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HE DESPISED THE SHAME

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).

At this time of the year it is appropriate that the Christian focus on the sacrifice of their Lord and Master who came down from heaven and gave His life that they, and all mankind, might have life: "...I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10); "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" (John 6:51).

Jesus' life on earth subjected him to scorn and derision, but as Hebrews 12:2 states, He despised the shame because of the joy that was set before Him.

Previous glory

The humiliation and shame He endured is better appreciated when it is remembered from whence He came: He was with God at the very beginning (John 1:2); He was "the beginning of the creation of God" (Revelation 3:14); "the firstborn of every creature" (Colossians 1:15); "the only begotten son of God" (John 3:16); "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15); "the Word" (Greek: *logos*—John 1:1) of God; and it was by Him that God "made the worlds" (Heb. 1:2).

While it is impossible for the human mind to fully appreciate the grandeur of His position before He came to earth, the Apostle Paul explained that something of the power of that realm can be gleaned from an observation of the wonders of creation. He wrote: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead..." (Rom. 1:20). Human beings who take time to observe the wonders of the world around them marvel at its splendour: its intricate design and beauty are beyond human explanation. It is as the Psalmist wrote: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that

thou art mindful of him?... O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Psa. 8:3-9).

It is from the lofty heights of the Divine Realm that Jesus came to earth to give His life a ransom for all. He came to earth to redeem human kind, a stratum that is lower than the angels whom He had previously created: "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3); "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb. 2:9).

Motivation

The merit of His action in coming to earth may be better appreciated when it is also remembered that He did not come to earth for His own glorification—He sought only to glorify His Father's name and then to return to the glory that He had with His Father before He created the world: "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:4-5). Thus it is evident that His motivation was totally without any thought of self-aggrandizement; it was purely because He loved the human creation. He voluntarily gave His life for its redemption: "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

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No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself... (John 10:17-18).

Nevertheless, after He came to earth, God gave Him assurance that He was doing His Father's will. One instance was at His baptism: *"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'"* (Matt. 3:16-17). The dove and the voices were evidences that His Father was "with Him", and, to the human mind they would have been a great assurance—such an assurance might have been a powerful factor that gave Him the strength that was necessary for Him to endure the shame that awaited Him.

Mission

Although Jesus did not come to earth with any thought of self-glorification, He understood perfectly why He had come, the work that God had planned for Him, and His reward when He had faithfully completed that work.

Concerning His knowledge of what lay before Him, He said: *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me". This he said, signifying what death he should die* (John 12:32-33). He knew that He would be crucified ("lifted up"), and it was the thought of the joy of drawing all men unto Him and redeeming them from the curse of sin and death that (as the writer to the Hebrews states) enabled Him to "despise" (discount; count as worthless, overlook) the shame He was to suffer.

Ridicule

Before He reached the humiliation of His crucifixion, Jesus endured much railing and ridicule. However, just as prophesied, none of it provoked Him: *"He is despised and rejected of men... yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth"* (Isa. 53:3).

One instance of Him being ridiculed was when He raised Jairus' daughter: *"While he yet spake, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, 'Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master'. But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, 'Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole'. And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, 'Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth'. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead"* (Luke 8:49-53). It is difficult to ascertain whether Peter, James and John

joined in the derision, but if so it probably was only a temporary lapse of faith on their part; nevertheless the incident was an example of the derision He endured. Jesus did not rebuke the people but merely commanded *"that they should tell no man what was done"* (Luke 8:56).

Desertion

Desertion was another experience that added to His shame: *"and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not"* (Isa. 53:3). One instance that exemplified the fulfilment of this prophecy is recorded in Mark 14:48-50: *"And Jesus answered and said unto them, 'Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled'. And they all forsook him, and fled"*. As might be said in today's language, "when the chips were down" His friends deserted Him.

Perhaps the most testing moment of all was Peter's denial a short time later: *"And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, 'And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth'. But he denied, saying, 'I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest'. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew. And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, 'This is one of them'. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, 'Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto'. But he began to curse and to swear, saying, 'I know not this man of whom ye speak'. And... the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, 'Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice'. And when he thought thereon, he wept"* (Mark 14:66-72). That instance and was a dreadful experience for Peter—he denied his Lord—and it was a very testing time for Jesus because one of His devoted disciples had denied knowledge of Him. Nevertheless Jesus did not rebuke Peter.

Crucifixion

When it came to the time of His crucifixion it is recorded that: *"...they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him"* (Matt. 27:28-31). Matthew describes the colour of the robe as scarlet whereas Mark describes it as purple. The

difference is insignificant because both colours were used in the curtains and veils of the tabernacle (Exod. 26:1, 31, 36; 27:16), and in the High Priest's garments (Exod. 28:6, 8, 15, 33). In Jesus' day purple was a sign of prosperity and authority: "*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day*" (Luke 16:19). The point to be noted in the case of Jesus' crucifixion is that they put such a garment on Him, mocked Him, and then took the garment off Him: the garment was a symbol of royal authority and the fact that they put the robe on Him during their mockery and removed it immediately afterwards emphasized the shame He endured.

The ignominy He endured during the final hours of His sacrifice is dramatically recorded by Mark: "*And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, 'Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross'. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe'. And they that were crucified with him reviled him*" (Mark 15:25-32).

Concerning the physical act of crucifixion, Smith's Bible Dictionary (page 129) reads: "It was unanimously considered the most horrible form of death. Among the Romans the degradation was also a part of the infliction, and the punishment if applied to freemen was only used in the case of the vilest criminals. The one to be crucified was stripped naked of all his clothes, and then followed the most awful moment of all. He was laid down upon the implement of torture. His arms were stretched along the cross-beams, and at the centre of the open palms the point of a huge iron nail was placed, which, by the blow of a mallet, was driven home into the wood. Then through either foot separately, or possibly through both feet together, as they were placed over the other... Then the "accursed tree" with its living human burden was slowly heaved up and the end fixed firmly in a hole in the ground. The feet were but a little raised above the earth. The victim was in full reach of every hand that might choose to strike... Such was the death by which Christ was doomed."

The ignominy that was heaped upon Him persisted to the end, being crucified between two thieves: "...he made his grave with the wicked..." (Isa. 53:9).

Reward

It might be beyond the natural human mind to grasp the magnitude of God's purpose in requiring His only begotten Son to suffer to such an extent: "*Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; 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. 53:9-12). The only factor that enables us to at least partly understand why God subjected Him to such terrible suffering is the glorious future that God has in store for Him.

The promise is that "*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied*". In view of the terrible suffering He endured, one can only speculate about the full meaning of God's promise to Him and His glorious future: "...will I divide him a portion with the great". God has already given Him a reward in that He has promoted Him to the highest level other than God Himself: "*Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name...*" (Phil. 2:9). The details of what He will receive as His "*portion with the great*" are something about which, at this stage, the believer can only speculate. Nevertheless it was not the thought of self-aggrandizement that motivated Jesus, but the joy of drawing all men unto Him.

Such a view of God's majesty, and the reward He has given to His faithful One so far, should be enough to spur on all those who have been given the opportunity to be joint heirs with Him and to share in His glory (Rom. 8:17). As the Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesians: "*The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all*" (Eph. 1:18-23). With such a wonderful hope, it is with joy that the Christian remembers Him at his time.

THE LAMB'S WIFE

Marriage may be regarded as one of the most important events in a person's life. For the Christian it is doubly so because it reflects God's plan for mankind in both an individual and a collective sense.

In the individual sense it represents the fulfilment of God's purpose in creating woman: "*And the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him'...And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man'. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*" (Gen. 2:18-24). In spite of the glory and power that Adam possessed—he named every living thing and whatever he called them became its name, even unto this day—all his needs were not met: he needed a companion. God created woman to provide that companion. God's creation was perfect and the qualities that God gave the woman made her the perfect companion for the man. Thus is seen the unsurpassed degree of companionship that a man should derive from a woman and likewise the woman from the man. The all-consuming interweaving of their beings is summarised by the simple statement: "*they shall be one flesh*".

In the collective sense marriage pictures the future marriage of Christ and the Church. The Apostle Paul describes the church as a chaste virgin who is preparing herself for her marriage: "*For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ*" (2 Cor. 11:2).

Prerogative

In Old Testament times the initial action towards marriage was taken by the man, not the woman, and the suitor's request was submitted to the woman's father for his agreement. Some examples are Jacob's appeal to Laban for Rachel's hand and Laban giving Rachel to Jacob (Gen. 29:16-21); the rules of servanthood ("*If his master have given him a wife*" - Exod. 21:4); and Saul's dealings with David regarding his daughter Merab (1 Sam. 18:17-19). The point to be appreciated is that it was not the woman's prerogative to initiate the giving of herself to the man and it was the woman's father's prerogative to give her or not give her to the man (which practice has been perpetuated in Western marriage ceremonies by the

bride's father being asked to declare publicly that he "gives this woman to be wed"). The protocol is consistent with Jesus choosing His disciples and not vice-versa: "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you...*" (John 15:16).

One example of the extended protocol in which the son's father directed whom his son should marry was Abraham directing whom Isaac should marry: "*And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the LORD had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, 'Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: And I will make thee swear by the LORD, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac'*" (Gen. 24:1-4).

The extended application applies to the church. God chooses the members of His Son's bride as Jesus declared in His prayer: "*I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word...I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me...*" (John 17:6-9).

Thus it is evident that it is not the prerogative of any human being to choose to be a member of Christ's bride; it is by God's grace that anyone is given the opportunity: "*But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him* (1 Cor. 12:18); "*But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth*" (2 Thess. 2:13); "*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them*" (Eph. 2:8-10). Consequently those who have been invited to be the Lamb's wife should not regard the invitation lightly, but should realise the opportunity that has been extended to them and grasp it firmly.

Preparation

There is a period of preparation for a secular marriage during which the bride prepares her wedding garment and conditions her mind for her new role. There is also a period of preparation for the church to be the Lamb's wife: "*And I heard as it were the voice of a*

great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: **for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready**" (Rev. 19:6-7). "Making herself ready" is the work of the chosen ones during this life-time.

In order for the two to become "one flesh", it is necessary for the bride to be perfect because the bridegroom is perfect: "...Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not..." (1 Pet. 2:21-23).

Revelation 14:1-5 declares that the 144,000 are to be pure and guileless: "And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads...These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God". It is with that standard in mind that the Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesians: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called...That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:1, 22-24). To that end the Apostle also wrote: "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).

The honour shared

The great hope of the Lamb's wife is that she will share in the work of restoring the human race to perfection: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified...For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:16-18). "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21). "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was

given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4). "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

Whithersoever He goeth

Revelation 14:4 (quoted above) records that one quality of the members of the 144,000 is that they "follow the Lord whithersoever he goeth".

Such devotion was exemplified in Old Testament times by Rebekah's willingness to leave all and go with Abraham's servant to be Isaac's wife, even though she did not know where that might lead her. Additionally she did so in spite of opposition from her family: "And her brother and her mother said, 'Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go'. And he said unto them, 'Hinder me not, seeing the LORD hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master'. And they said, 'We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth'. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, 'Wilt thou go with this man?' And she said, 'I will go'" (Gen. 24:55-58).

Likewise Ruth was so devoted to Naomi that she committed herself to follow her wherever she might go. Although Ruth's relationship to Naomi was not a marriage relationship, it demonstrates the standard that Christians must emulate: "And Naomi said, 'Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way...And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, 'Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law'. And Ruth said, 'Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me'. When she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her" (Ruth 1:11-18). Ruth's example and commitment to Naomi, to go with her wherever she might go, even to the point of dying where she would die, exemplifies the commitment required of every Christian.

Jesus' disciples also left everything and followed Him: "And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men'. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him. And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matt. 4:18-22).

The examples of Rebekah, Ruth and Jesus' disciples should strengthen the Christian's resolve to follow their Master wherever He leads.

Unto death

The marriage commitment is intended to last until one finishes their earthly life. That commitment reflects the commitment that Christ has for the church—"...he hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee'" (Heb. 13:5)—and exemplifies the devotion required of all who will be part of His bride: "be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

May each one who has been invited to be one of the Lamb's wife, strive earnestly so that when the marriage of the Lamb comes, they might be found worthy to enter in as a member of His Bride.

THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH

Psalm 19:14 is a verse of Scripture that expresses the desire of every Christian: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer".

The Christian should be particularly conscious of the words they speak because "... that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matt. 15:11).

The tongue is an unruly member of the body: "...If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things... Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body... Every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and

SEEK YE FIRST

God has blessings in His store-house for all the families of the earth, but the special blessing of glory, honour, and immortality that is reserved for those who love Him supremely far exceed His blessings for the world in general.

To love Him supremely means to love Him more than houses or lands, business or wealth, family or kindred or self: "*He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me*" (Matt. 10:37).

Christians must realise that: "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*" (Matt. 6:24): a choice is required.

If they do not choose the Lord and His service, they will be counted as placing the interests of their natural man first, contrary to the Lord's exhortation: "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...*" (Matt. 6:33).

It must also be remembered that those who have forsaken all to follow the Lord must not look back: "*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God*" (Luke 9:62). The Christian's strength may be renewed every day by remembering that their reward in heaven is eternal—it will not fade away—"...and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:2-10).

The contrasts described in those verses are stark: the size of a horse compared to the size of the bit in its mouth; the size of a ship and the force exerted by the wind on its sails compared to the size of its rudder. Human beings are able to control those forces but they are unable to prevent their tongue from expressing words that are contrary to their will. Consequently every effort must be made at all times to ensure that one's words are "*always with grace, seasoned with salt*" (Col. 4:6), and thus they seek to emulate Him of whom it is said "*that they all wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth*" (Luke 4:22). Nevertheless one should not be overcome by unintentional errors because perfection is not a thing of the past, but of the future.

THINGS TO BE REMOVED AND THINGS TO REMAIN

"And this word, 'Yet once more', signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Hebrews 12:27).

The latter part of the year 2008 saw the world plunge into a time of what some economists and financiers are calling “an unprecedented economic collapse”. So widespread is the effect that it has been called a “Global Financial Crisis” and accrued the acronym “GFC”. Some economists are equating its potential impact on human well-being to that of the great depression of the 1930s, and are suggesting that its effect is due not only to the degree of the collapse but also to the speed with which it has occurred.

In such times it is profitable to be reassured that all the events in the world are indeed under the control of the Creator and Master of the universe, and that all events are part of His plan for planet earth and for mankind. The Christian should not be apprehensive because “*we have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts*” (2 Pet. 1:19). The Christian must firmly grasp that assurance because many friends and acquaintances around them might be apprehensive. Of that time Jesus prophesied: “*Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken*” (Luke 21:26). It is a time that warrants sober thought.

The current crisis—the “GFC”—might be part of the fulfilment of the prophecy recorded in Hebrews 12:26-27: “*Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, 'Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven'. And this word, 'Yet once more', signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain*”. Those two verses refer firstly to the shaking of Mount Sinai in Moses’ day, then to a subsequent shaking in which the things that may be shaken will be removed.

The first shaking

The first shaking occurred during the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. It was a fulfilment of prophecy even though the period between the prophecy being given and fulfilled was only three days: “*In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And the LORD said unto Moses, 'Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee... Go unto the*

people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, and be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai'... And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. And he said unto the people, 'Be ready against the third day'... And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled... and Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly..." (Exodus 19:1-18).

The second shaking

The incident at Mount Sinai was dramatic and impressed the Israelites with the realisation that God was watching over them.

However its significance extends beyond the nation of Israel—it fore-shadowed God’s direct involvement in and control over the affairs of mankind.

THINGS TO BE REMOVED

The Scriptures identify the things that will be removed as a result of the second shaking. They include Babylon, pride, war, and “heaven and earth”.

Babylon

Revelation 14:6-8 describes the removal of Babylon: “*And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters'. And there followed another angel, saying, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication'*”.

The removal of Babylon is significant because Babylon represents an influence that is contrary to the righteous rule that God is going to establish in the earth: “*And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, 'Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the*

inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication'. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration" (Rev. 17:1-6). Revelation chapter 18 gives more detail about Babylon's sins and her removal; suffice it to mention here that she was drunk with the blood of saints, that is, she had murdered the Lord's followers.

Pride

Pride in all its forms, both individual and national, will be removed.

Isaiah 2:11-12 speaks of individual pride: "*The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low.*"

One characteristic of the nations that become dominant is that they become proud and consider themselves capable of "ruling the world", as Isaiah wrote: "*Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength: For he bringeth down them that dwell on high; the lofty city, he layeth it low; he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust...*" (Isa. 26:4-6).

War

War is another characteristic of the current world that will be removed when God shakes the nations the second time: "*Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth...*" (Psa. 46:2-11). War and its implements (that is, weapons) will be

destroyed as the prophet Isaiah's also wrote: "*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': for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: 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). The prophecy is that the nations will willingly go up to "*the mountain of the Lord*" to learn of His ways, thus the concept of an earth without war is consistent with what will be the over-riding disposition of the nations at that time.

Heavens and earth

The present heavens and earth will be removed as the Apostle Peter wrote: "*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness*" (2 Pet. 3:9-13).

The heavens and earth referred to by Peter in those verses are symbolic because God's purpose in creating the physical earth is stated in Isaiah 45:18: "*For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited...*". The earth abiding forever is consistent with one of God's early promises to Abraham—to give "*all this land*" to his seed that they may inherit it "*for ever*" (Exodus 32:13).

Process

Hebrews 1:10-12 gives some indication of how the current heaven and earth will be replaced: *And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all*

shall wax old as doth a garment; **And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed:** but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail". The expression "fold them up" might indicate that the process will involve them being gathered together, which in turn might be reflected in the fact that the present financial crisis is "global".

The concept is endorsed by the words in Isaiah 34:1-4: "Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies...And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree". The statement "the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll" might also give some indication of the process by which the heavens will be removed—a scroll was rolled together from both ends—but whether that detail is intended is a matter to ponder. Nevertheless the concept of the nations being rolled together is one that may properly be applied to the nations in the 21st century—all the nations are woven together in a tight fabric of trade and commerce such that they are interdependent; a fact to which the current financial crisis gives testimony.

THINGS THAT WILL REMAIN

In stark contrast to the above, the prophet Daniel, when interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's dream, spoke of a kingdom that will last forever: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44).

The prophet Haggai referred to the shaking of Mount Sinai in Moses' time and then went on to give a glimpse of the benefits that will flow after the second shaking: "In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the LORD by the prophet Haggai, saying... 'According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; 'Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come...and in this place will I give peace...'" (Haggai 2:1-9). The prophecy told not only of the shaking of all nations that was yet future, but also that after that shaking He would give peace.

The Christian can take great comfort from the fact that once the Lord has replaced the current world order

with His righteous kingdom where "they shall not hurt nor destroy" (Isa. 11:9), evil will be no more. The prophet Nahum declares that there will not be need for a third shaking because "...he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time" (Nahum 1:9).

Timing

2 Peter 3:9-13, quoted above, spurs Christians on to not lose faith in the promises that a time is coming when those things that cannot be shaken will remain. The preceding verses 3 to 8 give some clues as to the signs that will indicate that the time is near: "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'. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day". Many of those signs are evident in the world today: there are numerous scoffers who have no faith in the Biblical promises and whose irreverence was foretold by Jesus (Luke 18:8). They are also willingly ignorant of the record of the flood of Noah's day and the evidences of its occurrence, preferring instead to believe in the conjectures of so called 'science'.

The situation in the world in 2009 indeed closely resembles the conditions described by Jesus: "And there shall be...upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity...men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:25-28). Maybe the present global financial crisis indicates that God is shaking the heavens and the earth again in this, our day.

Whether or not that is so should not be alarming because a time is coming when: "he who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten...", because God has said: "I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind..." (Isa. 65:16-18).

SAND AND STARS

Symbolic language is used in many books of the Bible, one reason being to make it easier for the reader to comprehend the idea being conveyed.

Principles

The use of a symbol is beneficial only if the reader is familiar with the symbol, and more particularly with the specific characteristic of the symbol to which reference is made. Further, not all aspects of the symbol might be applicable to the new concept and, if that is the case, application of those other aspects might lead to incorrect conclusions. These two principles become apparent when some uses of symbols in the Scriptures are considered.

One of the early uses of symbolic language in the Bible that illustrates these principles is Exodus 16:11-31: “*And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ‘I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God’. And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, ‘It is manna’: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, ‘This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat’... And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey*”. The Israelites did not know what the manna was and so they compared its qualities with things with which they were familiar. Their action in making the comparisons illustrates the first principle of symbolic language—that the reader must be familiar with the symbol.

The Israelites compared the characteristics of the manna to three different things, each comparison reflecting only one characteristic of the manna:

- they compared its size to hoar frost;
- they compared its colour to coriander;
- they compared its taste to honey wafers.

They did not compare the size or colour of the manna to the size or colour of wafers, nor its taste, thus exemplifying the principle that only some (or one) of the characteristics of each substance was applicable.

Another example which illustrates that only the relevant characteristic is to be applied is the instructions regarding the bowls on the candlesticks: “*And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold...*

Three bowls made like unto almonds in one branch” (Exodus 25:31-33). The shape of the almond was the only relevant characteristic—the material to be used was gold.

Abstract concepts

The examples of the manna and candlesticks relate to concrete articles, that is, articles that may be touched. Symbolic language is used to convey the characteristics of abstract concepts also.

One example of a symbol being used to convey an abstract concept is given in Psalm 39:11: “*When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth; surely every man is vanity*” (Psa. 39:11). A person’s beauty is an abstract concept—it cannot be physically handled—and in this verse its consumption is compared to a moth. However the symbolism is not clear: is it to the work of a moth or to its nature? The **work** of a moth is the symbol used in Job 13:28, Isaiah 50:9 and Isaiah 51:8, however it is its **destructive nature** that is referred to in Isaiah 27:18, Hosea 5:12, Matthew 6:19-20 and Luke 12:33. Consequently whether the lesson in Psalm 39:11 is that a man’s beauty will eat him up, or whether his beauty will disappear gradually in a progression of holes, or fly away quickly, is unclear. Maybe one clue might be given in the clause: “*every man is vanity*”, from which it may be concluded that the intended inference is that a man’s beauty is temporary.

The Parables

The kingdom of heaven is an abstract concept and Jesus used parables (symbolic language) to convey various aspects of it, the first parable being the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-9). The meaning to be attached to each component of the parable was unclear and so Jesus explained their meaning and their relationship to the kingdom (Matt. 13:18-23).

The second parable related to the tares in the field (Matt. 13:24-30). Again the disciples did not know what the symbols meant so Jesus explained their meaning (Matt. 13:36-43).

However no explanation is given for some of the other parables and in those cases the reader is left to derive the meaning. One example is the parable of the grain of mustard seed: “*Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and*

lodge in the branches thereof" (Matt. 13:31-32). Several different meanings have been ascribed to the components of this parable: the mustard seed; the field (is it the same as in the parable of the sower?); the significance of the herb becoming a tree; the birds; and the branches.

Number

"Number" is an abstract concept and several different symbols are used in the Scriptures to convey the concept. Two symbols are used in Judges 7:12: "*And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude*". The only characteristic the grasshoppers and the sand had in common was that they were large in number—in all other ways they were different.

Sand

In Judges 7:12 (quoted above), the sand by the sea side is used to convey the concept of a multitude as it is also used in some other verses: Genesis 32:12; 41:49; Joshua 11:4; 1 Samuel 13:5; 2 Samuel 17:11; Job 29:18; Psalm 139:18; Isaiah 10:22 (interpreted in Romans 9:27); Jeremiah 33:22; Hosea 1:10; Hebrews 11:12; Revelation 20:8. However the symbolism of sand is not always that of a multitude; it is also used to convey the characteristics of weight (Job 6:3; Prov. 27:3); extent (1 Kings 4:29-30); lack of form (Matt. 7:26); quality of absorption (Hab. 1:9); and endurance (Isa. 48:19). **Thus the symbolism of an object cannot automatically be transferred from one instance of its use to another.**

Stars

Another symbol that is used to convey the concept of a multitude is the stars of heaven. In nine instances the reference is to events on the earth, not in the heavens, and thus it is their number and not their location that is the relevant characteristic. The nine instances are:

- Genesis 15:5 (verses 7, 8, 13, and 18-21 show that the promise relates to the inheritance of Abram's seed in the land; there is no indication of any reference to heaven);
- Genesis 26:4 ("countries" and "nations" relate to the earth);
- Exodus 32:13 in which Moses calls upon the Lord to remember His promise to Abraham to make his seed as the stars of heaven and to give them the land;
- Deuteronomy 1:10 in which Abraham's seed is related to the stars of heaven "*in that day*", that is it referred to that time and not a future time;
- Deuteronomy 10:22: as for chapter 1:10;
- Deuteronomy 28:62 relates to the number of Israelites in times past;
- 1 Chronicles 27:23 refers to David not selecting

men of Israel who were under 20 years old;

- Nehemiah 9:23 relates to the exodus from Egypt;
- Nahum 3:16 relates to the sins of Ninevah.

None of the nine instances quoted above relate to a heavenly location, even though the symbol is a heavenly body: the symbolism relates to number.

Sand and stars together

The symbols of sand and stars occur in the same verse in only two verses: Genesis 22:17 and Hebrews 11:12. Some authorities suggest that Hebrews 11:12 is a quotation of Genesis 22:17, and if that is correct, there is only one verse in which both the symbols sand and stars jointly occur. Genesis 22:17 reads: "*That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies*".

The only characteristic that grains of sand and the stars have in common is their number: in all other respects they differ—the sand is on the earth, the stars are in the heavens; sand is visible during the day whereas the stars are visible at night; mankind can touch the sand but not the stars; the sand may be washed by the waters of the sea but the stars are not; the stars emit light; the sand reflects it.

Difference not similarity

It may be proposed that the lesson to be learned from Genesis 22:17 is not derived from the similarity of the sand and the stars but from their difference, that is, that the sand relates to that part of Abram's seed that will inherit the earth and the stars refer to that part of Abram's seed that will be in the heavens. While there is no doubt that the church is part of Abram's seed—*"And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"* (Gal. 3:29)—and that the glorified church will be in the heavenly realm—*"And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly"* (1 Cor. 15:45-49)—the question remains whether the symbolism in Genesis 22:17 may be properly used to support that aspect of God's plan.

Revelation 7:9 is one verse that may be deemed to infer that the expression "*stars of heaven*" in Genesis 22:17 refers to the spiritual seed of Abraham: *"After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands..."*. However it is acknowledged that there are different interpretations of that verse, some issues being the location of the Lamb at the time to which the vision relates (Matt. 25:31-32; Rev. 21:4), and the meaning of "before" (Rev. 20:12).

LOVE THINKETH NO EVIL

“Love...thinketh no evil” (1 Cor. 13:5) is a statement that may seem superfluous: how could anyone plan (“think”) to do evil to someone they love?

Nevertheless the Apostle Paul included the sentiment in his letters to the churches at both Rome and Corinth—to the Romans he wrote: “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour...” (Rom. 13:10).

Both of the above statements refer to the person who contemplates an evil action—the ‘perpetrator’. However the recipient also (that is, the ‘victim’) of an evil deed is “not to think evil”, and there are at least two ways in which such love may cause a victim to react: disbelief and forgiveness.

Disbelief

Love may prevent a person from acknowledging that another has committed an evil deed, that is, their love is so deep that they cannot “think any evil” of their loved one. Consequently they refuse to believe that the action occurred. Such may be the case with a parent when their child commits a misdemeanour; they may find it very difficult to admit that their child has done anything wrong, and so they defend their child against all accusations. When finally confronted with a situation that they cannot deny, the parent may make excuses by attributing the cause of the misdemeanour to some circumstance or influence that is beyond their child’s control.

Forgiveness

While a refusal to think evil of a loved one is praiseworthy, it might be a form of denial or “refusal to face the facts”. The Christian is to face reality and doing so calls up the requirement to forgive. Forgiveness constitutes another, and higher, level of “not thinking evil”.

Forgiveness primarily involves acknowledgement of the sin or error, that is, it does not allow one to “close one’s eyes” to the event and refuse to believe or acknowledge that the action occurred. To acknowledge (that is, admit) that an evil has been done, and to exercise love in that situation, requires the one offended against to regard the offending action as a weakness of the flesh of the perpetrator, regardless of whether the perpetrator acted deliberately or unintentionally.

Stephen’s action when he was being stoned to death is one example of love that exhibited forgiveness: “And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, ‘Lord, lay not this sin to

their charge’. And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:59-60). Stephen was conscious of the evil that was being done to him—he realised that what was happening to him was unjust. Yet he was able to rise above it, lovingly think no evil of his executioners and ask the Lord not to lay the sin to their charge. Stephen was able to forgive his executioners because he was able to believe that they were acting in ignorance and their action was consistent with the present evil world.

This highest level of love is also exemplified by God’s dealings with mankind: “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them...” (2 Cor. 5:19). The word translated “imputing” is translated from the same Greek word as the word “thinketh” in 1 Corinthians 13:5. The Greek word is “logizamai”—Strong’s #3049—which means “to take an inventory”. To “take an inventory” means to keep a record, in this case a record of deeds done, and the verse states that God has not kept an account of mankind’s evil deeds. However that does not mean that He has ignored them: in His due time He will recompense evil as Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 1:8: “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ”.

God not thinking evil

The Apostle John wrote that “God is love” (1 John 4:16). It might be difficult to accept that “God is love”, and has not “thought evil” because He has punished some nations harshly, and will yet punish all nations. The seeming contradiction is resolved by the fact that God is working out a grander purpose for His creation as Solomon wrote: “And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith (profited thereby)” (Eccl. 1:13). It is with a still higher level of love that God is dealing with His human creation—it is not the Christian’s province to “recompense evil for evil” (Rom 12:17), not to think, impute or keep a record of any actions that may be justifiably classified as evil, but to forgive, not just once, but “seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22).

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