan: *“And Jehozadak went into captivity, when **the LORD carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar**” (1 Chron. 6:15)—it was the Lord who carried away Judah and Jerusalem; Nebuchadnezzar being merely God’s agent, as testified by both Ezra and Jeremiah: *“But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon... who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon” (Ezra 5:12).* Jeremiah records: *“And now have **I given** all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, **my servant**; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him. And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son’s son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him. And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine... **until I have consumed them** by his hand.” (Jer. 27:6-8).* Nebuchadnezzar was God’s servant.*

Thus the principle is established: God *“... removeth kings, and setteth up kings...”* (Dan. 2:20-21) as He pleases to accomplish His wishes, and so all human dynasties are working out God’s purposes. Hence Christians are to obey the laws of the land, as Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus: *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim. 2:1-2), and “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (Titus 3:1).*

Dealing with the world

The Christian’s walk is not easy, and perhaps no aspect is more difficult than keeping one’s conscience and integrity pure, and particularly since everyone is in the flesh and hence no one is perfect. One consolation is to always remember that God knows every intention of everyone’s heart: *“For the word of*

God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:12-13). It was on that basis that the Apostle Paul was able to write: “For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward” (2 Cor. 1:12).

The Apostle Peter added that it is necessary to remember that our reward is not in this age: *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:11-12); and “...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet. 3:15-16). It might be helpful to remember that it will be in the kingdom that the Christian’s conduct in this age will testify to the wisdom and righteousness of God.*

Integrity

Genesis 20:1-6 records Abimelech being exonerated because he acted according to his conscience: *“And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man’s wife. But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the **integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands** have I done this. And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the **integrity of thy heart**; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her”*. Abimelech did not act contrary to what he knew, having been told by both Abraham and Sarah that Sarah was Abraham’s sister, and hence God attributed Abimelech with integrity—he had not acted contrary to his conscience.

David also was one who pleaded with the Lord that he would be judged according to the integrity of his heart: *“... judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness, and according to mine integrity that is in me” (Psa. 7:8). David knew the Lord looks upon the heart, as the Lord told Samuel: “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). David had a “pure heart”—he had acted in accordance with what he believed was right—and hence he asked God to judge him as one having integrity.*

Guidance

Integrity is not just a characteristic that is measured by one’s action but it also provides guidance; determination to preserve one’s integrity helps overcome temptations to act in an improper way: *“The integrity of the upright shall guide them...” (Prov. 11:3); and “the just man walketh in his integrity” (Prov. 20:7).*

Every member

There is a similarity between the assessment of the integrity of a building and the integrity of the Lord’s church. The assessment of the integrity of a building involves the assessment of the individual members that comprise it and whether they have been assembled correctly. Faulty components can cause the building to fail even though they are assembled correctly, and also improper construction might lead to failure even if the components are of an acceptable standard. Both aspects have to be examined to ensure the building will be strong enough to withstand the stresses that will be put upon it.

Likewise the integrity of the church—*“God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9)*—depends on the quality of each member and also on their contribution to the integrity of the overall structure.

The assessment of each individual involves their doctrinal conviction and also their dedication to the welfare of the church—together they are the antitypical assessment of the suitability of a structural component of a building. Assessment of both those aspects is required to ensure the building will have the strength that will be necessary to endure the stresses that will be brought to bear upon it.

However there is at least one vital difference between the acquisition of the properties required of the members of a physical building and the acquisition of the properties required of the members of God’s building: the members of the material building must possess the required attributes before they are

selected for the building, whereas the members of God's building are required to continue to grow and develop after they have been incorporated into the building: *"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: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"* (Eph. 4:11-13). As Peter expressed it the members are to *"... grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..."* (2 Pet. 3:18).

Examine yourselves

The Christian must continually assess their innermost qualities—their conscience and integrity—to ensure their character is able to provide support for the

building, which in simple terms is their association with the saints. As Paul declared *"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men"* (Acts 24:16). It was an on-going exercise for Paul, and so it must be for all who would be members of the Lord's building: *"Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit"* (Eph. 2:19-22). Indeed, *"know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which ye are"* (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Yes, indeed!■

MILK AND HONEY

The expression "flowing with milk and honey" is commonly used to describe the land of Israel—the "promised land". The phrase occurs in Exodus 3:8: *"And I will come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and bring them up out of that land unto a good, ample land, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite."* (Exodus 3:8).

According to <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/> published by *IsraelVideoNetwork* on 19 June 2015, many Jewish scholars believe that the milk and the honey are actually referring to the plentiful and magnificent produce of the land of Israel. The milk represents the livestock—the goats and cows—that give milk. Honey in Biblical times was mostly produced from dates and figs, thus representing the fruit of the Holy Land. The phrase almost gives the impression the produce will miraculously flow into the land; that "someone above" is overseeing things.

However, to those who know better, it is perplexing to hear the land described that way. Israel is not an easy land to develop. It has little natural resources, and, until this day, is highly dependent on rain, which is not a constant. When the people of Israel were exiled over 2000 years ago, it seems almost as if the Land of Israel went into mourning. It lay barren, a desert wasteland, where Bedouin tribes wandered to find areas of vegetation for their flocks of sheep and goats. Little grew and there were few who tried to produce anything from its dry and barren earth. In his book *"Innocents Abroad"*, Mark Twain, after travelling through Israel, describes his impressions of the land in the year 1867: *"A desolate country whose*

soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds... a silent mournful expanse.... a desolation.... we never saw a human being on the whole route.... hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country."

However things have changed dramatically since those days. There is plenty of milk and honey. In the Kibbutz Yotvata in Israel's arid Arava region, Israel's cows produce far more milk per capita than in any other country in the world. For example, a cow in the U.S. or the U.K. produces, on the average, about 6000 litres of milk per year. A cow in Israel produces twice that much.

Not far from Kibbutz Yotvata lies Kibbutz Keturah. The kibbutz is known for its delicious dates. From the 12 date trees imported from California in the 1970s have sprung 10,000 date trees. Each tree produces 350 pounds of dates a year.

Date honey is the thing in Israel. Dr. Elaine Soloway, head of the kibbutz's orchards, managed to grow a date tree from a 2000 year-old date seed found in the archeological digs at Masada. The kibbutz has named the tree "Methusela".

Several Jewish scholars believe the current prosperity is a true sign that "the redemption" is near. *"But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot forth your branches, and yield your fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come home."* (Ezek. 36:8). Today the trees of Israel have begun to yield fruit, and the land flows with milk and honey, while it awaits the greater abundance promised in Isaiah 35.■

A LOVING BROTHER FINISHES HIS COURSE



Br. David Simkin passed away on the 18th April 2015 aged 91. David had been attending the Melbourne Berean Bible Class since the late 1940's with his wife Sr. Betty.

David was an Elder in the Melbourne Class for many years and was instrumental in establishing a Sunday school for the Melbourne Class.

In 1983 he was elected Assistant Secretary to the Berean Bible Institute. With the failing health of Br E.E. Martin, David took over the activities of the Institute, moving the office equipment and stock from 19 Ermington Place, Kew to his

home in Briar Hill. He was instrumental in preparing the documents to facilitate the incorporation of the BBI in 1990, a move that exhibited great foresight and wisdom and which is the legal basis of the Berean Bible Institute Inc. today. David was editor of the Peoples Paper from August 1988 until 2007.

From approximately 1968 until 1980 Bro. David acted as "Ernest" in the weekly Australian production of the radio "Biblical Dialogue" program titled "Frank and Ernest". The program discussed Bible doctrine and prophecy. The program format was for "Ernest" to ask questions and "Frank" (Bro. E. Martin) would provide the answer. The program aired on 3GL (Geelong) and 3AK and 3UZ in Melbourne until the stations denied access.

David remained a member of the BBI until his death. He was always ready to assist the brethren. Many brethren in Australia are indebted to Bro. David for the encouragement God provided through him. ■

ZION HEARD—AND WAS GLAD

The following article is an excerpt from a presentation given in 1965; 50 years ago. It is published here because it might give some indication of the changing times in the world and also of the stability and continuity of the grounds for Christian faith: *"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever"* (Heb. 13:8).

Of particular interest is the opening expression: *"in the midst of all this trouble and tumult in the world"*. If the unrest in the world in 1965 was justifiably described in those terms, what terms need to be used to describe the turmoil in the world in 2015?

* *

"But in the midst of all this trouble and tumult in the world, what is the attitude of the Lord's truly consecrated and faithful people? Are they, too, in fear? As the judgments of the Lord fall heavily upon the wayward and disobedient so that the whole earth reels and staggers as a drunken man (Psalms 107:27), are the saints in dismay and distress?

Ah, no; for it is written, *"Zion heard, and was glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoiced, because of Thy judgments, O Lord"* (Psa. 97:8). It is the "sinners in Zion" that are "afraid." Psalms 91 and 46 show why the saints rejoice and are restful of heart while others weep and lament. It is because they *"dwell in the secret place of the Most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty"* (Psa. 91:1).

These dwellers in the secret place of the Most High are provided in these perilous times with a clear knowledge of the Divine Plan, with its times and seasons, which enables them to see both the necessity for the present method of Divine discipline upon the world and also the peaceable fruits of righteousness which will result therefrom. In the midst of the storm and battle of this great Day of the Lord, they hear the commanding voice of the Lord of Armies, and their hearts rejoice; for they have full confidence in His ability to bring order out of all the confusion. They realize that in the judgment of this day it is the Lord Who speaks from Heaven—from the high place of authority and control; therefore they give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness (Psalm 30:4)—of His Justice, Wisdom, Love and Power, which ensure that He is doing all things well.

The guidance and covering protection God gives to His people may be equated to the guidance and protection He gave the nation of Israel when He brought them out of Egypt: covered by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). Indeed God is their "Refuge and Strength".

And the place of this security and protection is indeed a secret; it affords a peace and quietness that is known only by those who are privileged to dwell there: *"under the shadow of the Almighty"*. May we all continue to rejoice in the rest this place provides. ■

SHALL HE FIND FAITH?

“Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8)

In some circles emphasis has been placed on the word “faith” in Jesus’ words in Luke 18:8, contending that a “more precise” meaning of Jesus’ words is that He was referring to THE faith.

One basis for the contention is the Vatican manuscript as quoted by Benjamin Wilson in the interlinear translation in his Emphatic Diaglott. However the smooth reading translation is *“will he find this belief on the land”*—hence to what belief did Jesus refer?

The inclusion of the word “the”, as in the Diaglott interlinear column, is supported by a note in the margin in the Companion Bible that *“faith = the faith”*; and the Concordant Literal New Testament (which reads *“will He be finding the faith on the earth?”*). Also the Revised Version contains a note in the margin *“or the faith”* which means it is regarded as an alternative translation.

Strong’s Concordance lists only two occurrences of “the” in Luke 18:8, which may be allocated to its occurrence in the phrases *“the son of man”* and *“the earth”* in the verse. Unless Strong’s Concordance has overlooked a third occurrence in the verse, there is no provision in the verse for “the” to be included as a qualifier for “faith”.

A study of the Greek word translated “faith” in Luke 18:8 reveals that it occurs approximately 244 times in the King James Version, and an examination of several occurrences seems to indicate the word can be applied in a general sense. Thus resolution of the issue resorts to the inclusion of the word “the” in the Vatican manuscript as noted in the Diaglott (the parable is not reported in any of the other gospels).

More recent translations

Some more recent translations read:

- Scofield (1909): *“shall he find faith on the earth”*, with a note in the margin: *“The reference is not to personal faith but to belief in the whole body of revealed truth”*;
- Revised Standard Version (1881, with revisions in 1901 and 1946): *“will he find faith on earth?”*; and
- New International Version (1985): *“will he find faith on the earth?”*.

The declared objectives of the revisers are honourable and thus it is difficult to contend their translations are biased by their individual understanding. For example the Preface to the New International Version reads: *“The New International Version is a completely new*

translation of the Holy Bible made by over a hundred scholars working directly from the best available Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. It had its beginning in 1965...” (the project took 20 years).

The faith

Even if one concludes that Jesus was referring to a specific point of doctrine, that point has to be identified. The Emphatic Diaglott smooth reading uses the words *“this belief”* and so the question remains: to which belief was Jesus referring?

One guide should be the context. Luke 18:1 seems to indicate Jesus was referring to faith in a general sense, and particularly faith that God would hear their prayers. He illustrated His point by referring to a judge who did not believe in God and who for his own expediency absolved a petitioning woman. Jesus’ lesson was that if an unjust judge was prepared to (ultimately) hear the plea of a woman, they could be assured God would hear their prayers.

Such an interpretation might be deemed superficial and elementary, particularly by those who have been given deep insight into the Scriptures, as Paul implies: *“But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. but as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God”* (1 Cor. 2:7-10). Nevertheless the question remains: what was the faith to which Jesus referred?

Faith generally

Looking at the world at large, it seems possible that there is less faith now than in previous times—not necessarily religious faith but faith in anything. The contention is consistent with the general definition of faith: *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb. 11:1). Compared with previous generations, the present generation (in the developed world) is impatient—2015 is a “now” generation; everything has to be instantly provided, the mind set perhaps being augmented by computers and other technological devices that eliminate or reduce waiting. One example is email: email provides an almost instantaneous means of obtaining written documents.■

THE CHRISTIAN'S PRAYERS

How can the Christian be sure that God will answer their prayers? It is not enough that they affirm their belief in prayer. For example many mothers have believed in prayer and have asked God to protect their sons on the battlefield, only to receive a message that they had been killed.

However there are thousands who are eager to testify that God has answered their prayers for the safety of their boys. Other thousands will testify of the wonderful manner in which God has given them other special blessings they requested. On the basis of experience alone, therefore, it may seem that God answers the prayers of some, yet does not answer the prayers of others. But that conclusion is inconsistent with a simplistic understanding of Romans 2:11—that “*there is no respect of persons with God*”. So, there must be some good reason why God seemingly answers some prayers, and not others.

Fundamental disposition

Prayer is a very important component of religion. It is practised widely by the adherents of all religions. The desire to pray is an acknowledgment of dependency upon a Higher Power; the expression of a realization that the one who offers the prayer needs help from some source outside of and higher than themselves. It would seem reasonable that God is pleased with the sincere desire of all who try to contact him in prayer, because to this extent at least it is a recognition of His sovereign power.

The almost universal urge to pray is due to the fact that originally man was created in the image of God. As a result of man's fall into sin and death the divine image in his character has been much blurred, in many cases almost erased, yet remnants of it still remain, and one of its manifestations is the urge to pray. There may be millions who never pray, yet often feel that they should, and have a sense of guilt because they do not. On this basis it is also reasonable to conclude that God is pleased with the spirit of prayer on the part of His creatures.

But why does God hear the prayers of some, while apparently other prayers go unheeded? Jesus hints at the answer to that question in His observations about the prayers of the scribes and Pharisees. They prayed to be seen and heard of men, Jesus explained, and they thought God would hear them for their much speaking. By this example Jesus reminded His disciples that there are proper and improper attitudes of prayer, as well as correct and incorrect methods. Those who spin their prayer wheels may be sincere, but their method is inappropriate.

Subject matter

The Scriptures also indicate that there are proper and improper things for which to pray. James wrote: “*Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss*” (James 4:3). It is vitally important to ascertain for what the Christian has the privilege of asking God to give them in the way of favours.

God did not design prayer as a means of finding out how He should manage His affairs on earth. He is not looking to the Christian to tell Him what He should do. He has his own fixed plans and purposes, and if the Christian is to receive the riches of His blessing, it is essential that their prayers be in harmony with His plans. As James declared, the Christian asks “*amiss*” every time they petition God for blessings which He has not designed to give.

Intent

The Scriptures contain examples of various types of prayer. Foremost among them are prayers of thanksgiving. God is pleased when His creatures recognize Him as the source of their blessings, and because of this lift up their hearts and voices to him in thanksgiving.

Then there are prayers of adoration, prayers which give recognition to the glorious attributes of the Creator's character—His wisdom, His justice, His love, and His power. The desire to glorify God should be the motive for many prayers.

Prayers for God's mercy are also appropriate. The Scriptures urge all Christians to seek divine forgiveness of their sins through the medium of prayer. Hebrews 4:16 urges the Christian to “*come boldly to the throne of grace*” there to obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need.

Nevertheless there are prayers that are requests for certain blessings, or favours from the Lord. The question is to what extent should such prayers be the essence of the Christian's prayers?

Some pray for health, either for themselves or for others. Some pray for protection while on a journey. Millions pray for peace. It has often happened that citizens of countries which are opposing each other in war pray that their respective armies will be victorious. It is proper to presume that all who go to God in prayer are sincere, and ask Him for the things which to them seem the most important at the time.

But does the Bible declare that all such prayers should be granted? If such prayers are answered, it

simply means that it was in keeping with His will. God has a fixed plan, and that plan was not made to satisfy the whims and wishes of every individual. So what is the balance?

One common saying is that “prayer changes things” and that is certainly true from the human individual’s perspective, but it does not change God’s plans. God is not looking to human beings, nor to the nations, nor to the United Nations, to learn what changes He should make in order to improve conditions for any human being. How little confidence could the Christian have if God’s plans could be swayed or changed by the eloquence of human prayers!

“Thy Will Be Done”

God’s people should have uppermost in mind and heart the desire that His will be done in all their experiences, just as Jesus did in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *“Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with me. And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt”* (Matt. 26:38-39).

It was God’s will that Jesus should suffer humiliation and death as the Redeemer and saviour of mankind. This important feature of the divine plan had been foretold by the holy prophets in the Old Testament. And Jesus wanted above everything else to have the divine will accomplished, regardless of what it meant to Him. He affirmed this later, when He was about to be arrested: Peter drew his sword to protect his Master, Jesus said to him, *“Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”* (John 18:10, 11).

The followers of Jesus have the privilege of suffering and dying with him. Paul spoke of being “crucified” with Him, and he also wrote *“To you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake”* (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:29). The Christian is called upon to follow in Jesus’ footsteps, so they know it is not God’s will to spare them from all hardship. Thus, as with Jesus, their chief concern should be that the Lord’s will might be done in their mortal bodies. The Lord’s will might be that for a time they enjoy certain earthly blessings, but the burden of their prayers should not be for them, but that His will be done. Jesus enlarged upon this point when He said to his disciples that as long as they were abiding in Him and His words were abiding in them, they could ask in prayer for whatever they desired, and it would be granted unto them (John 15:7). That might seem like an assurance that they are privileged to ask God for anything they may

happen to think of and want. But not so! Note the condition attached to this statement by the Master: *“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you”*. To abide in Christ means to be a member of His body; He being their Head. This means that His thoughts become their thoughts, and His plans their plans. If their wills have thus been wholly surrendered to God, through Christ, they will have no will of their own, hence their prayers will not be requests for what they want, but only for those things which are in harmony with the will of their Head. By thus praying in harmony with the Lord’s will, they can be assured of favourable answers.

Such a disposition is in harmony with another statement made by Jesus to His disciples in which He informed them that the Heavenly Father will be pleased to give the *“Holy Spirit to them that ask him”* (Luke 11:13). To be filled with the Spirit of God means to have His thoughts dominate one’s thinking, and for their lives to be conformed to those thoughts. Then they will not be asking God for blessings except those which He has promised to give, and so there will never be any question about one’s prayers being answered.

“Thy Kingdom Come”

In response to the disciples’ request, *“Lord, teach us to pray”*, Jesus gave them what is now known as “The Lord’s Prayer”. An important part of this outline is the proper method of approach to God: *“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name”* (Luke 11:1, 2). Adam is styled a *“son of God”* (Luke 3:38). But when he sinned he lost his sonship, being alienated from God and sentenced to death. Adam’s children—the entire human race—are likewise aliens and strangers to God, so they cannot properly address him as *“our Father which art in heaven”*. To be able to address God as *“our Father”* is a privilege that belongs exclusively to those whom He has invited to be His sons, who have repented of their sins, accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour, and devoted their lives to God in full consecration to do His will. Such are described as having received God’s Spirit of sonship (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 4:6). As children of God, the Christian should desire above all else to honour the name of their Father. So by word and by action their attitude should always be *“Hallowed be thy name”*. To properly hallow God’s name necessitates that, when they approach God in prayer, they do so in the manner outlined by Jesus and recorded in the Scriptures—that their prayers will be offered in His name: *“Ye did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you”* (John 15:16). What a privilege it is to be invited to pray in His name!■

THE GOVERNMENT SHALL BE UPON HIS SHOULDER

“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” (Isaiah 9:6).

Governance of an industrialized (developed) nation is a complex task. It requires detailed attention be given to a wide range of facilities and services, some of which are a national defence organisation, citizen access to health and welfare services (private and/or national), education, transport, national financial management, options for cultural pursuits and a regulatory framework that provides for input by the citizens.

Some of those functions are inter-related, for example, in Australia, the national financial interest rate is struck by the Reserve Bank. The rate affects both house prices and industrial investment—the lower the rate the greater is the incentive for industrial companies to borrow and invest (thereby stimulating the economy) but a low rate enables home buyers also to borrow more and so the price of housing increases, which makes it more difficult for some people to own their own home.

Another factor that increases the complexity is the difference in the living environments in different parts of the country, combined with variation in population density. Overall the population density in Australia is approximately 3 persons per square kilometre, but varies from 22.5 in New South Wales to 0.156 in the Northern Territory. Consequently it is not possible to provide the same level of services to those living in the Northern Territory as for those living in New South Wales. Such inequality has the potential to lead to dissatisfaction.

Additionally the difference in living standards is greater between developed countries and those countries that are more primitive.

Overall the situation is becoming more complex, as Jesus foretold: *“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring”* (Luke 21:25). Perplexity is different from complexity: complexity is when there are many component parts and is made more complex when different parts interact with others; perplexity means a state of quandary—a puzzling situation for which there is no obvious solution.

The government

When individuals are unable to solve their problems they may appeal to the government for assistance. The resources available to the government are those

that have been recovered from its citizens and so in simple terms such requests are asking for help from the other citizens, masked in the term “government”. In such cases the government is expected to bear the responsibility of providing a solution. But in times of perplexity the government might not have the necessary resources to do so. Thus the promise in Isaiah 9:6 is that the Son will be responsible for the welfare of the people—He will be the government.

The shoulder

The certainty of the promise that the Son will take the reins and govern the people is confirmed by the statement that the burden of government will be upon His shoulder.

Historically the load required to be carried was placed on the shoulder: *“And Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of Jordan, and take ye up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder...”* (Joshua 4:5). *“And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder...”* (Isa. 10:27). Thus the promise that the government shall be upon His shoulder is a confirmation that He will take all responsibility for the events that transpire on the earth at that time.

No end

The final aspect of the kingdom being on the Son’s shoulder is that the benefits will extend to all peoples: *“Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end”* (Isa. 9:7). Such a promise means there will not be any disparity or inequality of the benefits afforded by the government due to the people dwelling in different locations: *“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (Isa. 11:9). Indeed *“all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God”* (Isa. 52:10) and shall rejoice (Rom. 15:10).■

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